

Wyden Holds Town Hall *continued from page 6*

elderly (he was a director for the Grey Panthers before running for congress) and said he understands the value of senior centers in communities. He noted that he is against a plan currently being considered in Congress to roll back tax write-offs for donations to causes like the Senior Center. He said he could continue to help the Senior Center Project in any way he could.

Brett Costley, representing the Vernonia Health Board, asked Wyden for more support for rural health clinics, asking specifically for ways, besides grants, to fund resources and services like physical therapy, pharmacies and X-rays. Wyden offered to help the Vernonia Health Center become a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). Costley informed Wyden that all twenty applications this year from Oregon to



Vernonia High School senior Quentin Skanes was offered an internship with Senator Ron Wyden's office.

it difficult for local pharmacies to compete. Wyden said he was not familiar with the Act Darrah referenced but said he would look into it. Wyden explained that Medicare has changed dramatically in the last ten years. Instead of paying for emergency hospital visits or doctors visits, it is now about treating cancer, diabetes, strokes and heart disease—chronic conditions. Wyden said Medicare has not kept up with the times and that he has introduced legislation, the “Better Care, Lower Cost Act,” that would help encourage coordinated care. Wyden said the legislation recognizes the importance of rural pharmacists as health care providers.

Quentin Skanes, a Vernonia High School student asked Wyden if he supports presidential candidate Bernie Sanders’s plan to offer free college tuition to US students. “I’m certainly interested in the idea of either reduced or free community college,” said Wyden. He went on to say that a plan is needed that pays for it. Wyden said college is one of the biggest expenses in someone’s life, yet the choice of a college doesn’t lend itself to market place forces. Wyden said he has co-written a bill with Marco Rubio, the “Student Right to Know Before You Go Act,” that requires colleges that accept federal funds to reveal graduation rates, debt level, remedial education levels, and potential earning of graduates. Wyden said that competition and market place tools will help hold down the cost of college. Wyden went on to offer Skanes, who he called an “enterprising and engaged student,” an internship in his office.

Olin Younger from Birkenfeld asked about arial spraying of herbicides by timber companies “wherever and whenever they want,” and the inability of the state of Oregon to regulate it. Wyden referred the question to his local staff who said that the federal government could not control what happens on state and private timberlands. On federal lands they are required to hand spray, and only on invasive species. The state legislature has held several hearings on the issue. Wyden said he will follow the issue.

Wyden received several questions that referenced the safety concerns of transporting crude oil along the Columbia River corridor. Concerned raised included: the difficulty in getting answers from the railroad companies, the lack safety protections and resources within communities, and the inability of local communities to reject issues they have safety concerns about. Wyden said he is concerned about the prevalence of trains transporting oil in Oregon. He agreed that a “Safety Summit” to provide answers would be useful and that citizens have a right to information about safety considerations. Wyden also expressed concerns that railroads are not accountable for safety concerns. Wyden said only meeting “minimum safety standards” is woefully inadequate and that he will research the issue further.

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become a FQHC through the Office of Rural Health had been rejected. Wyden said he was unaware of this and would investigate. He said he has worked in the past to assist community health centers and wrote the law that helped smaller health centers reduce their cost for malpractice insurance.

Phil Darrah, former owner of the Vernonia Pharmacy, current owner of the Banks Pharmacy and a member of the Vernonia Health Board, spoke about SB 314 and HB 592 the “Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Enhancement Act,” which would compensate pharmacists for providing medical advice to patients in rural areas. Darrah pointed out that large corporations and mail order companies have made

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