

Local

Wyden's town hall

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The audience was comprised mostly of registered Democrats and PCPs from the Baker County Democratic Central Committee, with a smattering of Republicans and otherwise affiliated voters mixed in.

A PCP is a Precinct Committee Person—the most grassroots level of elected office in any County, voted in by members of that person's own party to support their party's platform and the candidates, in representation of those voters in their precinct who are registered in their party.

Baker City Mayor Kim Mosier introduced Wyden, senior Democrat on the Energy and Natural Resources and Finance Committees, and stated that the forum was a time for "citizens to share their concerns and ask questions—it's very brave." She explained that comment forms were at a front table, and numbers would be drawn from tickets that had been distributed to audience members to determine who would ask questions.

Wyden took the podium and began by stating that this town hall was his 724th. He said right out of the gate, "I think we're in for the prospect of a brutal fire season." He said his "top priorities in the next few weeks, not months or years, is to fix the broken system of fighting fire. He emphasized preventative measures such as fuel thinning. He said firefig-

ing has come from the "prevention fund" in the past, and his answer is to take money from the "disaster fund" to fight the fires, leaving the prevention monies for thinning.

After physically embracing several guests, Republican PCP, Jan Kerns crossed the room and sat next to Wallowa-Whitman Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya. Mosier announced that Kerns had volunteered to help facilitate Democrat Wyden's town hall, and would draw/announce tickets for the question and answer session throughout the meeting.

Longshoreman's Strike.

Rancher Logan Kerns began the Q&A by asking what "we're going to do about domestic terrorism like that that has shut down 47% of domestic exports out of the country?"

Wyden said, "First of all I think we all understood what a toll it was taking and it came at a bad time with Hanjin leaving Portland."

He added, "Obviously, business labor relations and how you bring people together to prevent that in the first place is hugely important ... you've got to find a way to show you have an economy where everybody wins."

He said the Oregon brand for ag products, computers and wine, "is on fire all over the world."

He said in his trademark lisp that he is working on a trade policy that embodies his economic philosophy to "Grow stuff in Oregon. Make stuff in Oregon. Add value to it in Oregon and then ship it somewhere."

He said his policy would focus on the Japanese dropping barriers to U.S. trade with ag products. One out of six Oregon jobs

rely on trade, he said.

Public Lands Transfer.

George Hauptman, owner of Canyon Outfitters in Halfway, which gives riverboat tours in Hells Canyon, said, "One of our concerns is the trend toward trying to privatize public lands in the West." He stated if Hells Canyon were not a national recreation area his company couldn't operate.

Wyden said, "A very important point! First I want everybody at home to know my view with respect to public lands is we always oughta try first and foremost to promote multiple use. That is public land policy at its best."

He continued, "Obviously we have made some judgments about protecting some of our special places. And it doesn't get in my view much more special than Hells Canyon. I can tell you on my watch we're not gonna see anybody privatize—you know, Hells Canyon."

The term "privatization of public lands" was seemingly used interchangeably during the meeting with "Transfer of Public Lands."

The Baker County Press was unable to locate any movement in Oregon or Baker County to privatize public lands. There is, however, an organized movement at both levels toward the return of Federally managed lands to more local State control.

Wyden went on to say what most Americans were concerned about during the government shutdown "was the closure of our special places ... I can tell you, I don't think the people are gonna support some sort of privatization of our special places. Suddenly hanging up big signs and all kinds of things to make it look like it's a very different place than Hells Canyon today."

The Baker County Press was also unable to locate any movement to privatize the lands of Hells Canyon.

Wyden then paused and took a moment to recognize local Democrat Peggie Timm, who passed away last year.

Marijuana Dispensaries.

A gentlemen who didn't identify himself by name stood and said his wife was a medical marijuana user who grows. "The City Council is desperately trying to keep marijuana dispensaries out of the City. They're searching for any loophole to circumvent Oregon law," he said, and asked if there was any sentiment in Congress to remove marijuana from the Schedule I list of drugs and move it to a more "benign list."

