

Local

Wyden town hall

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Merrill introduced incoming ASB (Associated Student Body) President Kara Bennett, who acted as moderator for the meeting. “I’m glad to hand over this job to Kara’s capable hands...” Merrill said, reminding attendees to silence cell phones, as he stated the importance of the meeting. He also asked students to remain seated when the bell rings, indicating second period, to allow Wyden to finish responding to a question first before politely leaving the auditorium.

Merrill said, “I’m looking forward to a meeting with good, substantive questions, and comments. It’s my hope that students in attendance get a great deal out of this big opportunity, and thank you again, Senator Wyden, and welcome to Baker High School.”

Prior to introducing Wyden, Bennett explained that the meeting would be held in a question-and-answer format, and she would announce community and student numbers (stubs of which attendees held), in the order they were submitted, to allow those present to ask questions.

“I would like to introduce Senator Ron Wyden, who ran for the Senate in 1996, in Oregon’s first vote-by-mail election...” Bennett said. She briefly recapped his background, explaining that he attended college in California on a basketball scholarship, law school at the University of Oregon, that he serves on committees such as Finance and Revue, and Environment and Natural Resources, and that he’s the senior Democrat of the Finance committee. She said he’s made a point of holding Town Hall meetings (this meeting was Town Hall number 773) in every county, every year, since first being elected to the Senate.

Wyden explained his pledge upon being elected, to hold these meetings, in order to “...do it the way the Founding Fathers wanted us to do it...to have everybody in Baker County educate me on what’s important,” he said.

In recognition of local contributions and efforts, Wyden said, “Mr. Tim Kerns is a Baker County rancher, and for over 15 years, he has served as County Commissioner, and Mr. Kerns is now retiring from that post. Now, retirement is probably a bit of an unusual word for the Kerns household, because my sense is that he, and his wife Jan—they are a partnership, in every sense of the word—are not going to be just sitting around...Tim Kerns has been a responsible voice for agriculture... There’s no question, he’s going to continue to be a community leader. There’s also no question, that I’m going to keep asking him for his advice... He’s been telling it like he sees it, for a long, long time...I’ve been able to get one of those (an Honor Flag, which had been flown at the Capitol building, in Washington, D.C.) for Tim, and his wife, Jan... Let’s do a big shout out to the Kerns family.” Applause

followed this, and Wyden asked the couple up to the stage, where he presented them with the flag. The Kerns’ made brief statements, in appreciation of receiving the Honor Flag, including the mention by Tim, of Wyden’s efforts with COOL (Country of Origin Labeling) legislation.

Bennett drew numbers associated with those wishing to ask questions, and this included the following questions and discussions (not all-inclusive), facilitated partly by Wyden’s Business Outreach/Field Director Neel Pender, who held one of the micro-phones used by attendees.

From former Oregon Cattlemen’s Association (OCA) President, and current Baker County Livestock Association (BCLA) member Curtis Martin: “Have you actually gone there recently (to Malheur County, location of the impending Owyhee Canyonlands monument designation), and visited with the community members?

Are you fully aware of the position the community has taken, in opposition to these extremist organizations, that are trying to influence President Obama...?” He elaborated on his question, and the impacts of the designation.

Wyden responded that he has been there, and he emphasized the importance of agriculture, stating that he had co-sponsored a bill with Republicans, to assist farmers and ranchers with funding for equipment, for example. He said there’s ample opposition in the surrounding communities to the designation, his focus is protection of the economy, and he and others have voiced this opposition to the President, however, the President has the authority, under the Antiquities Act, to designate the Owyhee Canyonlands as a national monument.

From Anna Sullivan: “I’m with the Oregon Farm Service Agency (FSA), and I’d like to thank you for your support...I’d also like to thank you for reopening re-staffing of the Grant County FSA office. It was close to 2012...We really do appreciate it, and I hope the producers in that area appreciate it, as well.”

Wyden responded by expressing appreciation for the FSA, and he explained the obstacles involved with improving local economies, providing jobs, and dealing with regulatory agencies, like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He emphasized the importance of connecting with local communities, throughout the State, not just the metropolitan areas, like Portland.

From a student: “Do you believe that America is in a post-Constitutional state, and if so, how will you fight for, and reinforce the Constitution, as a compass for our government, as the Founding Fathers intended, if you’re reelected to the Senate?”

