

# Opinion

— GUEST OPINION —

## Safe drinking water is a bipartisan issue

By Rep. Greg Walden

All of us in Oregon and across the country deserve access to safe, clean drinking water. That's why the Energy and Commerce Committee—where I serve as Chairman—just passed bipartisan legislation to modernize the nation's drinking water infrastructure.

Today, drinking water flows to our homes and businesses through more than one million miles of pipes operated by both publicly and privately-owned water systems.

Many of these pipes were laid in the early to mid-20th century with an expected lifespan of 75 to 100 years. In fact, some communities in Oregon still rely on wood stave water pipes that are reaching the end of their life. While in most places, drinking water quality remains high, we also have seen horrible problems from Flint, Michigan to drinking fountains in Oregon schools.

Our legislation focuses on addressing drinking water systems' physical needs, aiding states and utilities with compliance and operation of the drinking water program, and encouraging the wisest use of money that is spent.

For the last 20 years, Congress has helped drinking water delivery systems meet the challenge of providing consumers with safe and affordable water through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF). From the end of 1997 through 2016, Oregon has received more than \$274 million in grants to help improve the safety and quality of tap water, comply with drinking water rules and reporting requirements, and give a helping hand to the most economically distressed communities struggling to provide their residents safe drinking water.

This fiscal year, Oregon is set to receive nearly \$12 million in funding to improve its water systems.

Many rural communities across Oregon struggle with failing infrastructure and a limited ability to afford these



Submitted Photo

Rep. Greg Walden represents Oregon's Congressional District 2, which includes Baker County.

increasingly costly projects. They turn to the DWSRF for help.

In Malheur County, rural communities such as Vale and Nyssa are completing new water treatment and storage facilities to bring safe drinking water to their residents.

In Umatilla County, the city of Pendleton is upgrading more than 30 miles of water lines that are nearly a century old—Mayor John Turner said this project would be impossible without the program.

Our bill, the Drinking Water System Improvement Act, continues those important investments and authorizes \$8 billion over five years for the DWSRF while also expanding the number of ways in which the fund can be used to improve delivery systems. In fact, we're authorizing an increase of \$350 million in funding for next year from which states such as Oregon could benefit.

Perhaps most important is how the bill looks to the future, using smart-technology to monitor drinking water quality in real-time.

This allows us to better prevent, detect, or rapidly respond to contaminants in our water systems. The ability to have up-to-the-minute information helps ensure water is safe and clean, system leaks and recent contamination are identified quickly, and the accuracy and availability of compliance data is maintained. We also included a program to help our schools replace drinking fountains that might contain lead.

These are just some of the highlights of the bill. As this measure heads to the House for a vote, I will continue working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to ensure it passes and we do our part to make sure the water Americans drink is safe.

## Oregon PERS debt at \$52,100,000,000

Submitted by Sen. Ted Ferrioli's Office

Taxpayer-funded pension systems are combustible by nature, but Oregon's ticking time bomb known as PERS is on the brink of exploding.

Among the impending disaster's collateral damage, Republicans say.

Under Oregon's one-party-rule taxpayers are now on the hook for an estimated \$52,100,000,000 in taxpayer-held pension debt. Simply put, to avoid getting smacked with an Illinois-like credit rating of near "junk" status, late last Friday the

PERS Board adjusted the taxpayer funded-pension system's (PERS) assumed investment earnings rate, lowering it by three-tenths of one percent, down to 7.2 percent from 7.5.

"Tinkering with the PERS rate won't solve the long-term problem of solvency. It's another failed 'progressive' strategy like selling off public lands and temporary accounting gimmicks aimed at diverting attention from the need to increase PERS savings directly by capping the final average salary included for PERS benefit calculations and by eliminating 'pension spiking' by

extending the final average salary calculation to the last five years of public employment," said Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli, of John Day.

The newly set assumed earnings rate is not as low as Oregon Investment Council's moderate recommendation of 7.1 percent, but it is still much higher than Oregon actuary Milliman's realistically estimated 6.7 percent earnings rate over the next two decades. The Brown administration's action, in the span of just seconds, flooded the PERS debt another \$2.1 billion dollars.

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— GUEST OPINION —

## The SB719 debacle

By Kevin Starrett  
Special to The Baker County Press



Submitted Photo

Kevin Starrett heads up the Oregon Firearms Federation, fighting for Second Amendment rights.

When the Oregon Legislature passed SB 719, there was very little attention from the mainstream media. This is unfortunate because 719 is the most dangerous and draconian gun control bill ever passed in Oregon.

The bill was the work of Democrat Senator Ginny Burdick and Republican Brian Boquist.

If you haven't heard of it, you're not alone. While the bill forces firearms confiscations from people who have committed no crime, many police don't even know about it. Here's how it works.

If a member of your "household," a member of your family, or any police officer tells a court that they believe you are a danger to yourself or others, police will be dispatched to your home with an order for you to surrender all firearms and "deadly weapons" under your control.

If you have a concealed handgun license, that will be seized as well.

You will not have been informed that someone is making this accusation against you.

You will have no opportunity to defend yourself from these accusations until after your property is confiscated and your rights stripped from you.

And then, only at your own expense. You are guilty until you can prove yourself innocent and the burden of proof is on you.

Here are some of the reasons you can have your firearms confiscated; If you have ever had a DUI.

If you have recently used marijuana. If you have lawfully purchased a firearm in the last six months.

That's right. You can lose your guns and your rights because you bought a gun.

While Senator Boquist promoted the bill as a "veteran's suicide prevention" bill (after the suicide of his stepson) the bill contains not a single word about getting help for a person who is actually self destructive.

The bill contains not a single word about providing protection for the people in the home of someone who is actually dangerous.

In fact, the Democrats in control of the legislature refused to even consider an amendment that would have required there be some minimal effort to seek professional help for a person who was really troubled.

Senator Boquist has claimed this is

"not a gun bill."

He has accused people who opposed the bill of "not caring if veterans blow their brains out" but clearly the bill is nothing more than a massive attack on the private ownership of firearms.

If the people whose guns will be confiscated are truly a danger to themselves or others, why is there nothing in the bill that requires those people be confined or committed?

A person too dangerous to have a firearm is too dangerous to be free without a custodian. But in spite of Boquist's cynical and deceitful comments to the contrary, the bill does not even pretend to address getting help for a person in crisis.

If you believe that surely the courts will not issue a gun confiscation order without solid proof of need, remember the words of Oregon Judge Kenneth Walker who recently stated, that nobody, not even the police, should be allowed to have firearms and if it were up to him, all guns would be placed on a barge and dumped in the ocean.

There is indeed virtually no incentive for any judge to ever refuse to issue one of these orders.

And if, after losing your property and your rights you choose to go to court to challenge the confiscation and humiliation, you must now somehow prove you are not dangerous.

Oh, and if you get an assessment from a mental health professional that says you are perfectly fine, that may not be considered by the court!

How these orders will be carried out remains to be seen.

Will a SWAT team show up at your home in the middle of the night?

Will your home be torn apart in a search?

And if a person truly is self destructive, would this not be the perfect opportunity for "suicide by cop?"

Boquist's disgraceful exploitation of his stepson's death will not help a single person. It will however, be used by vindictive family members to destroy other's reputations.

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