"I do think this scheduling issue where marijuana is considered I guess, as more dangerous than cocaine or something like that—," said Wyden. "I want to see the argument for something like that ... I want to see the medical evidence for in the scheduling why the government says marijuana is a more dangerous drug than cocaine."

According to the United States Federal Controlled Substances Act, Federal schedules 1-5 do not in fact list cocaine as more dangerous than marijuana, but categorize them together on Schedule 1 based on potential for

abuse and medical usage. Cocaine is also listed on Schedule III. Several drugs are present on multiple schedules. These drugs are also broken down in more complex ways as opioids, depressants, stimulants and the like, with Cannabimimetic agents in their own category.

"With respect to the debate between the State and the City, I'm not gonna pretend to be a lawyer who knows everything about City-State relations but obviously the voters of Oregon made a judgement that applied to every nook and cranny in our state."

He said there were legal questions as to what a city could do and what a state could do.

Probation and Privacy Issues.

A gentleman from Richland asked how it was that law enforcement and probation were aware of the substances on which his daughter had been high when arrested on a DUII, but he, as the father who wanted to help, couldn't access that information due to privacy laws.

Wyden promised to have his staff, who were present in the room, follow up on the issue.

He concluded that in general, "We have a serious drug problem in front of us."

Boardman to Hemingway.

Karen Yeakley stood and voiced her opposition to the Bureau of Land Management's proposal to place the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line in front of the Interpretive Center rather than behind it.

"As I live and breathe, this is a bad decision for Baker County," she said.

She said the line will harm sage grouse, resulting in a Federal listing for the bird. She said former Governor Tom McCall had a central Oregon path established.

"I've been hearing from ag folks all through this trip, so I understand how serious this is," Wyden said.

He said the head of Idaho Power would be in his office in the coming week, so he would garner more information then and "ask some very pointed questions."

He said Idaho Power now has almost a minority role in the issue with Bonneville Power and PacifiCorp heavily involved.

He assured he would rearrange his schedule to make that meeting happen.

China.

Joe (last name inaudible) asked about the U.S. allowing China to liquidate stocks creating an outflow of currency from the U.S. to China.

"Obviously we have a host of questions," Wyden said, "with respect to our relationship with China. And you have brought up an obvious one that relates to this discussion of trade. If we were to step away from putting in place this trade policy, China will write the rules for these markets."

He mentioned the U.S. is hitting the debt ceiling next week, and "Who's the biggest owner of foreign debt? China. So the question of how we handle this is hugely sensitive."

Keystone Pipeline.



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Jan Kerns, Republican PCP, helped facilitate the audience question and answer portion of Wyden's town hall meeting. Seated to her right is Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Supervisor Tom Montoya.

A lady in the audience asked, "Why are we not putting that Keystone Pipeline through?"

Wyden said the answer was twofold. First, he didn't believe Canada would accept enough responsibility in cleaning up potential oil spills, and second, "There were just too many unanswered questions."

Title II Funds and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT).

Terry Drever Gee stood and categorized herself to the crowd as a "conservative Republican." She said, "I want to thank you for the Title II money and now it's kind of questionable—"

Wyden interjected, "What do you do with the Title II funds for?"

"We put projects on the ground. With the Forest Service collaborative. And it's putting our kids to work, which I have a real soft spot for the kids, the OYCC kids, and it's also helping with our roads and our schools."

"Did you hear that?" Wyden said. "We're talking about Title II, Secure Rural Schools, and the collaborative—the Forest Service is really responsible for it."

He said this issue had become intertwined with PILT—Payment in Lieu of Taxes. He said between Secure Rural Schools and PILT, Baker County has received \$1.7 million. "So it's a lot of money."

"From the standpoint of Oregon alone, this is the most important law that I have written," Wyden said. He said Oregon's share of these funds is upward of \$2.8 billion.

