

WYDEN Vaccine followup was insufficient

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regardless of where it takes place and where perpetrators fall on the political spectrum.

“We’re not going to agree on everything, and that’s obvious, but the Oregon way is to have peaceful discussion,” Wyden said. “The First Amendment is about peaceful protest but I want everyone to know there’s a real, clear distinction and a clear, sharp line between peaceful protest exercising your First Amendment rights and violence.”

Wyden went on to answer 10 questions from constituents including a former judge, a pharmacist, a mayor and several students. Most questions involved challenges and barriers rural Oregonians have encountered during the pandemic. Wyden also addressed wildfire prevention, child trafficking, inflated prescription drug prices and the potential for legislation in response to last week’s violence.

Multiple questions addressed rural communities’ ability to receive and distribute COVID-19 vaccines in a timely manner.

Ann Murray, a pharmacist who has owned Murray’s Drug with her husband since 1990, asked Wyden what he would do to help expedite vaccine implementation. Her question also asked the senator to address economic structures that have

threatened the survival of rural pharmacies.

Wyden said criteria for who receives the vaccine is set at the state level, but he said the federal government “needs to step up and provide the leadership” in clarifying the roles of different levels of government.

“Even after the announcement of the availability of vaccines, there wasn’t the kind of detailed follow-up that was necessary,” he said. “We saw that there were such gaps in information and clear explanation of what each level of government was going to do that people fell between the cracks, and I’m hearing these horror stories all the time of people who are quite elderly are having difficulty getting access to the vaccine.”

In response to an earlier question about vaccine rollout from Condon Chamber of Commerce Director K’lynn Lane, Wyden said senate finance committee healthcare staff “is on alert that if the Murrys have a concern as it relates to access to pharmaceutical services in rural Oregon, we are going to be on it immediately.”

Murray thanked Wyden in a comment after he responded to her question. She called the senator “a strong advocate for rural healthcare.”

Three more virtual town halls are scheduled for Thursday, Friday and Sunday. More information and the entirety of Monday’s livestream can be found on the Town Hall Project Facebook page.



Eagle Creek trail is open again and saw heavy use in its first week of use since closure due to the September 2017 fire that ravaged the area just west of Cascade Locks. Rachael Travis and Tyler Pearson of Portland, with Tucker, walk back from Wahclella Falls; Travis said, “The water’s really high because it’s been raining so much and the falls look beautiful.” A hiker returning arriving back at the trailhead said the Eagle Creek trail is rough with numerous downed trees and blackberry growth in places. Hikers are cautioned that the trail surface is slippery due to continued rain, and precautions are essential before heading to the trailhead on on the trail itself. Some sections are precipitous even in dry, uncrowded conditions. Masks are essential and social distancing can be difficult to maintain on narrow sections of the trail. Day use recreation passes are required and can be purchased at trailheads. Expected heavy rains could result in heavy run-off in the the burn scar area of Eagle Creek drainage, with 2-6 inches expected in the next few days, according to emergency management officials. Kirby Neumann-Rea photo

BENTZ Many distrust election results

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time, pursuing either impeachment or the invoking of the 25th Amendment to remove President Donald Trump from office.

Bentz, meanwhile, is taking heat for his support of the failed GOP minority effort that had claimed fraud or irregularities in the November General Election, and called on Congress to create a commission to review the Electoral College results.

Bentz responded in an email Jan. 10 to questions about published comments he made immediately after the Jan. 6 breach and riot in the U.S. Capitol. Bentz had first described events at the U.S. Capitol as “a protest gone really wrong, really bad,” in a Jan. 7 article in the Oregonian newspaper.

Bentz wrote on Jan. 10, “... Now having seen the videos of the invasion of the Capitol and the extensive damage done by the mob, I would characterize what happened in the Capitol as far from mere protest.”

Bentz also continued to downplay the role of Trump, who has been accused of making statements that incited the Jan. 6 riot, actions which led to his shutdown on social media along with increasing bipartisan calls for his removal.

In the Jan. 7 Oregonian article, Bentz had added, “As far as judging the president, I don’t see how that’s very productive right now,” adding Sunday that “it was a vicious attack on our democracy. As far as the president’s role, it was as a speaker at a rally. There was no public disturbance at that time. That disturbance came later, and as I have said, those who decided to invade the Capitol broke the law and should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. There were phrases used by speakers other than the president at the rally that I would not have used, but as I understand it, those words are protected speech. And as I have said, I have not seen evidence that supports the argument that the election was ‘stolen.’”

“Our focus should be on a peaceful transition to the next administration and how we can address the pressing issues facing our country and Oregon’s Second Congressional District,” Bentz said in Sunday’s email. (The questions were sent electronically after repeated requests for a phone interview on Jan. 7-8 were not met.)

His Jan. 7 statement included the comment, “I have heard many speak of distrust in the elections that were facilitated by several states.”

Asked Sunday to elaborate, Bentz wrote, “Constituents have contacted my office with a wide variety of concerns, and it is an important part of my role as their Representative to carefully listen to their opinions. Among these opinions was the concern about the constitutionality of Pennsylvania’s changes to their election laws — and the resulting impact on the faith of many Americans in the integrity of our elections.

