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Healthcare hecklers make for unusual town hall

BY KERRY McQUISTEN
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The story might have been that U.S. Representative Greg Walden chose the Baker High School gym as the location for his 14th town hall this year—had it not been for the unusual makeup of the audience. Therein is the real story. Members of the group Health Care for All Oregon (HCAO), a Portland-based politically motivated nonprofit endorsed by the

Oregon Communist Party and County Democratic Central Committees across Oregon to name a few, came to the gathering en masse. HCAO's primary goal? Universal health care per a single-payer system. Some of the group's members were local to the venue. Others stated that they had come in from outside the area and were following Walden from town hall to town hall. Locally, HCAO lists

Betty's Books as their only "business ally." Interspersed between HCAO members across the bleachers were residents not belonging to that group. In contrast to last month's town hall with Senator Ron Wyden, Baker High School students were not taken from class to attend Walden's town hall. Walden began by introducing Boy Scout Troop 444 to lead the Flag Salute, then said this was his 144th town hall since

2012, and second trip to Baker City this year. This year 1,344 Baker County constituents have contacted Walden's office, with 1,314 responses given so far. Walden gave a general overview of recent Congressional activities, such as the passing of the Omnibus Appropriations Bill, which fully funds the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program.

SEE TOWN HALL
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Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press
Rep. Greg Walden (at right) as Boy Scout Troop #444 brings in the flags.

City discusses new Public Safety Utility Fee



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Poppy girls were on hand to sell poppies in remembrance of the debt owed to veterans and their families.

BY GINA K. SWARTZ
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The final item on the agenda, the idea of a new public safety utility fee, was the hot topic at City Council this week. Mayor Mike Downing called the first regular City Council meeting to order Tuesday night. Councilor Abell led the pledge of allegiance and gave the invocation for the evening. City Recorder/Human Services Manager Julie Smith called roll with all Councilors answering present. Mayor Downing next called for the consent agenda that consisted of the 2017 STP (Surface Transportation Program) agreement. Approval of this agreement is a cooperative agreement with Oregon Department of Transportation for the exchange of Federal dollars to State dollars. The 2017 amount will be \$112,801.88. A staff report submitted to Council by Joyce Bornstedt advised Council that the Public Works Advisory Committee had reviewed and approved the Pavement Management Plan that included using the STP funds for the proposed projects. Councilor Joseph moved to approve with a second heard by Councilor McQuisten. With a unanimous vote the consent agenda was approved. Downing called then for Citizen participation.

Mary Miller, Chair for the public arts commission came forward to advise Council that the vinyl wrap project the commission has been working on diligently for some time has stalled due to the inability to receive approval to move forward from ODOT. She advised Council the commission will try other avenues to complete this project and they will keep Council advised of the progress. **Poppy Day Proclamation** Downing read a proclamation recognizing May 26th, 2017 as Poppy Day in Baker City. The American Legion Axillary #41 and the V.F.W Auxiliary #3048 twined the Memorial Poppy and Buddy Poppy to remind the community of the debt Veterans and their families are owed. Designated Poppy Girls were on hand to supply Councilors with poppies. They then walked through the crowd to sell additional poppies. **National Correction Officers and Employees Week Proclamation** Downing read this proclamation declaring the week National Correction Officers Week. He stated he had been out to the Powder River Correctional Facility earlier in the week to present the proclamation and was informed they had plans to recognize employees with different things all week.

SEE PUBLIC SAFETY FEE PAGE 4

Geiser Grand to expand

• 20 NEW ROOMS TO BE ADDED WITH HELP FROM A \$100K GRANT

The Geiser Grand Hotel has been awarded an Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant—the maximum grant size of \$100,000 to encourage their efforts to save the historic Crabill Building, soon to be known as the South Wing of the Geiser Grand Hotel. That building almost entirely collapsed from snow and ice load on February 4 of this year. The building's owners, Dwight and Barbara Sidway, have committed to save and expand the building by extending the Geiser Grand Hotel. The couple plans to add approximately twenty more guest rooms and suites. "We are so grateful to our downtown neighbors for their support throughout this trying time," said Barbara Sidway. "The aspirations of the merchant group Baker City Downtown, and the commitment by the City of Baker City to move forward with becoming a Main Street community made this grant possible. I know that there will be so many more resources to come into our community as the community's Main Street efforts bear fruit." The Sidways have assembled a credentialed design team. Stu Edwards, Structural Engineer out of Ontario, has worked with the Sidways since 1993, and was a key player in saving the Geiser Grand Hotel from the wrecking ball. Jerry Rotnov, architect, flies in to Baker from his home in Clarkston. Electrical Engineer Jack Terry and Justin R. Beaucannon Mechanical Engineer of Idaho round out the design team. They are charged with creating a design that will be strong structurally, and offer guests unparalleled luxurious comfort, with amenities that may include a rooftop bar and Jacuzzi.

SEE GEISER GRAND PAGE 3

Award-winning food and beverage
7 a - 9 p Daily

OPERA PARTY
Tuesday Nights

MOTHERS DAY
Brunch and Dinner May 14



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Friday Mostly cloudy with rain showers. Chance of precipitation is 60%. Highs in the mid 50s. Friday Night: Lows in the mid 30s.

Saturday Mostly cloudy with scattered showers. Chance of precipitation is 40%. Highs near 50. Lows near 30.

Sunday Mostly cloudy with scattered showers. Chance of precipitation is 30%. Highs in the mid 50s. Lows in the mid-30s.

Your weekend weather forecast for Baker County.

Our forecast made possible by this generous sponsor:

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Official weather provider for The Baker County Press.

OREGON TRAIL ELECTRIC CO-OP

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