He continued, "This relates to the point the gentleman made about privatization of public lands. Well over 100 years ago there was a big debate, and a lot of people participated, obviously we weren't around for it. But the judgement was that we oughta have a national forest system. And what a national forest system means is that all of our forests in Oregon are owned also by the people in Iowa and Florida—not just owned by us. A national system. And in return for creating a national system we said 'How are we gonna pay for the basics? How are we gonna pay for the roads, and the police and the schools and the like?'"

He added, "The agreement back then 100 years ago was places where

you had the forests and the public lands, we get a decent-sized check, you know, because we won't be cutting timber out on public lands, and that worked really well for 80, 90 years and when the environmental rules changed, it didn't. So now I want to emphasize this. I'm working to try to get the harvest up in a sustainable way on the east side and the west side of Oregon. And I'm strongly in favor of keeping Secure Rural Schools and PILT because the reality is there is no way you can get the harvest up high enough so that harvesting alone will get local communities what they need."

Montoya nodded his head in agreement, to which Wyden said, "And my man from the Forest Service who's not allowed to say anything about politics—he's nodding his head. He's not allowed to say anything about politics so I don't want to put him on the spot. But he knows that's right because the Chief has said that as well. There's no way to get the harvest up high enough alone to not need the safety net."

Wyden's image of the future is one in which local communities are perpetually beholden to federal dollars.

Wyden explained, "We're now in a situation where we're gonna need both. We need to get the harvest up, and we're gonna need the safety net."

Jan Kerns and Montoya nodded together again.

The discussion was limited to timber harvest, and did not include the economics of other natural resources such as minerals.

Klamath County, Oregon has been the first county to formally disagree with Wyden's concept, having drafted a resolution supporting public lands transfer. Two weeks ago, officials in Mineral County, Montana worked the numbers and as a result drafted a similar resolution.

At one point, Illinois, Missouri, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, Indiana and Florida were comprised of 90-percent Federally managed lands. After transferring those lands back to state control, those states currently utilize local resources to fund police, schools, etc. without PILT funding.

Oregon House Bill 3444 also seeks that same transfer of public lands back to Oregon State control.

According to the American Lands Council, "Preliminary studies have shown that state governments manage their lands at less cost per acre or visitor than does the federal government. Assuming a 'best use' determination that balances aesthetic and economic uses for their lands, these data indicate that states stand to gain overall revenue while still acting as responsible stewards for future generations, and balancing current aesthetic and recreational uses with economic development."

Drever Gee added in her closing comments, "Just let me thank you again for putting that bill together." Wyden and Drever Gee exchanged more compliments after she mentioned she'd been back in D.C., was a union member, and on the Forest Service's Resource Advisory Council.

A few other questions were asked involving rural jobs, Oregon's new carbon fuel standards, fast-tracking the aforementioned trade agreement, etc. Wyden promised to have his staff work with Halfway to explore job creation there. He expressed support of low carbon fuel standards, saying he believed "it" is creating weather changes. He said he'll continue to address what he sees as the problem of climate change in the U.S. and around the world.

Also of note in the audience mingling with Wyden or his staff were Fred Warner, Jr., Camille Warner, and County Commissioner Tim Kerns, all three newly elected to Republican PCP positions last year.

Wyden's on-site staff included Kathleen Cathey, La Grande field representative; Jacob Engler, special projects director; and Mary Gautreaux, deputy state director.

Wyden is married to millionaire heiress wife Nancy, whom he wed in September 2005. He has five children: Adam, Lilly, Ava, William and Scarlett.

He was first elected in 1996.

He was born in Wichita, Kansas, raised in Palo Alto, California, lists Portland, Oregon as his hometown, and divides his time between his wife's and children's residence in New York, a house in Portland and a condo in Washington D.C.

Wyden's next stop was a town hall Saturday afternoon in Ontario.