“I came to Congress to stand up for rural communities across my district by addressing the terrible damage caused by recent wildfires, reforming the laws that govern our water rights, and by ensuring we help those hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic,” he wrote on Sunday.

Bentz had issued an official statement later on Jan. 7 regarding the recent events at the United States Capitol and the Electoral College certification process in Congress.

In it, he said, “The violent events that took place yesterday on the Capitol grounds are a stain on the history of our country. There is absolutely no excuse for protests to turn into riots, and I condemn the actions of the rioters in the strongest terms possible.”

Asked Jan. 10 about his basis for continuing to join the electoral challenge after the numerous legal rulings, Bentz defended his participation among a minority of Republicans in the process. (Bentz’s opposition was limited to Pennsylvania.) He wrote, “Indeed there have been numerous rulings regarding a number of concerns in many states. However, at the time of the vote, there remained pending litigation in Federal

Court regarding the constitutionality of the actions of Pennsylvania’s Secretary of the Commonwealth and the state’s Supreme Court.”

Asked about elected leadership’s role to correct misinformation and help constituents with correct information, he replied Sunday: “Yes, and in doing so it was my goal to protect the integrity of and belief in our elections. That is why I provided an extensive statement describing the constitutional grounds upon which I voted against the objection to certify Arizona’s Electors, but supported the objection to Pennsylvania’s Electors.”

Bentz was also asked to respond to the statement by California Rep. David Valadao, also a Republican, that “it is not the role of Congress to choose who the states certify. Only states have the authority to appoint electors. Choosing to ignore the facts for the sake of party power is damaging to the American people’s confidence in the Electoral College and sets an unwise precedent for future elections.”

Bentz replied, “It was my goal to protect the integrity of our elections and prompt all states to uphold election laws as determined by their state legislatures — all in accordance with the United States Constitution.”

Bentz was also asked what was it like as a first-term Congressman to be in the halls of Congress when Wednesday’s events took place.

“It was certainly not what I expected, but I want to be clear, no matter what happened, it is an absolute honor to be in Congress and represent the people of Oregon’s Second Congressional District,” he wrote. “Of course, the violent events that unfolded on Wednesday were shocking and a complete travesty. As I have said many times, I condemn the violence in the strongest terms possible. Such depravity and disregard of the sanctity of the physical foundation of our democracy has no place in our society. The terrible events of that day

resulted in the loss of life and delayed the Electoral College certification process, a foundational part of our democratic republic. At the time of the event, my staff and I followed the orders of the U.S. Capitol Police to remain locked down in my office in Longworth House Office Building until the threat was over. Our first actual sight of the damage wreaked by the mob was late in the evening as we walked back to the House across and past broken glass, trash, hundreds of SWAT team members, and passed through the shattered doors opening onto the House floor. It was a truly sad and sobering day.”

Bentz’s Jan. 7 statement

“I call on all Americans to choose peaceful protests over violence, chaos, and anarchy. I commend Capitol Police for their brave efforts to end yesterday’s incident and enable Congress to return to our important work. As the Representative of Oregon’s Second District, I am committed to listening to the opinions of my constituents, upholding the Constitution, and engaging in the deliberative process entrusted to the United States House of Representatives.

“I have heard many speak of distrust in the elections that were facilitated by several states. That is why I wrote to Speaker Nancy Pelosi last month, urging for a prompt and thorough congressional investigation into voting irregularities during the 2020 presidential election. So far, my request has fallen on deaf ears. Therefore, the duty has fallen on Congress to begin restoring faith in our representative form of government and to ensure the voice of the American people is heard through the Electoral College certification process.

“After seeking the opinions

of constitutional experts, listening to my constituents, and many conversations with Members from the states in question, I cast my vote in support of the objection to the certification of the Electors from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In doing so, my goal was to protect the integrity of our elections and to prompt all states to uphold election laws as determined by their state legislatures — all in accordance with our Constitution.

“Article II of the Constitution sets forth that each state legislature is entrusted with the authority to establish and facilitate elections within that state. In Pennsylvania, the Secretary of the Commonwealth and the state’s Supreme Court did not adhere to the statutes set forth by the legislature when they extended deadlines for the return of absentee ballots. This action violated the principles of Article II of the Constitution because the state legislature had not previously delegated broader authority to the Secretary. Ultimately, this change in voting procedures by a non-legislative body contributed to a widespread loss

of faith by many Americans in the integrity of the 2020 election — including many in my district. Such a violation of our Constitution must be discouraged in the strongest terms possible.

“I could not support objections to the certification of Electors of any other state — including Arizona. Like many states in question, the Arizona legislature had in fact delegated broader authority to administer elections to other state and local agencies, and I found little evidence supporting an argument that Article II of the Constitution was violated.

“As we conclude the Electoral College certification process, we can accept that Joe Biden will be the next President of the United States. I am committed to a peaceful transfer of power, but I continue to empathize with those whose frustrations with the electoral system remain unresolved. I share their frustrations, and as the Representative of Oregon’s Second District, I will do my best to address their concerns.”

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