Wyden responded that it’s important to recognize, with all of the challenges of today, that the U.S. is the freest country in the world, and that most people seem to want to emigrate from their country to the U.S., and not the other way around. He said he’s on the Intelligence committee (his child calls it the

“So-called Intelligence” committee, he said), and he cited an example involving issues of protecting both national security, and individual liberty—cell phone data encryption technology, and the attempts and arguments to gain access to that data through the court system, by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Wyden said he doesn’t support these attempts, or arguments, and he supports policies that protect or improve security, and liberty.

From a community member: “I was wondering what it would take to get Amtrak back through here?”

Wyden responded that he and Idaho Republican Senator Mike Crapo have been working on that issue for several years, and that if the communities along the Amtrak route, especially in rural Oregon and Idaho, would make financial and service commitments, it could be possible. He said it would be a very important service the area, and that recreation is now a big economic component, stating that recreation and tourism in Oregon have produced as many jobs as the number of people it would take to fill Autzen (Eugene, University of Oregon, capacity of 54,000), and Reser (Corvallis, Oregon State University, capacity of 45,674) stadiums together, at the same salaries.

Wyden asked the community member to stay in touch with him regarding the topic.

From a student: “Do you suppose that constitutionalism, and free market capitalism are trampled by massive, over-regulating bureaucracies?” Wyden responded that he’s always felt that, as long as the playing field is leveled, with fair rules, a free market is far superior to any other market. He said that rules aren’t fair in today’s world, and he works on tax reform, for example, to enable everyone to have a chance at success. He made a reference to Henry Ford, saying, as Ford would say, “I’m an industrialist. I want to do well...But, for me to do well, my people have to have enough money to buy my cars,” a notion which reflects Wyden’s own judgments, he said, with respect to economics. He cited issues with the government, giving an example of the Federal Drug and Food Administration’s (FDA) change in regulations, which altered the way “spent grain” was used, as a bi-product of craft beer brewing. Prior to the change, he said, the spent grain was utilized, and the scenario was “win-win,” even receiving support from environmentalists, however, after the FDA’s added rules and regulations, he spearheaded efforts to reel in the government agencies, stating, “Look, I may not know everything about beer, but I know when a federal agency has had one too many,” prompting laughter from those present. He said he and others then remedied the federal overreach.

From a community member: “Are we keeping up with the threats, and reality of this thing called ‘Global Warming?’”

Wyden responded that

he believes that global warming is very real, considering his analysis of data from different agencies, and sources. He respects different views, because not everyone agrees with his, but his reading of the data is that there is an issue. He said that one of the best responses to that issue is to diversify the State’s energy portfolio, and Oregon is in a good position to do that, including implementation of geo-thermal power, steam power, hydro power, bio-mass power, and a variety of approaches, to deal responsibly with climate change.

From a student: “Today, with everything that’s going on, in Washington, it seems, the Republicans and Democrats can’t work together on a lot of things...I want to know how you personally work with Republicans...and also, what your experiences are?”

Wyden responded that he spends more time in Washington, D.C., working with Republicans and Senators, who don’t necessarily share his views, because it’s the only way to get things done. He said that, in January of 2017, after a new President is elected, neither the Republicans, nor the Democrats, in the U.S. Senate, will have enough votes to get their way, which means, “Either we will have bipartisanship, or we won’t get anything done. It’s just that simple.” He stressed the importance of working together, regardless of political affiliation, and he tries to find common ground (his number one priority, he said). At this time, almost all of the students who were present needed to leave the auditorium, because of the period bell.

From a community member, a Trail Tenders volunteer for the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (OTIC): “It’s my understanding that the tourism industry has already increased...We have several programs, up at the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center... My question has always been, when are you going to come to work with me, at the Interpretive Center?” Wyden responded that OTIC is a wonderful program, and that he will find a way to make that happen. The volunteer responded that students have opportunities, though not paid, to volunteer during the summer months, at OTIC.

From BCLA member, and Public Land Committee Chairman Ed Trindle: “Due to our fires last year, we had a number of permittees, who had no pasture to go to. We (the BCLA) went to work with the BLM (Bureau of Land Management), and the (U.S.) Forest Service, to try to find an open permit, that these people might go to...The Forest Service said that there was a possibility of looking at a grass bank, and/or a grazing association...” Trindle cited lack of communication from Wyden’s office, and the Forest Service, regarding resolution of the issue, and Trindle asked, “Can you, and will you open those communication lines back up, for the livestock industry, in this County?”

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Patty Trost

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Trost switched to the Ironside Route, driving “Buster” the bus, when the school district contracted with Mid-Columbia Bus Company. That route later expanded to include Brogan as well.

