

Merkley and Bonamici Hold Town Hall

US Senator Jeff Merkley and US Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici held a joint Town Hall at the Vernonia School on Friday, April 3, 2015.

Over sixty people were in attendance when Senator Merkley opened the meeting by making a presentation of a United States flag to high school principal Nate Underwood. The flag had previously been flown over the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. "This school contributes so much to the strength of this community," said Merkley. "This is really in appreciation for how every facet of the community came together to make this happen."

Merkley and Bonamici both made opening remarks and then took questions from the audience.

In his opening remarks Merkley stated that not much has been passed through the Senate since January. He noted that the Senate had spent almost a month working on the Keystone Pipeline issue which President Obama had said he would veto and did, spent a month on a Homeland Security bill which everyone agreed on but then had unrelated immigration policy riders added, and spent a few weeks on a new trafficking bill which everyone agreed on but then an unrelated social issue was added to it, and then time was spent on the budget. Merkley also mentioned conversations about authorizing military force in Syria, the Iran nuclear weapons treaty, and the attempt to fast track the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement.

Congresswoman Bonamici noted during her opening remarks that she serves on the Education and Science Committees. She said she has been working on the reauthorization of the "No Child Left Behind" act, which she

said needed some "big changes," and said instead of focusing on standardized testing we should provide a well rounded education for students. She has introduced

telligence and in cyber security. That huge investment in defense is not the right direction." Bonamici also mentioned the importance of the permanent fix to the reim-



a bipartisan amendment to the reauthorization that would eliminate low quality and redundant testing and better inform instruction; the bill has passed through the Education Committee. She also has been working on the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act which provides funding for senior service programs like Meals on Wheels, which she said helps seniors live independently for as long as possible. Bonamici said she serves on the Environment, and Research and Technology subcommittees of the Science Committee and said she had a bill that she sponsored pass in the House. The bill, the Tsunami Warning Research and Education Act, has strong bipartisan support. She said she is also working on the Weather Forecasting Improvement Act which would assist in agriculture and fishing and has been passed out of committee. Bonamici said she did not support the budget bill which she said made too many cuts to safety net programs and made too much additional investment in defense spending. "We need to keep our country safe, no doubt about it," said Bonamici, "but the way to do that is through good, smart investments in in-

bursement formula for Medicare, which passed the House and will be considered in the Senate. "This is something that has needed to be done for many years," said Bonamici. Bonamici noted that temporary funding for Secure Rural Schools was added to the bill, and that she is committed to working on that as well.

Throughout the meeting both Bonamici and Merkley mentioned the importance of their bipartisan work in Congress in order to try to get things done and mentioned examples when they have worked across the aisle on legislation.

When the Senator and Congresswoman began taking questions from the audience, the first question came from Vernonia High School senior Alexis Baska, who asked if they could help provide more funding for education in rural areas like Vernonia. Senator Merkley responded that the federal government funds programs like Title One, Head Start and No Child Left Behind. He said that in the new budget he will be pushing for more funding for education and trying to block more funding for defense through the appropriations process. He expressed con-

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May 19 Elections Give Voters Some Interesting Choices

The upcoming May 19 election will offer local voters the chance to elect representatives to the Vernonia School Board, The Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District, the Mist-Birkenfeld Fire District and the Columbia County 9-1-1 Communications District. There are also three ballot Measures for voters consideration.

Ballot Measure 5-243 is a county wide measure that would increase the Natural Resources Depletion Fee by thirty-five cents (\$.35) per ton to a total of fifty cents (\$.50) per ton. The current fee primarily provides revenue for county roads. The increase is intended to cover the costs to the infrastructure of Columbia County that result from mining activities. The additional fees would be used as follows:

- Ten cents (\$.10) for road improvements and maintenance of existing roads and bridges.
- Twenty-five cents (\$.25) for Columbia County Rider Transportation.

The initiative requires that none of the proposed increased funds could be used for other county general fund purposes.

Measures 5-245 and 5-246 would raise funds for the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District. Measure 5-245 is a ten year bond for the purchase of fire apparatus and is estimated to cost taxpayers an average of \$0.2621 per thousand of assessed value each year. For the owner of a home or property owner, the estimated annual average cost would be \$26.21 per \$100,000 of taxable assessed value. Measure 5-246 is a five year levy which would fund the salary and benefits package of a Training Captain. This person would be responsible for the District's training program and responding to incidents. This measure is estimated to cost taxpayers an average of \$0.32 per thousand of assessed value each year. For the owner of a home or property the estimated annual average cost would be \$32 per \$100,000 of taxable assessed value.

The Vernonia School Board will have a few new faces. Katie Cook is running unopposed for Position 3 and Brittanie Roberts in running unopposed for Position 7. Those seats are currently held by Tim Bamburg and current Board Chair Bill Langmaid who both chose not to run. Greg Kintz, who currently occupies Position 2 is facing a challenge from Thomas E. Jones of Birkenfeld. Jones is the husband of Mist School teacher Joan Jones.

The Vernonia and Mist-Birkenfeld Fire District Boards will see no changes as Joel Glass and Terry Lindauer in Vernonia are both running unopposed for their currently held positions and Larry Boxman, Joan Jones, and Barbara Smith are all running unopposed for positions they currently hold on the Mist-Birkenfeld Fire Board. The same is true on the Columbia 9-1-1 Board where Kathy Denkla is running unopposed for the position she currently holds.

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School Board to Make Charter School Decision

The Vernonia School Board will meet in a special meeting on April 21 at 6:30 PM to decide whether to sponsor a Charter School and submit an application to the Oregon Department of Education (ODE).

The Vernonia School District formed a Steering Committee earlier this spring made up of citizens, school staff, School Board members and parents to discuss the possibility of submitting an application to the state to become a Charter School. The Steering Committee held discussions, decided

to move forward, and prepared the formal application which was reviewed by a School Board Subcommittee for completeness. Following two public hearings, the full School Board is currently evaluating the application on its merits and will make a final decision about submitting it to the State at the special meeting on April 21.

The proposed application would leave the Mist School separate from the charter. The charter would encompass the entire K-12 Vernonia School. The new Charter School

would require the formation of a separate Board of Directors and require independent accounting processes.

Vernonia District Superintendent Aaron Miller elaborated on the Charter School application process during a recent conversation. Miller said the Steering Committee included several community partners and was what he deemed "a representative group" that included "a wide range of people from the community."

According to Miller the

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