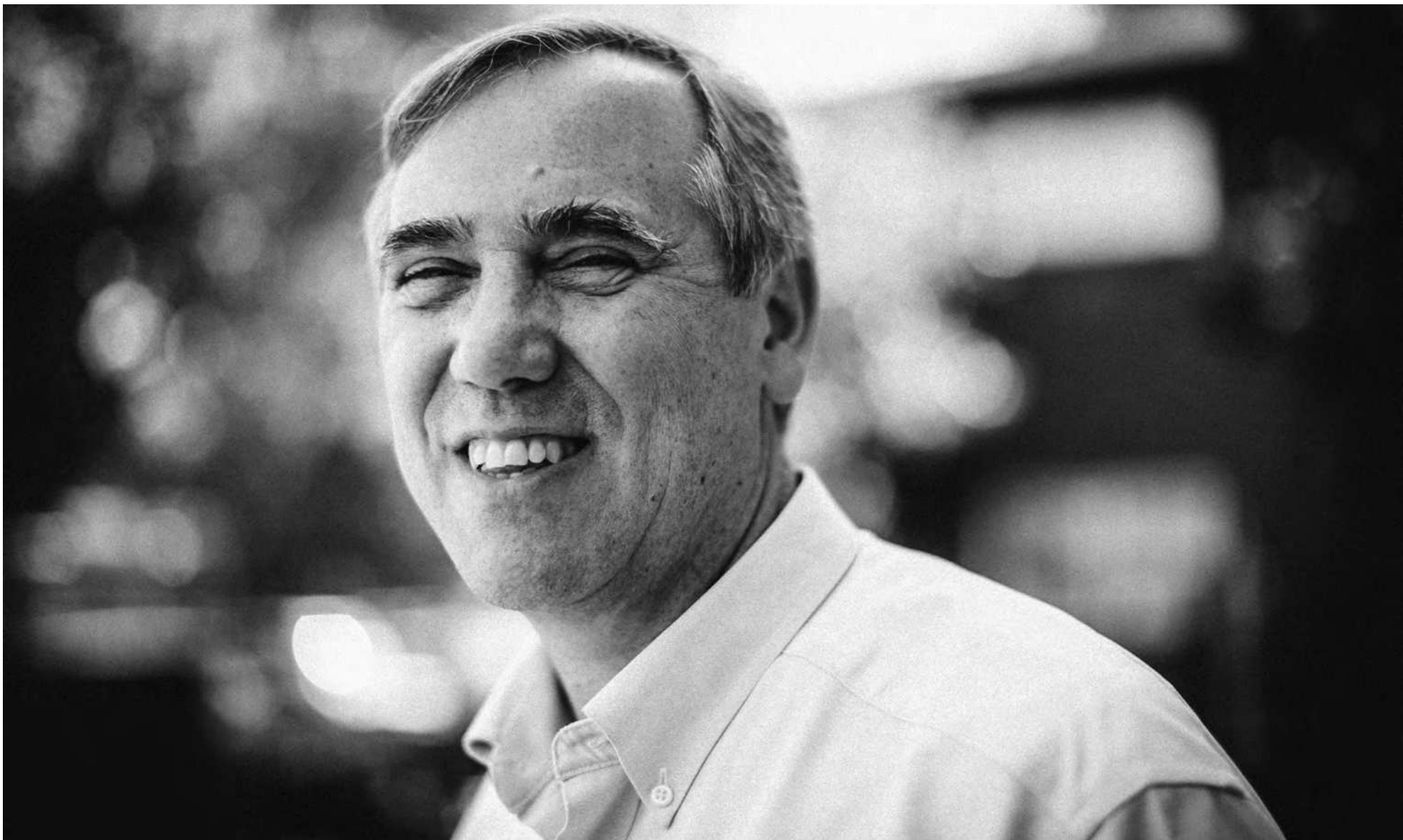




MERKLEY

2020

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***Sen. Jeff Merkley on the potential for a presidential run,  
his nationally publicized activism and more***

BY MEERAH POWELL

**S**en. Jeff Merkley is a busy man. That much is clear.

Merkley and I sat down to chat around 11 am on a Friday at the Subway restaurant on Gateway Street in Springfield — a quick lunch stop in between his various other appointments and meetings for the day. (His Subway order was a six-inch Italian BMT and a Dr. Pepper, if you're curious.)

It can be easy to forget about the scope of Merkley's political work when talking with him. He may be busy, but there's nothing inherently rushed about him. Though he's clearly far from unprofessional, Merkley has an air of casualness to him. Dressed in a nice button-up shirt paired with jeans and cowboy boots, he talked before we formally began our interview about a recent trip to the coast with his 13-year-old Airedale terrier, Sadie.

When he's not in Oregon, Merkley also does a lot of important national work — most notably, as of late, visiting a detention center in Brownsville, Texas, to reveal the visceral truths of immigrant parents and children's separation under the Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy. The viral video of Merkley visiting the detention center gained him a profile in *The New York Times* and *Rolling Stone*, along with other spots in national media.

When he is in Oregon, Merkley makes sure to have time for locals. During that August day in Springfield when we met, Merkley did three media interviews, sat down with the interim director of the Veterans Administration in Roseburg, met with leaders of Lowell, Westfir and Oakridge, held a Eugene small business roundtable, gathered with local union members and held a campaign event.

His days are usually scheduled this tightly, he says.

In many ways, Merkley is just a normal Oregonian who has gone on to do very extraordinary things.

Growing up in Myrtle Creek, then Roseburg, before moving to Portland as a kid, Sen. Merkley never envisioned going into politics. He says he definitely never dreamed about ever becoming president. But now, after 20 years in Oregon politics, he just might be taking that plunge into the presidential run come late this fall.

"I'm exploring the possibility of running for the presidency," Merkley says. "I've been in the early primary states and been well-received."

He says he and his wife, Mary, will make a decision on it sometime after November. For now, he's still doing all he can in his position as a U.S. senator.

Merkley might not be all-in for the presidential run yet, but he has a lot of people who believe in him, in Oregon