

Local

Sen. Merkley holds town hall

• HUNTINGTON CHOSEN FOR ANNUAL BAKER COUNTY TOWN HALL MEETING

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Senator Jeff Merkley held his annual Baker County Town Hall Meeting at the VFW Hall / Community Center in Huntington on Thursday, July 2 at 1:30 p.m.

Merkley has held a town hall meeting in every Oregon county every year since being elected; this is the seventh in Baker County.

Merkley told the assembled county-wide community leaders and citizens, “I could not imagine doing my job without the input from town halls like this one.”

The meeting began with Mayor Travis Young of Huntington leading the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance and Introducing Senator Merkley by highlighting some of the Senator’s accomplishments to date, including having “emphasized fighting for the success of Oregon’s working families. That means fighting for good paying jobs, strong public schools and affordable college and health care.”

Senator Merkley began his time at the podium by asking the community elected officials and office-holders in the room to introduce themselves and then asking the rest of the assembly to give those people an ovation to thank them for their service and dedication to the communities they serve.

Representatives of the National VFW organization thanked and commended Senator Merkley for pushing through the change in the US Department of Veteran’s Affairs policy on C123 veterans who flew in planes contaminated with agent orange, which will now mean those veterans will get agent orange related benefits which they were previously denied.

The senator asked Huntington Fire Chief Eric Bronson to come to the podium, and presented him with a Certificate of Appreciation and an American Flag for the volunteer fire department, then thanked them for their work in Huntington and the surrounding communities.

The senator began his talk by stressing that he



Sen. Jeff Merkley takes the mic while Huntington Mayor Travis Young watches on.

and his staff are always available to help Oregonians with problems or questions about government programs and agencies. They can help with a wide arrange of issues including but not limited to Social Security, veteran’s benefits, Medicare/Medicaid, student loans, mortgage and foreclosure, taxes and environmental issues.

He spoke about the Sage Grouse issue and said that he was hopeful that it would stay out of federal control.

He said he was happy that the small rural post offices in Unity, Hereford and Durkee were able to remain open even though there was a reduction in hours of operation.

The meeting was opened to questions from the assembly and some of them were as follows:

The first question was asked by recent High School graduate Mandy Guerri who asked, “How can state law supercede Federal law on recreational marijuana?”

Merkley replied, “The federal government could stop it but they have much bigger issues to deal with such as gangs, black market crime and much bigger criminal issues.”

He also says that enough states have changed their drug laws that they are looking at changing the classification of marijuana and spending the money currently used to prosecute “marijuana crimes” on more important areas.

Huntington resident Marianne Lovell stated, “We have roads here in Huntington and around Baker County; they have needed fixing for years, but every time they are sched-

uled to be repaired we hear that the money was sent to the western part of the state over us. What can we do about this?”

The senator explained that ODOT has to put the money where it is seen to be most needed on a highest priority first basis.

Shellie Nash, Huntington Deputy City Recorder, asked the senator, “What can we do about the drastic lowering of the water level in the Snake River every year immediately after the 4th of July, that seriously impacts the tourism in our area which we depend on to survive?”

Merkley replied that there are many regulations and policies that must be followed by Idaho Power, who controls the water level in the Snake River and he was not versed on all of them but that he would look into it.

The final question was again asked by Mandy Guerri who wanted to know, “What can we do in a small town to get involved?”

The Senator replied, “Volunteer to help a senator for a day. Become a page or when you’re in college become an intern like I did for former Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield—or get involved in local community organization.”

Merkley also held a Community Leadership Meeting at 1 p.m. just before the start of the town hall.

Community Leaders from around the County were called by the senator’s office and invited to attend this meeting in order for the Senator to get information on what they felt was the most impor-

tant issues for this area. Present at this meeting were representatives from City of Huntington, Baker County Commission, Baker County Chamber of Commerce, BLM and the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

The chief concerns for Huntington were the timing of the raising and lowering of the Snake River, the pressing need for jobs and economic development and the lack of availability of local EMT/medical/ fire training for volunteers.

The issues most important to Baker County Commission was the Sage-Grouse plan, new proposed powerline issues and lack of public transportation in Baker County. The Baker County Chamber brought forth the concerns over the proposed new minimum wage and added gas taxes and their impact on Baker County residents.

Senator Jeff Merkley is a native Oregonian born in Myrtle Creek. His family moved with the timber industry to Roseburg and then to Multnomah County. He was elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1998 and in 2007 became the Speaker of the House until his election to the U.S. Senate in 2009.

Senator Merkley keeps offices in Portland, Bend, Medford, Salem, Eugene, Pendleton and Washington DC.

His number in Portland, where constituents call for help on programs issues, is (503)326-3386.

The Pendleton office number is (541) 278-1129.

