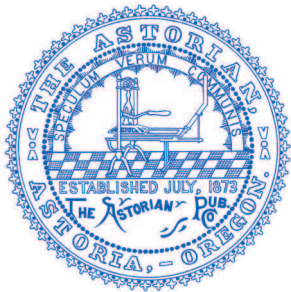


THE
DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Each week we recognize those people and organizations in the community deserving of public praise for the good things they do to make the North Coast a better place to live, and also those who should be called out for their actions.



SHOUTOUTS

• **Charlene Larsen** and **Dulcye Taylor**, who were each honored with Lady Liberty Awards Thursday at a luncheon at the Liberty Theater in Astoria. The awards recognize exemplary volunteerism, professional excellence and contributions to the community as a whole. Both Larsen and Taylor have been deeply involved in a number of North Coast organizations and projects through the years, and both are continuing to actively serve on boards in voluntary leadership roles.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici speaks at the Astoria Senior Center last year.

• **U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici**, an Oregon Democrat whose district includes Clatsop County, who helped steer a bipartisan bill through Congress that will boost research to improve forecasts and storm warnings that can ultimately save lives. The bill now awaits President Donald Trump’s signature and includes a tsunami warning provision that has been on the congresswoman’s radar since initially

winning office, The bill requires the National Weather Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to advance research on high-tech forecasts and computer models, with an emphasis on accuracy and longer warning times for major weather events, which will certainly help all residents of coastal areas.

• Astoria High School alumnus **James West**, who was recently presented with the Bonneville Power Administration’s Administrator’s Award for Special Services. West is a 2001 graduate from Astoria who studied electrical engineering at Oregon State University and is an operational analyst with Bonneville’s workplace service team. The award cited West for “contributing to BPA operational excellence,” and the agency said he is highly regarded for consistently challenging the status quo and striving to improve BPA programs and processes.



CALLOUTS

• An **Oregon School Activities Association** committee, which is considering reducing the number of classifications in high school sports from six to five. The move, if approved, would occur beginning in the 2018-19 school year and the committee will be meeting five more times before making its final recommendation to OSAA’s executive board for a vote in September. Smaller, rural school districts favor the current six classification system and say that reducing it to five would increase the disparity of school size and make it more difficult for some schools to compete on an even level with larger schools in their districts. Warrenton, for instance, would be moved to a 3A classification with schools that have much larger enrollments. As Craig Rothenberger, athletic director at Class 4A Junction City, said, “A lot of people think that if it isn’t broke, don’t fix it,” and that “there’s a lot of support for six classifications.” He’s right, and we hope the proposal gets scrapped.

• The **IRS**, which says it once again will being using private debt collectors to go after tax delinquents. The resumption of the program comes amid a wave of telephone and internet scams in which fake IRS agents try to con innocent taxpayers out of their money. The IRS stopped using private debt collectors in 2009 after the agency determined that IRS employees could do the work better. But Congress passed a law in 2015 requiring the IRS to restart the program. To start, the IRS will turn over the accounts of 100 taxpayers a week to four private debt collectors. The program will grow to 1,000 accounts a week by the end of summer. The IRS says it is notifying taxpayers that their accounts are being turned over to private debt collectors. Scammers no doubt will take note, and with Tax Day upon us on Tuesday residents should visit the IRS website at www.IRS.gov for information and tips on how to avoid falling victim to such scams.

Suggestions?

Do you have a Shoutout or Callout you think we should know about? Let us know at news@dailyastorian.com and we’ll make sure to take a look.



No ordinary time in politics

Wyden, Merkley and Walden walk different paths

By STEVE FORRESTER
The Daily Astorian

No ordinary time, 2017. National politicians face dismal choices. These first months of the Donald Trump administration and the Republican hegemony are a lens to view three of Oregon’s federal lawmakers — U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and U.S. Rep. Greg Walden.

If a politician serves long enough, history will knock on his door. How a lawmaker answers that call marks them forever. This is one of those moments of no escape. With his party in power, Walden has vaulted into the national spotlight — as a party leader and committee chair. Also this year, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer designated Merkley as his chief deputy whip. And Wyden, using his position on the Senate Intelligence Committee, has doggedly pursued Russian intrusion into our 2016 presidential election and links between President Trump, his lieutenants and Russia.

Best position?

Walden should be in the best position to prosper. But politics is a collaborative art, and Walden is hampered by a president who is a novice at congressional politics and the art of political accommodation. When President Trump took a run at repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, it seemed like this would be Walden’s biggest moment.

