

WYDEN

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tackle the problem.

Wyden also said the financial side of health care is caught in a continually increasing cycle: When people who can't afford insurance need emergency medical care, the cost is passed on to other patients in the form of higher prices for medical care.

Wyden came to La Grande a day after being in Portland where he spoke about his support for legislation that would help Congress better address mental health issues. He had spoken in Portland at a "Breaking the Silence" news conference,

aimed at getting people to be more open about addressing the subject of mental health. The senator said he earlier broke his own silence on this issue when he spoke publicly about a brother who suffered from schizophrenia.

"For years and years, I would go to bed every night wondering if he was going to hurt himself," Wyden said of his brother Jeffrey, who died in 2001 at age 51.

Those posing health care questions at the town hall included a nursing student from the Oregon Health and Science University School of Nursing at Eastern Oregon University. Wyden said he was delighted to

hear from the student because of his concern about health care in the region.

"You can't have rural Oregon without rural health care," Wyden said.

He said one way to boost rural health care in Oregon is getting students like those graduating from OHSU School of Nursing at EOU to remain in this region.

"We want you (students at OHSU-EOU) to stay," Wyden said.

The senator mentioned another hurdle facing rural health care is the high cost of medical education and the resulting debts.

"This is discouraging people from getting into medicine," Wyden said.

Addressing another health care issue, Wyden spoke about the possibility of creating a single-payer system in the United States, essentially expanding Medicare to cover all Americans. Wyden said it is beneficial to consider moving in this direction.

"I'm all for expanding Medicare choices," Wyden said.

One reservation he has is that under a single-payer system, millions of Americans who now receive health insurance from their employers would lose it.

Wyden was also asked about efforts by Russia to change votes by hacking into computers used for voting. He said one of the best ways

to avoid this problem would be to have everyone in the United States go back to using paper ballots.

"Paper can't be hacked," he said. He noted in states like Oregon, which has vote by mail, all ballots are paper. Wyden said he would like all states to follow Oregon's example.

Wyden was also asked about his plans to help towns in rural Oregon rebuild their infrastructure. The senator said he is working with fellow senators to get more funding to help communities with things like road and water projects.

"Rural Oregon is bleeding. We want to restore its infrastructure," Wyden said. ■

B2H

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would be highly visible while passing through La Grande, whereas the Morgan Lake route would be much less visible.

The council's proclamation stated that if the B2H project does go forward, the route known as the Bureau of Land Management Preferred Route is also the city's preferred route through the La Grande area. Barry said a study by the BLM indicates its preferred route would cause less environmental damage and the B2H's power lines would be less visible than the Mill Creek or Morgan Lake routes.

The BLM's preferred route is also known as the Glass Hill Alternate Route. It would come out of Ladd Canyon and run south of the proposed Mill Creek and Morgan Lake routes.

"The City believes the BLM Preferred Route is a viable option that would not impact the City of La Grande," the proclamation states.

City Manager Robert Strobe said the City of La Grande will have no offi-

cial influence on whether the B2H line will eventually be approved or on which route it would take through Union County because none of the routes under consideration would pass through La Grande city limits. He said if a portion of the proposed route was within the city limits, the City of La Grande could ask the Oregon Department of Energy that the B2H project meet certain city standards.

La Grande Mayor Steve Clements said city officials have told B2H officials at every meeting they have had in recent years that the city does not want the transmission line to come through here. He cited the visual impact of transmission lines and the damage to the environment their construction and presence would cause.

Clements noted if the Morgan Lake route were used, the power lines would not be visible from La Grande, but at Morgan Lake they would be easy to see, harming the area's view shed.

The Mill Creek and Morgan Lake routes are now being examined by

the state's Energy Siting Council. Should the siting council determine both proposed routes meet state standards, Idaho Power will select one, Sven Berg of Idaho Powder told The Observer in early April. Final approval of the route would later have to be given by the Oregon Department of Energy.

Construction should start around 2022, Berg said. Towers will range from 100 to 180 feet tall, and the typical height will be 140 feet, according to Idaho Power. The towers will be substantially higher than the power lines now in Union County.

"It will really be a visual monstrosity," Barry said.

The B2H transmission line is needed, according to Idaho Power news releases, because economic and population growth is driving up the demand for electricity among customers of Idaho Power, Pacific Corp and Bonneville Power. While enough energy is being produced for the northwest region served by the three energy providers, the existing transmission lines don't have the capacity to carry much more to customers. ■

ARTS

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ering the other kids out at about 11 a.m. unless they are a child with auditory needs."

Nitz has been lining up some projects and looking for art instructors to demonstrate.

The Eastern Oregon Symphony will bring its instrument "petting zoo" where kids can experience instruments firsthand. Nitz said activities will include string art, origami, photography, clay, tie-dye, 3-D printing, watercolors, pastels, book binding and needle-felting.

"Needle-felting is where you take wool and tie the fibers together by poking a certain kind of needle in, and it creates 3-D wool shapes," Nitz said.

All art supplies will be provided, but Nitz recommended children wear washable clothing like long T-shirts or a smock for messier ac-

tivities. There will be one instructor and two volunteers at each table to guide children in the activity at hand.

"The instructors I have gotten hold of have been very willing to participate, or if they were going to be out of town they have directed me to a secondary resource," Nitz said.

Nitz said she expects her involvement in the event will be rewarding.