Trost said, “I had 15 students on the route then, but the numbers went up and down depending on whether the ranch hands who moved in had kids. Going to Brogan made my day long as I was now working in the classroom all day. I was doing more activity trips, too.”

In June of 2007, Trost was awarded Oregon School Bus Driver of the Year and received the award from the Oregon Pupil Transportation Association. She was nominated by Bruce Flatt of La Grande, who was the owner-supervisor of Mid Columbia at the time.

“I was surprised and truly honored,” she said.

Buster was retired that same year, but not before Trost had put 264,000 miles on the vehicle.

Trost got to keep the bus’s mud flaps. “They were filled with bite marks from two dogs who waited for their little human to come home every day,” she said. “My new bus was a 22 passenger with heated mirrors, air conditioning, and automatic drop chains for the snow and ice. The kids named that bus Scooter.”

Scooter had racked up 174,000 miles by this year.

In 2010, budget cuts necessitated the elimination of the teaching assistant positions at the school, but Trost continued to drive the Ironside route along with various special school trips. Future Farmers of America and Future Business Leaders of America are two active groups in the school.

“We averaged between 50-60 trips each school year and between Rod Wilson and myself, we got our precious cargo to and from school safe and sound,” said Trost.

Trost reminisced, “I have a lot of good memories and funny stories that kids have shared over the years. To this day, every time I see a llama, I think of a little boy named Zeb. He told me that he knew a lot about llamas and with the most serious look on his little face, he informed me that when a baby llama grows up it turns into a camel.”

The most embarrassing bus driving moment came during her first year on the Bridgeport Route.

“It was spring,” she said. “Cattle were being turned out, and if you’ve ever been on the Hereford highway, it’s very narrow. I came upon a huge black bull romancing a cow right in the middle of the highway. I couldn’t go around; I had to wait. But all my kiddos were ranch kids and this was nothing new to them. One of the scariest moments was driving up Brogan hill and the pickup ahead of me lost his little flatbed trailer. It came rolling back toward us but fortunately ran into the bank.

“I always greeted each student boarding the bus with a ‘good morning’ and ended with a ‘see you tomorrow’ or ‘have a great weekend.’ I got to see a lot of awesome sunrises and sunsets to begin and end my day. I never got tired of my route because there was something different to see each day. I’ve had close calls with deer and elk—and even hit an antelope one day. Fortunately, the antelope got up and ran off. I’ve had snowshoe hares race beside the bus on a cold snowy morning and encountered jack rabbits in Cow Valley playing chicken with the bus. Driving through cattle drives might have slowed us down a bit, but how many people even get to see a cattle drive? I’ve driven in every type of weather imaginable, the worst being thick fog or a white out from a snow storm. We might have been late to school, but we always made it there.”

Trost added, “I’m going to miss my co-workers, the kids, and everyone else at school. But I will get to see them from time to time as I’m going to help Christy Swindlehurst out in the cafeteria whenever she needs me.”

Now that she’s officially in retirement, Trost plans to spend more time with her family—her four children, Andy, Nathan, Brian and Tara, all graduated from Burnt River. Trost has seven grandchildren. That family time, she said, also will include checking off some of the project on husband Rick’s “honey-do” list.

“I’m also going to start hunting again,” she said. “I’m old enough for an Oregon Pioneer Hunting/Fishing license and I got one. We’ll see if I get that elk tag I applied for last month.”

Trost was presented with a bus-shaped cake and a plaque during the week day of school in honor of her career.

Union Pacific to repair tracks in Oregon

Union Pacific plans to invest \$34.6 million in 2016 to improve Oregon’s transportation infrastructure. The company’s multi-million dollar private investment will enhance employee, community and customer safety and increase rail operating efficiency. Freight railroads like Union Pacific operate on track built and maintained without taxpayer funds. Union Pacific’s private investments sustain jobs and ensure the company meets growing demand for products used in the American economy.

Union Pacific’s planned investment covers a range of initiatives: \$28.5 million to maintain railroad track and \$3.8 million to maintain bridges in the state. Key projects planned this year include:

\$4.5 million investment in the rail line between Chemult and Oakridge to replace 33,372 railroad ties.

\$3.6 million investment in the rail line between Bridal Veil and Hood River to replace 28,342 railroad ties.

\$3.2 million investment in the rail line between Stanfield and La Grande to replace almost 4 miles of curve rail.

This year’s planned \$34.6 million capital expenditure in Oregon is part of an ongoing investment strategy.