

Merkley, Wyden critical of Trump's nominee to the US Supreme Court

Democrats plan to oppose Gorsuch

Staff and wire reports

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley on Tuesday condemned President Donald Trump's choice of federal appeals court Judge Neil Gorsuch for the U.S. Supreme Court, calling it "a stolen seat being filled by an illegitimate and extreme nominee."

The Oregon Democrat had warned he would filibuster any nominee other than Judge Merrick Garland, who was nominated by President Barack Obama to replace the late Justice Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court but was blocked by Republicans for nearly a year.

"The most fundamental thing that must be understood about tonight's announcement is that this is a stolen seat," Merkley said in a statement. "This is the first time in American history that one party has blockaded a nominee for almost a year in order to deliver a seat to a president of their own party. If this tactic is rewarded rather than resisted, it will set a dangerous new precedent in American governance."

Merkley said the "strategy of packing the court, if successful, could threaten fundamental rights in America, including workers' right to organize, women's reproductive rights, and the rights of ordinary citizens to have their voices heard in elections rather than being drowned out by the corrupting influence of dark money from the richest Americans."

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden called the Gorsuch nomination a "breath-taking retreat from the notion that Americans have a fundamental right to constitutional liberties, and harkens back to the days when politicians restricted a people's rights on a whim."

Gorsuch, a 49-year-old judge on the 10th U.S. Circuit

Court of Appeals in Colorado, wrote "The Future of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia," a book that outlines his opposition to assisted suicide and euthanasia based on the intrinsic value of every human life. Oregon was the first state to adopt an assisted suicide law for terminally ill patients. Four other states have followed with similar laws.

"His opposition to legal death with dignity as successfully practiced in Oregon is couched in the sort of jurisprudence that justified the horrific oppression of one group after another in our first two centuries," Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, said in a statement. "No senator who believes that individual rights are reserved to the people, and not the government, can support this nomination."

Gorsuch is the youngest Supreme Court nominee in a quarter-century. He's known for clear, colloquial writing, advocacy for court review of government regulations, defense of religious freedom and skepticism toward law enforcement.

His nomination was cheered by conservatives wary of Trump's own fluid ideology. If confirmed by the Senate, he would fill the seat left vacant by the death last year of Scalia, long the right's most powerful voice on the high court.

Gorsuch earned Republican praise today as he visited Capitol Hill. The judge was accompanied by Vice President Mike Pence as he met with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. McConnell called Gorsuch "an outstanding appointment" and said Republicans were "thrilled" to get the confirmation process started.

Pence predicted that as senators get to know Gorsuch, "they'll come to understand the enthusiasm" Trump has for Gorsuch.

A Senate Judiciary Committee spokesman said the panel hoped to begin confirmation hearings in about six weeks.

Veterans get new van for medical trips to Portland hospital

The Daily Astorian

Excited volunteer drivers for Astoria-area Disabled American Veterans gathered on a Saturday in December to inspect their new Ford passenger van and pick up their new keys.

The new van replaces one with a quarter-million miles, all driven by volunteers. It is larger, with room for 11 passengers, and provides safer access for people with disabilities, according to Dick Lang, the driver coordinator.

The local volunteer drivers make the round trip to Portland almost every weekday — totaling about 1,000 miles per week — enabling local veterans to receive medical treatment and prescription medications.

The DAV is a nonprofit that provides support for vet-

erans of all generations and their families. The nationwide organization, which helps more than 1 million veterans each year, provides more than 700,000 rides for medical appointments and assists veterans with more than 300,000 benefit claims annually.

The local van is always in need of drivers so that veterans do not miss important appointments and treatment. These appointments often take weeks to schedule; a cancellation due to lack of transportation can be consequential.

Lang said it is a rewarding experience to be able to assist local veterans, many of whom would not have any other way to get to the Portland VA Hospital for treatment.

For information on becoming a driver, contact Lang at dicklang@charter.net or 503-298-8757.

GOP bill would sell 70,000 acres of Oregon public land

40 acres are in Clatsop County

By ZACH URNESS
Statesman Journal

A lawmaker from Utah has introduced legislation that would "dispose" of 3.3 million acres of public land nationwide, including 70,300 acres in Oregon and 40 in Clatsop County.

In what some have called the opening shot by Republicans to sell or transfer federal lands, U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz introduced H.R. 621 last week to free up resources "for economic development in struggling rural communities."

Environmental groups denounced the effort, saying Chaffetz is pushing an "anti-American public lands agenda" with the broader goal of privatizing natural treasures across the West, a statement from Oregon Wild said.

The land identified for disposal — meaning sale to private entities or states — includes acreage from 10 different states. The bulk comes from Nevada (898,000 acres), New Mexico (831,000), Wy-



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer
U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, speaks during news conference in Salt Lake City last month. Chaffetz has introduced a bill to sell or transfer some federal lands.

oming (694,000) and Arizona (450,000 acres).

Oregon counties

In Oregon, the 70,300 acres comes in parcels from 19 counties managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The parcels range from 44,533 acres in Harney County to 1 acre in Marion County.

"I think this bill is basically a 'test balloon,' to get the effort and conversation moving," said Jim Moore, profes-

sor and director of the Tom McCall Center for Policy Innovation at Pacific University. "The land referenced here is pretty scattershot and may or may not make sense. I'd watch for a more focused effort if we're really talking about this happening."

It's not clear whether President Trump's administration would support the bill. Trump has made statements opposing the sale of public lands and nominated Montana lawmaker Ryan Zinke, who also opposes the idea, to lead the Department of Interior.

"That's kind of the fly in the ointment of this whole idea," Moore said.

1997 survey

The identified land comes from a 1997 survey conducted by the Clinton administration, which was seeking potential revenue to benefit the Everglades Restoration effort. The survey never resulted in the land being sold.

There's no map showing the exact location of each parcel, only a short description of the land's character, monetary value and possible problems with disposal.

In the entry for 1,475 acres in Deschutes County, for example, it's noted that "recreation is a major support of Deschutes County's economic base, consequently, the county is opposed to any loss of federal lands."

The 2,120 acres in Jefferson County, meanwhile, is identified as having mining claims, endangered species, wetlands and floodplains, along with historic and cultural resources.

The largest area proposed for disposal is in Harney County, where 44,500 acres is described as agricultural and grazing land with some public access.

"These lands have been deemed to serve no purpose for taxpayers," Chaffetz said.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., disagreed.

"Legislation based on a decades-old report on lands supposedly ripe for disposal clearly belongs on the shelf," Wyden said in a statement.

"Public lands belong to all Americans, and preserving these lands in public ownership keeps them accessible to everybody — including hunters, fishers, timber enterprises and recreation lovers."

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Stefanie Cao
Medicare Market Manager
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