"You get to see kids experience something brand new in a real way," she said. "For all the work I put into things, I get to see the results first hand and all the good that it does. That's what I'm looking forward to."

Arts for All was managed by the City of La Grande from its inception until 2016 when Art Center East took over stewardship. Although it was popularly received by the community, the non-profit Art Center East found it difficult to sustain due to

the high cost of renting an event facility and providing supplies and staff for it.

Consequently, in the spring of 2018, the Art Center East Board of Directors decided to invest its resources into the Artists in Rural Schools program to reach a wider population of school-age children on a more sustainable budget. With the change, the city decided to continue Arts for All through its Parks & Recreation department.

"Thank you, parents, for participating in Arts for All this year," Nitz said. "Your kids can't get here without your help, and we appreciate your interest in our program and in helping to bring arts to children."

Nitz wants to recruit volunteers together no later than April 19, so anyone interested in helping out at the art tables should contact her at 541-962-1352 or mnitz@cityoflagrande.org. ■

BANQUET

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town to volunteer in — sometimes too easy," she joked.

Carla Arnold was awarded educator of the year. She is a music teacher at La Grande Central Elementary school.

"Carla and her husband moved to La Grande back in 1994, and since then she has dedicated many years to the young people of this community through her teaching and mentoring, using music as the medium," O'Toole said.

"The first person I'd like to thank is my grandpa," Arnold said in her acceptance speech. She said her grandfather was the first person to encourage her interest in music, and she hopes to be that person for the children she teaches. She thanked her family, school staff and especially Central Elementary's secretary, Connie Ingerson, for her support.

Cody Bowen was the winner of the public servant award. Brogoitti presented the award, mentioning Bowen's work with the Union County Sheriff's Office as a patrol deputy. She highlighted his work as a certified drug abuse resistance educator and with the Union County Safe Communities Coalition.

"Undeniably, his most important role has been his position as a school resource officer," Brogoitti said. "Kids seek him out if there's a problem or share with him when they have concerns for themselves or for other students in the school. They open up to Cody and have tough conversations that they can't have with anyone else, and that includes their parents."

Bowen thanked his family, the chamber and Union County Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen.

"I want you all to know that I get up every morning with a smile on my face, and I'm very passionate about being there for your children," he said.

The Entrepreneur of the Year award was given to Deana Leinbach and Peggy Case, the owners of Two Broke Girls, a coffee and mercantile shop in Island City.

Leinbach and Case thanked their families, the community and their employees.

"It has (been) a labor of love, and this whole community has been amazing," Case said. "Deana and I totally agree that we would not be as successful as we are today if we didn't have the people working for us that we do."

The Business of the year Award went to Hines Meat Co.

"Jake and Paige Hines have a passion for serving the population in Union County," Brogoitti said. "They are continuing to grow their original vision to make local meats and produce available to everyone in the area."

The owners accepted the award on stage with their two children.

"It has been a difficult road, but good," Paige Hines said. "We know that we get to go to work every day and do what we love, and not everyone gets to do that."

Jake Hines thanked his wife and children for their patience and support, as well as God, the community and his employees: "We are so thankful for the people who work for us; they are our family."

The EOU Partnership of the Year Award was presented to the Chamber of Commerce by Tom Insko, EOU president.

"Tonight I want to recognize an organization that really is a catalyst for bringing community together with their institution, and that's the Union County Chamber," Insko said.

He thanked the audience and the chamber for embracing EOU students and making them feel at home in this community. Suzzanah Moore, executive director, accepted the award on behalf of the chamber. ■

ORA

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ORA board member Kathy Pfister-Minogue.

ORA is a non-partisan group "working to promote social justice, agricultural and economic sustainability, and stewardship of the region's land, air and water," according to oregonrural.org.

The Blue Mountain Chapter was founded in 2001 and, according to board member Bill Whitaker, currently has four action groups: health care, energy, food and agriculture, and social justice.

The documentary explores the effects of money in politics. Pfister-Minogue said the documentary aligns with the ORA Health Care Reform Action Team's goal of achieving universal health care.

"If you look at how our legislators are funded for election campaigns, they get huge amounts of money from pharmaceutical companies and insurance companies," she said.

Pfister-Minogue also said politicians who take money from pharmaceutical or insurance companies are biased in their favor, rather than the favor of people who can't afford medicine or care.

Grande Ronde Hospital's 2018 Union County Community Health Assessment, which is still in draft form, reported the top reason for being uninsured in Union County is the inability to pay the premiums or cost. Among people who did not get prescriptions filled, the survey found 39 percent said the medicine was too expensive, and 15 percent said they stretched the pre-

scription by taking less than recommended to offset the cost of the medication.

Pfister-Minogue is a nurse practitioner, and she said stretching medication can be dangerous. She explained why she personally supports universal health care: "It's the right thing to do. It's a moral imperative."

ORA board member Cheryl Simpson said universal health care is a non-partisan issue because people from all over the political spectrum struggle with the cost of care. "Everyone has a health care story to tell," Simpson said. "Usually it's a story where the cost impact has been very negative to a family or community."

In a press release, Pfis-

ter-Minogue put it this way: "Issues surrounding health care are complex and we hope this documentary will answer questions and stimulate important discussion... We are inviting our community to join us in viewing a very important documentary about the influence of big money that stands in the way of achieving universal health care." ■

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