

Opinion

— GUEST OPINION —

Making progress together

By U.S. Rep. Greg Walden

The biggest disagreements and loudest voices got most of the attention during this last session of Congress, from filibusters to failed websites, immigration to ISIL.

However, while the pundits blared, many of us worked hard to achieve important legislative wins for Oregon and America in 2014—like boosting American energy and jobs and rooting out waste to save taxpayer dollars.

Make no mistake, we still have work to do, but we have a strong foundation to build on next year with the new Republican majority in the Senate on efforts to grow and strengthen Oregon's rural communities.

All in all, I'm proud that three bills I wrote this session—protecting rural satellite television service, providing more water and power for Central Oregon, and boosting agriculture research in Hermiston—are now the law of the land. And several other of my initiatives passed the House with bipartisan support, including the plan to reform federal forest policy to grow jobs in the woods, improve forest health, and provide needed revenue for schools, roads, and law enforcement.

Although I am disappointed the Senate did not hold a vote on this plan or any forestry bill to assist our region, this gives us a strong base to build on next year with the new majority in the Senate. I've already begun conversations with members of the House and Senate from both parties on efforts to reform federal forest policy and better manage our lands.

All of these initiatives were developed transparently with community support, so they will have good momentum going into 2015.

One of my top priorities is making federal agencies like the IRS, the VA, and the EPA more transparent and accountable to taxpayers. I sought and secured a federal investigation into the enormous, costly, failure of Cover Oregon to stop the waste, demand the truth, and get accountability. That investigation is ongoing, and we hope to get the results in the near future.

And when the FDA proposed rules that would have made it harder to grow onions and brew local beer, I pushed back hard on behalf of producers and brewers, inviting the FDA to visit with Oregon growers to witness the rules' impact firsthand. Our voices were heard as the agency reworked these to make them better for Oregon producers.

I doubt most people realize how much time a member of Congress and his/her staff spend helping cut through red tape at agencies like the Social Security Administration or the VA. For me and my team, we helped more 2,811 Oregonians over the past two years, including nearly one thousand veterans cases.

The Energy and Commerce Committee I serve on had 51 bills signed into law this session, including legislation to increase hydropower and boost research for pediat-



Submitted Photo

Greg Walden represents Oregon's Second Congressional District, which covers 20 counties in southern, central, and eastern Oregon.

ric diseases.

We launched a major initiative called 21st Century Cures to aggressively help find cures for the nearly 6,500 known diseases that lack them. This is an exciting initiative that will dramatically improve the lives of people all over the world.

The Committee also conducted thorough oversight of federal agencies under our jurisdiction. When the Federal Communications Commission proposed a "study" that sought to poke their noses into America's newsrooms, the Communications and Technology panel that I chair objected strongly, leading to the agency dropping this threat to the First Amendment.

And Congress successfully passed legislation to help clean up the mess at the VA and allow more veterans to go outside the VA to access care in the communities where they live. This will really help veterans, especially in our rural communities.

We also passed plans to streamline and improve job-training programs and provide needed resources to farmers to tackle drought, fire, and new diseases and pests in their crops.

Getting deficit spending under control also remains a huge priority of mine. The House passed a budget that balances over the next 10 years and eventually pays off America's debt. I supported efforts to reform programs, eliminate waste and duplication and as a result we cut discretionary spending to a level below when President Obama took office.

This work doesn't always grab the headlines or dominate the chatter on Twitter, but these quiet gains improve the lives of people and help get our region and country on a better track. I could not have been as successful working on these issues without hearing from and listening to you—the people of Oregon's Second District.

Just this year, I traveled more than 9,000 miles through our enormous district to hold town halls (49 in the past two years) and other community meetings. That's in addition to the thousands of telephone town hall questions, emails, letters, phone calls, Facebook messages, and tweets I've received from you and answered (more than 41,000 just this year).

As the New Year dawns, I pledge to continue to work as hard as I can to solve our problems, here at home and across the nation. I want to continue to hear from you about your ideas and priorities. This is how I develop my "to do" list to take back to Washington, D.C. each week.

Please visit www.walden.house.gov to send me an email to let me know what you think should be on my plate for 2015.

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

Congratulations!