Citizens can also connect with him or see what he is working on at merkley.senate.gov.

Truck recovered



Submitted Photo.

Superior Towing and jeeps from Locked & Loaded arrive near the Marble Creek trailhead.



Submitted Photo.

The pickup abandoned by Robinson was in a steep location, creating a challenge to remove it.

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Back on that May 12 afternoon, according to Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner, officers pulled Robinson, 41, over in a traffic stop near the intersection of 4th Street and Virginia Avenue. Robinson was suspected of being a Felon in Possession of a Firearm. He is listed online as a registered sex offender whose past includes assault and burglary convictions. Robinson’s vehicle temporarily yielded and then accelerated away from officers. Three Baker City Police units pursued Robinson’s vehicle out of the city and up Old Auburn Highway. Two Oregon State Police units and four Baker County Sheriff’s units joined in the pursuit, which wound its way up to Marble Creek pass where the vehicles could go no further.

Robinson abandoned his 4x4 truck and fled on foot, at which point it was snowing and darkness had fallen, forcing law enforcement off the mountain. The next morning, Robinson surfaced near Mowich Loop between Baker City and Sumpter, where an armed, law-abiding citizen held him at gunpoint until officers arrived to make the arrest.

Christy said around the first of June his company initially went to the area to look at what it would take to remove the abandoned Dodge, then returned along with members of the Locked & Loaded off-road group for more detailed reconnaissance June 15-16. Locked & Loaded often volunteers for road cleanup projects and sought a way to help with this particular removal.

After competing tow companies also surveyed the scene and bowed out, “It was down to us or a helicopter,” said Christy. The helicopter option out of Bend turned out to be cost-prohibitive at \$1,000 per hour per pound removed. “That’s about \$7,000 per hour,” he said.

The truck, as it turned out, was not owned by Robinson at all, but rather the estate of a deceased grandparent, which was set to be ticketed by the United States Forest Service (USFS) after June 24.

“A team of eight of us from Superior Towing and Locked & Loaded went. We had three jeeps, one heavy tow truck, one side-by-side, and half a mile of line—wire rope.”

The jeeps—along with drivers Don O’Grady, Tim Shively and Corey Younger—were stationed in 300-foot increments along the route of recovery in case materials needed to be passed up and down the mountainside. On foot, without those jeeps in place to relay supplies, it was taking 45 minutes for the team to climb from truck to crest.

“It [the truck] was sitting in water in a ditch bank at the bottom,” he said. “It was near the trailhead, right in the headwaters of Alder Creek.” Whether or not the pickup’s situation in those waters will technically be treated as an environmental hazard is still being determined by the USFS.

Christy said the incline of the pickup was so steep that the oil had run out of the motor, making it unable to be started until the last 100 feet of that long half-mile uphill. “We could barely turn it,” he said. “Everything we did made it want to turn over.”

Christy said Superior has been working with the USFS and also the estate’s insurance company. Sorting out the payment process for the job will likely prove to be time-consuming. But the pickup was removed at dusk, just prior to the USFS’s deadline for fines.

“No one was hurt in the recovery,” said Christy, “but we did roll the side-by-side.”

National Cattlemen sue EPA

The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) and Public Lands Council, along with other producer and land use groups, filed a complaint in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas against the EPA and Army Corps over their “waters of the United States” (WOTUS) final rule.

“The WOTUS rule remains a top priority for our producers and for all landowners nationwide,” said Philip Ellis, NCBA president and Chugwater, Wyoming, cattleman.

“While cattlemen have long asked for greater clarity around the Clean Water

Act, this rule does the opposite, rendering jurisdictional determinations so vague and subjective that our members cannot possibly make a determination as to what basic ranching activities will subject them to criminal and civil penalties under the Clean Water Act. We remain committed to working with the administration, Congress and through the courts to stop this rule,” he said.

The complaint charges that this rule by the EPA and the Corps exercises broad control over land use, far beyond what Congress authorized in the Clean Water Act. More-

over, the ambiguity and breadth of this rule violates the U.S. Constitution.

“As cattle producers and landowners, we are extremely concerned by this regulatory overreach by EPA and the Corps,” said Brenda Richards, PLC president and Idaho rancher.

Richards added, “Litigation is a last resort to exercise our rights against regulation, but producers have determined that this is a necessary step. Several states filed similar litigation requesting injunctive and declaratory relief from this administration’s regulatory rampage.”

Similar suits have been filed by officials representing 27 states, all within two days of the rule’s publication on June 29.

NCBA and PLC’s other co-plaintiffs are the American Farm Bureau Federation, American Petroleum Institute, American Road and Transportation Builders, Leading Builders of America, National Alliance of Forest Owners, National Association of Home Builders, National Association of Manufacturers, National Corn Growers Association, National Mining Association, and National Pork Producers Council.