

Rep. Walden fields town hall questions ranging from county funding to Iraq

By **SCOTT JORGENSEN**
IVN Staff Writer

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) faced numerous questions regarding the continuing war in Iraq during a town hall meeting Tuesday afternoon, July 3 at Anne Basker Auditorium in Grants Pass.

Walden represents Oregon's vast Second District, comprising most of the eastern part of the state and portions of Josephine County.

In opening remarks, Walden admitted that not all has gone well in the Iraq conflict, which began in 2003.

"We know the scorecard has not been a good one," Walden said.

The War on Terror has so far cost approximately \$503 billion, Walden said, with the Iraq conflict accounting for \$352 billion.

While Walden said that "the day is not too far off in the future" for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, the logistics of doing so remain difficult. Dividing Iraq into three separate sections will not work, as Turkey's government is hostile to the idea of an independent Kurd-controlled area, Walden said.

Turkey's army is amassing troops along Iraq's northern border, with light skirmishes and incursions already occurring, he said.

Walden said that there's "incredible genocide that can ensue" if American forces pull out of the conflict prematurely. He noted that the United States must be mindful of how such a move could affect the entire Middle East.

"All that is a reality," Walden said.

However, he said, the future of Iraq will depend ultimately on that country's leaders and their willingness to take responsibility for providing security and other services to their citizens. Walden said the United States should not bear that burden indefinitely.

"Their leadership needs to recognize that our patience is not forever," he said.

Resident Kevin Marr asked Walden point-blank when the congressman would stop supporting the Iraq War.

"I'm not there yet," Walden said. "I want to hear what (U.S. Army) Gen. (David) Petraeus has to say in September."

Walden went on to say that the Bush administration should adopt more of the recommendations issued by the independent, non-partisan Iraq Study Group.

"We need to do more on diplomacy," Walden said. "I fault this administration for not doing more of it."

Walden's vote in favor of the Military Commissions Act of 2006 also was called into question during



Rep. Greg Walden

the town hall meeting. That controversial bill included the suspension of habeas corpus for terror suspects.

American prisoners of war aren't allowed habeas corpus when held in other countries, Walden said. And some of the persons released from detention have been found later on battlefields.

Walden denied that detainees are entirely without rights.

"There is a bit of an appeal structure still in place," Walden said. "There is a process there."

The U.S. Supreme Court will rule on the issue in October, Walden said. Meanwhile, the United States should work to expedite the trials of the accused.

"I don't think we ought to hold them there forever," Walden said.

He also addressed the county payments issue. Several Oregon counties, including Josephine, receive funds from the federal government in lieu of declining timber receipts.

The 1994 Northwest Forest Plan reduced timber harvests by 85 percent, Walden said. As such, the key to fixing local economies lies in responsible forest management, he indicated.

"What built Oregon is the wood products industry," Walden said.

Immigration was a popular topic during a question-and-answer session. Walden stated that 1986 was the last time Congress passed any major immigration legislation, but that little has been done to uphold its provisions.

"No administration has adequately enforced that bill," he said.

Audience members questioned Walden about formation of the North American Union, which would group the United States, Canada and Mexico into a single political entity along the lines of the European Union.

Walden said that he would not support formation

of that organization, and that it could not be done outside the democratic process.

"Any of those sorts of changes have to be voted on by Congress," he said.

Questions also were posed regarding the trans-Texas corridor, a proposed superhighway project. Critics of the project characterize it as part of a plan to merge this country with Canada and Mexico.

Walden said that upon 1994 passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the nation's borders were supposed to be opened to truck traffic.

"That never happened," Walden said.

He stated that "private entities are looking at the construction of toll roads," but that there are no federal plans for the superhighway.

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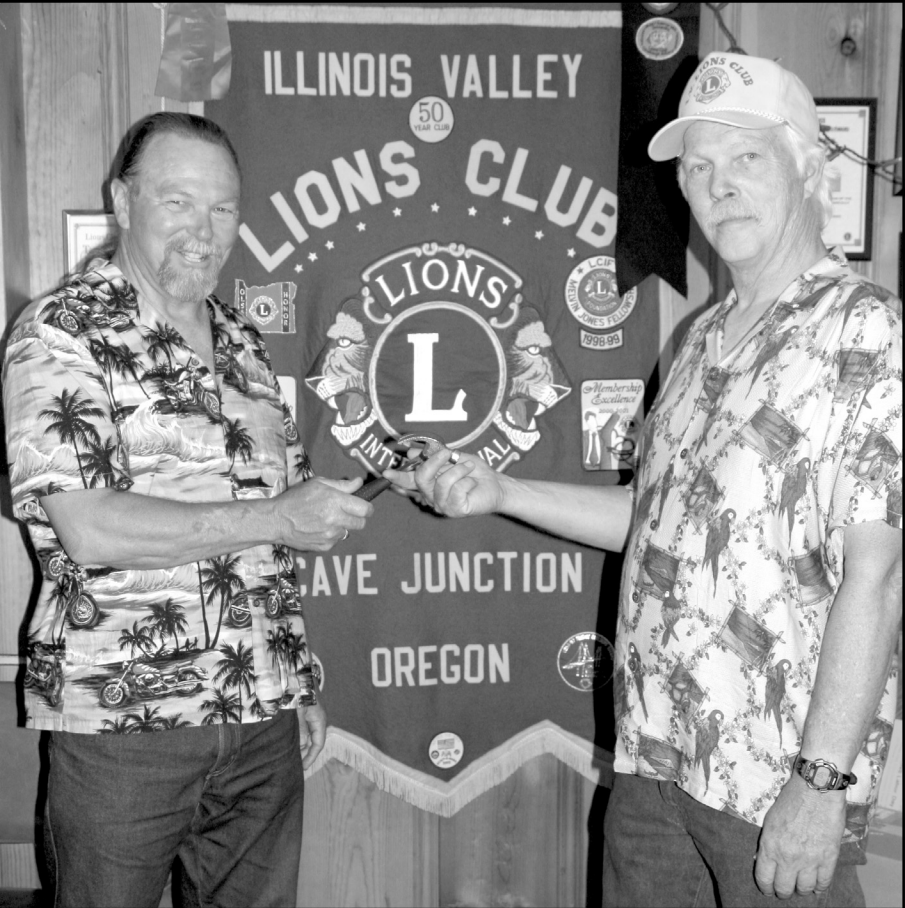
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ILLINOIS VALLEY LIONS Club conducted an installation ceremony and potluck barbecue Sunday, July 8 at the Lions Den at Illinois Valley Airport. Steve Lyons (left) passed the presidential gavel to Dave Anderson who will serve until July 2008. Lyons, who has been president four times during the past 16 years will serve as club secretary. For information about joining the club phone 287-0290.

GARY BELL (third from right) was honored as 2006-07 Lion of the Year during the gathering at I.V. Airport July 7. Bell, a longtime Illinois Valley Lions Club member, was recognized for his continual community service as chairman of the club's Sight & Hearing program. With Bell are perennial club treasurer Lewie Spencer, and Terri Lyons. She holds a photo, presumed to be from the early 1980s, with club members whose identities are sought. (Photos by Michelle Binker/Illinois Valley News)



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