Chairman Walden’s Energy and Commerce Committee set a record by doing a 27-hour markup of legislation that would have repealed and replaced the health care law. A beaming Walden was pictured sitting next to President Trump in the run-up to D-day on the House floor. But that vote never came. When House Speaker Paul Ryan told Trump he didn’t have the votes to move the bill, it was abandoned.

Weeks prior to that fateful moment, Wyden had predicted it. “I said that pursuing a partisan reconciliation-only strategy was a prescription for trouble,” the senator said. “And they produced a bigger debacle than I expected.”

Criticizing the House bill, Wyden adds that it “made a shambles out of rural health care.” Of all Oregon’s House members, Walden has the most rural hospitals. Following Walden around his immense central and eastern Oregon district, The New York Times described the contradiction between the House bill Walden was peddling and the needs of hospitals in his district.

One could say that Oregon has bets on three distinct outcomes of the Trump presidency. Walden is the insider. Wyden is the consummate deal-maker and collaborator. Merkley is on the left flank — an outspoken critic who imitated the late Oregon U.S. Sen. Wayne Morse in his overnight 15-hour filibuster.

Merkley says the filibuster has generated feedback from people “in the REI store, in the coffee shop. People saying ‘Thank goodness someone is fighting the court-packing.’”

Of the prospect of another attempt to repeal and replace the ACA, Merkley says: “My belief is they’re going to have a hard time if



AP Photo/Steve Dykes
U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden addresses the crowd of supporters at the Oregon Convention Center after winning re-election in November.



Rocky Wilson/EO Media Group
U.S. Rep. Greg Walden stresses a point while speaking about federal issues during a town hall meeting in Enterprise in 2014.

that strategy is to remove health care for millions.” Says Wyden: “I’ve heard they are reaching out to the far right. That will take them to an even worse bill.”

Waiting for a payoff

When asked if there a difference between Trump’s politics and Walden’s, the congressman’s press aide, Andrew Malcolm, said: “He thinks he can deliver more for the state inside the room than outside it.” And Malcolm notes that Walden has met with the president and vice president several times — something that seldom happened when Barack Obama was president.

But many of Walden’s constituents are waiting for a payoff. Farmers in Walden’s agriculture-rich district have long sought immigration reform, because they depend on migrant labor. Hood River orchardist Mike Omeg has described to our sister newspaper the Capital Press the cumbersome process he and other fruit growers must endure to bring in more immigrant labor during harvest season. Omeg says Walden listens politely to Oregon growers, but does nothing beyond that.

Malcolm says Walden believes that, “If anyone can get (immigration reform) done, it’s Trump. He (Walden) is optimistic.”

A model waiting

Says Merkley: “I think it is a possibility. The Senate laid out the vision for immigration reform in the 2013 bill. It had the support of Republicans and Democrats. It ended the shadow economy. It opened a path to citizenship. It hits the fundamental points. That’s a model waiting for president Trump.”

As the senior member of this Oregon triumvirate, Wyden has the longest perspective. Of Trump he admonishes, “I think that history



Steve Tool/EO Media Group
U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley listens to a question from an audience member during a town hall meeting at Joseph Charter School in 2015.

says that if you are doing big issues, you are at your peril if you don’t get both sides invested at the start.” In other words, the poisonous partisan politics of religious warfare and total victory that Newt Gingrich inspired has reached its limit.

During my 10 years as a Capitol Hill correspondent, I watched Wyden’s first terms in the House and I knew Walden, who was then an aide to Congressman Bob Smith.

While Wyden and Merkley are easy to characterize, I have found Walden to be opaque. In some ways, Walden is an extension of the House staffer I knew. He has mastered the politician’s art of saying nothing in a convincing manner. And in the post-Gingrich House he has risen to party prominence by being a dependable party man, even at the risk of ignoring the needs of his district — such as farmers who desperately seek immigration law reform.

Running room

The irony in this perception of Oregon’s three leading D.C. lawmakers is that the Democrats have more running room than the Republican.

Here is how Merkley sees the challenge and opportunity that Trump presents:

“Last week (Trump) sounded like me on infrastructure. We need to turn to less expensive strategies like borrowing. Suddenly I thought we could work out a workable deal.”

Concludes Merkley: “When there are opportunities, I’m there. But when he’s aiming at destroying consumer protections and packing the court and setting Wall Street loose, I’m going to fight like crazy.”

It will be clear how senators Wyden and Merkley answer history’s knock on their door. I’m not so sure about Congressman Walden.

Steve Forrester is the former editor and publisher of The Daily Astorian.