

GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

Senator Wyden still pushing for voter reform

The Democrat-Herald had a chance last week to visit with U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, who brought us up to date on the progress of his legislation to require states to use paper ballots and to employ audits to ensure that hackers have not meddled with election results.

The good news is that the bill, which he has dubbed the Protecting American Votes and Elections Acts (the acronym is PAVE, because no congressional action is complete without a snazzy acronym), now has attracted 14 co-sponsors.

The bad news is that not one Republican has signed onto the bill proposed by Wyden, a Democrat. And with Republicans still in control of the Senate, that means the bill likely will remain stalled — especially since Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has been a staunch opponent of this sort of election reform, Wyden said.

But Wyden is nothing if not persistent — and he made the case in a session with the Democrat-Herald's editorial board that the need for the election reforms called for in his bill has never been more urgent. Wyden sits on the Senate Intelligence Committee, and although he can't reveal classified details, he said what he's seen there has him convinced that the election meddling we endured in the 2016 election was nothing compared to what we could see in 2020. "I think we're looking in 2020 at something that would make 2016 look like small potatoes," he said. He noted as well that the threats to the security of U.S. election systems aren't limited to just Russian efforts.

He said the next few months are a critical time to harden election defenses against anyone who might be tempted to see what sort of damage they could inflict. Realistically, he said, if the work isn't done by October, there won't be enough time to get ready for November 2020, which (shockingly) is less than a year and a half away.

According to Wyden, paper ballots and statistically rigorous audits are two steps election experts say are necessary to give voters confidence that election results have not been changed by foreign governments or other hackers. And if the 2020 elections are as close as we suspect they will be, we'll need every ounce of that confidence.

The senator said election clerks around the nation have told him that they like the idea of the audits, but worry about the associated costs. That's why Wyden said the bill includes money to help pay for those audit costs.

The bill is a logical extension of Wyden's longtime efforts to expand Oregon's vote-by-mail system to the entire nation. (And it carries a little bit of the spirit of former Linn County Clerk Del Riley, the father of Oregon's vote-by-mail system.) Frankly, we've been surprised that more states have not followed Oregon's example to start using paper ballots, which offer at least two distinct advantages: First, by their nature, they're virtually impossible to hack. And they leave behind a paper trail that allows relatively easy auditing.

Still, expect Wyden's bill to attract the same kind of criticisms that it has in the past: Republicans have said similar measures overstepped congressional authority and violated states' rights.

But Wyden's bill does not strip away state control over their elections; instead, it shows the way for states to adopt voting systems that have a fighting chance at turning away hackers.

"I'm not underestimating how hard this is going to be," Wyden said, noting that among the measure's foes are companies that manufacture voting machines. But he said he still believes he can win over opponents, especially if he's successful in casting the issue as a national security matter. There's merit in that argument: You certainly can make the case that any attempt to shake confidence in our voting system could jeopardize national security. Whether that argument helps to get these voting reforms over the hump remains to be seen.

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Your views

Higgins: Marketplace better the second time around

To the Editor:
This is a shout-out to my La Grande neighbors — especially those on the northwest and southwest sides of the city: Let's support the new "re-envisioned" local Marketplace on Adams Avenue and Fourth Street.

Instead of getting in your car to drive across town — or even farther, up and down the Island City strip — to buy groceries or purchase basic necessities, why not jump in the car and drive a few blocks to the new neighborhood Marketplace? Or, better yet, why not walk a few blocks in this glorious weather to buy flour and hardtack, etc., as our forefathers might have done?

I have discovered some real "finds" at the new market, including Stilton cheese from England; "Marketplace's" own brand of dog food (with fish or meat as the #1 ingredient, and grain-free, if desired); local beef; a distinguished island of fantastic Northwest (and California) wine offerings; and gorgeous hanging petunias that are bigger and cheaper than Walmart's. And, much, much more.

Between the new Marketplace and the ever-so-complementary offerings of Nature's Pantry across the street, we have everything we could possibly need (and desire) within a few feet.

It wasn't until it was gone, that I sorely missed the original version of our neighborhood Marketplace. I'm going to do my best to support this new one, and I hope you will join me.

These folks are dancing as fast as they can to excel and, let's face it, everything is better the second time around.

*Diane Sheya Higgins
La Grande*

McHaddad: United Way celebrates spring giving

To the Editor:
Winter and fall are hard times for folks in Northeast Oregon, especially our neighbors who struggle with food security or endure abuse. Fortunately, Union County workers and businesses came together to fight back against high poverty and employment rates by donating to United Way of Eastern Oregon.

Through a combination of payroll contributions from Anderson Perry, Bi-Mart, Walmart, FedEx, UPS, Boise Cascade, Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande School District, US Bank, Union County, La Grande Pediatric Clinic, and the state of Oregon, as well as donations from Avista, Bi-Mart, La Grande Amusement, Union County Sheriff Reserves, and Valley Insurance, United Way of Eastern Oregon's fall-winter campaign was able to raise more than \$22,000. In May, these contributions went to local food banks, youth programs and other important community resources including Shelter From the Storm, Mt. Emily Safe Center, Court-Appointed Special Advocates and Union County Search and Rescue.

In 2019, United Way is building on relationships with businesses and workers in Union County to expand our employee giving and donation efforts. If we received just \$1 per month from every local employee

and \$100 per year from every employer, United Way would raise more than \$159,000 that would stay in Union County.

We recognize that community members want to give their time as well as money, so we are developing an online volunteer opportunity database that will allow you to better connect with your cause of choice. United Way fights for the health, education and financial stability of every person in every community, and you can learn more about how to live united with us in Union County this year at www.uweo.org.

*Alex McHaddad
Executive Director, United Way of Eastern Oregon*

Watt: The Grande Ronde Valley doesn't need to change

To the Editor:
Mayor Clements tells us that La Grande has "housing issues" and "with the right developers and incentives we might be able to pull this together." Cue the alarm bells and flashing red lights please. I like La Grande, the Grande Ronde Valley, just the way it is. I don't want it to be "developed" into something else, like Bend has been.

There are real estate developers who want to carve up our beautiful valley, selling it to all comers. Like they did to Bend, which has basically become a California colony. These developers most certainly do not need "incentives."

If I believed Mayor Clements' numbers — 1,200 people in 10 years — I wouldn't be concerned, but I don't. Why do we need 1,000 houses for 1,200

Write to us

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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people, almost one house per person? Normally it's about three persons per house, so the plan is for 3,000 people. I suspect the plan is for many more people than that. Just look at the fields on Cove Avenue behind Walmart. No thanks.

I moved my family here to raise my children in the remarkable and unique environment that is the Grande Ronde Valley. People here are polite, considerate. The women and children are safe walking down the street, even at night. We don't have a lot of transients and bums. We have very little crime. There is a sense of community. You can carry a gun. These are things I consider fundamental to a good life. If we let it grow, this will all change.

Don't "Bend" the La Grande/Island City metropolis. This threatens the whole valley. We are doing pretty well as we are. We will deal with our "housing issues."

No incentives. No development. Let's preserve what we have.

*Richard Watt
Union*

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THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896 (USPS 299-260)

The Observer reserves the right to adjust subscription rates by giving prepaid and mail subscribers 30 days notice. Periodicals postage paid at La Grande, Oregon 97850. Published Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (except Dec. 25) by Western Communications Inc., 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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Send address changes to:
The Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850
Periodicals postage paid at:
La Grande, Oregon 97850

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