To the Editor:
Congratulations to the Baker County Press as you being your second year of service to the people of our region. It is truly refreshing to read a paper that clearly does not bend to the "good old boy" establishment. Your fair, objective

and honest pursuit of the facts is refreshing and makes your publication credible. You have a talented group of dedicated professionals on your staff and we, the readers, benefit from that. Thanks and best wishes for many more years of journalistic excellence.

Jerry Boyd
Baker City

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— GUEST OPINION —

How to fix Congress (Part Two)

By Sen. Mike Lee

2. Don't Forget Cronyism

We're going to be hearing that word, "govern," a lot in coming weeks; as in, "Now Republicans must show they can govern." What is meant by this is passing bills—quickly and with bipartisan support—and having them signed into law, in order to show the country that Republicans can "get things done."

In this advice, there is much truth, and also a trap.

The truth is that, yes, Republicans should take every opportunity to reform federal law wherever common ground with Democrats can be found. And if good policy makes for good politics, as it usually does, so much the better.

We should find common ground that advances our agenda, rather than let the idea of common ground substitute for our agenda.

But the trap is that Republicans in fact can't "govern" from the House and Senate alone—especially without a Senate supermajority. We can clearly articulate our views and advance our ideas, and then see where we can work with the president and congressional Democrats. But we have to do these things in that order. We should find common ground that advances our agenda, rather than let the idea of common ground substitute for our agenda.

If we fail to grasp that, we will be drawn into advancing legislation that is both substantively and politically counterproductive, and that sends the wrong message to the public about our party. For instance, the easiest bipartisan measures to pass are almost always bills that directly benefit Big Business, and thus appeal to the corporatist establishments of both parties. In 2015, this "low-hanging fruit" we'll hear about will be items like corporate tax reform, Obamacare's medical device tax, patent reform, and perhaps the Keystone XL pipeline approval.

As it happens, these are all good ideas that I support. But if that's as far as Republicans go, we will regret it. The GOP's biggest branding problem is that Americans think we're the party of Big Business and The Rich. If our "Show-We-Can-Govern" agenda can be fairly attacked as giving Big Business what it wants—while the rest of the country suffers—we will only reinforce that unpopular image.

Insofar as the pent-up K Street agenda includes good ideas, then by all means let's pass those pieces by huge margins and send them to the president. But a new Republican majority must also make clear that our support for free enterprise cuts both ways—we're pro-free market, not simply pro-business. To prove that point, we must target the crony capitalist policies that rig our economy for large corporations and special interests at the expense of everyone else—especially small and new businesses.

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Submitted Photo

Elected in 2010 as Utah's 16th Senator, Mike Lee has spent his career defending the basic liberties of Americans and as an advocate for founding constitutional principles.

corporatist establishments of both parties. In other words, Republicans should seek common ground between conservative principles and the interests and needs of the general public, not just between Washington Republicans and Washington Democrats. And the search for that genuinely common ground will point to a lot of low-hanging fruit too, even when it comes to the proper relationship between government and business. We could pass legislation winding down the Export-Import Bank or the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. We could—and really, must—eliminate the taxpayer bailouts for big insurance companies in Obamacare's "risk corridors" program. Or we could start to break up taxpayer subsidies for the energy industry or large agribusinesses.

Anti-cronyism legislation is win-win for the GOP. It is good policy, restoring growth and fairness to an economy that Big Government and Big Business have rigged against the little guy. And it's even better politics, standing up for the middle class while pinning hypocritical Democrats between their egalitarian talking points and their elitist agenda.

Taking on crony capitalism is a test of the political will and wisdom of the GOP. To become the party of the middle class and those aspiring to join it—our only hope for success in 2016 and beyond—we have to change more than our rhetoric. The new Republican Congress does have to get things done, but those things have to be for Main Street, too, not just Wall Street and K Street. A big part of our "governing" test is whether we can stand up to special interests. Leaders like Paul Ryan and Jeb Hensarling in the House, and Marco Rubio and Jeff Sessions in the Senate have made the fight against cronyism a point of emphasis—and it's sure to be a theme in the 2016 presidential primaries, too.

This issue is reaching critical mass on the Right. And as I see it, it's now a political necessity, another one that we should embrace rather than resist.

In passing anti-cronyism bills, we can either achieve policy wins for economic growth and opportunity, or we can let the president explain in his veto messages why taxpayers, whose take-home pay is stagnant, should be subsidizing corporations, whose profits have never been higher. That's a brand-changing debate Republicans can win.

(To be continued next week...)

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