



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

**U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, speaks with constituents after a town hall at the Columbia River Maritime Museum on Sunday.**

## Wyden: ‘We’re going to get after this to make sure they get funded’

*Continued from Page A1*

The packed meeting, dominated by discussion related to the shutdown, took place in the Columbia River Maritime Museum, with the retired lightship Columbia and the Coast Guard cutter Steadfast as backdrops.

About 42,000 Coast Guard personnel received their last paychecks Dec. 31, but have since been working without pay until the shutdown ends. Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones, a former commander of Sector Columbia River and the emcee Sunday, noted how local crews had assisted disabled crab boats in hazardous conditions since the beginning of the crab season last week. He asked whether there would be legislation to make sure Coast Guardsmen are paid.

“We’re going to get after this to make sure they get funded,” Wyden said.

U.S. Sen. John Thune, a Republican from South Dakota, recently introduced the Pay Our Coast Guard Act to cover active-duty pay, retiree benefits, death gratuities and other payouts. The bill has been sponsored by three Republican and four Democratic senators and could be voted on as early as this coming week, according to the Military Times.

Wyden, a Democrat who serves on the Senate Finance Committee, said he has asked the IRS to waive penalties for late filings related

to furloughed government employees unable to process tax returns. He also raised concerns over the training of forestland firefighters being stopped during the shutdown.

Wyden called on President Donald Trump to listen to constituents and reopen the federal government before discussing funding for a wall on the border with Mexico, the issue that led to the shutdown. The senator touted his previous support for increased border security, but decried Trump’s idea for a wall, relating it to a stop sign in front of the Statue of Liberty. He also told the story of his parents, who fled Nazi Germany.

“Unless you’re a Native American, folks, chances are you’re part of the immigration experience,” Wyden told the audience.

He recounted a female immigrant he met at a pharmacy who was afraid to seek a prescription for her ill son because her family could face deportation. Asylum laws are not being complied with, he said, and major Democratic victories in the 2018 elections were a sign of momentum for change.

Asked about the potential impeachment of Trump, Wyden called for a modest approach based on the completion of Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation into Russian influence in the 2016 election. He talked about a legislative effort to protect Mueller’s investiga-

tion, which has been blocked multiple times from a vote by Republican leaders in the Senate.

Asked about his views on timber and logging issues, Wyden brought up the Clean Energy for America Act, his effort to eliminate tax breaks that mostly benefit fossil fuels and replace them with incentives to support clean energy and greater efficiency.

He talked about efforts to investigate and prevent price gouging in the pharmaceutical industry; reform Medicare to better serve aging baby boomers; ensure funding for mental health and education; protect the nation’s public lands from being privatized; resist Education Secretary Betsy DeVos’ proposed changes to Title IX funding regarding gender-based discrimination and sexual misconduct in schools; challenge Trump’s machinations on foreign policy; and strive for bipartisanship in Congress.

Fellow Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley has mulled a run for president in 2020. Asked why he hasn’t run for president, Wyden said he already has the best job in the world representing the interests of Oregonians in the Senate.

“I’m going to take some of these stories back to the floor of the U.S. Senate next week, and I’m going to use them in the effort to do everything I can to get the government open,” he said.

## Crossing: The Lowenbergs transformed Gearhart Grocery into a brew pub in 2016

*Continued from Page A1*

The Lowenbergs moved to close the Gearhart Grocery, which they had owned since 2010, and turn it into a brew pub in 2016. Some residents feared losing the town’s lone grocery, and felt a brew pub didn’t fit the character of the community.

Terry Lowenberg told city councilors that the Gearhart Grocery could not compete with large chains like Fred Meyer, Safeway and Costco.

Gearhart Crossing made headlines again in 2017 when Lowenberg was granted a conditional use permit to install lottery machines in the pub and deli.

The City Council initially denied the request, bringing up concerns of



Brenna Visser/The Daily Astorian

**People enjoy the last dinner service at Gearhart Crossing, a local pub and grocery that closed Sunday.**

maintaining neighborhood character and questioning the need for the gambling machines. Lowenberg argued the lottery machines were needed to make Gear-

hart Crossing profitable.

City councilors eventually approved the move, fearing the denial could lead to a conflict with state law and ultimately an appeal.

## Weaver: Parking behaviors have improved

*Continued from Page A1*

Two-hour parking covers most of Duane and Commercial streets, along with Marine Drive, between Eighth and 15th streets from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Downtown merchants and employees are also not supposed to park in front of their storefronts. All around downtown are three-hour or all-day parking areas.

Until Harris started a year

ago, enforcement had been nonexistent since the 2013 retirement of former parking officer John Hord.

Downtown merchants had a love-hate relationship with Harris, who could be seen downtown marking tires and helping to direct visitors to local attractions. Between January and September of last year, Harris issued more than 1,000 parking tickets, including nearly 900 to drivers from Ore-

gon and more than 120 to Washingtonians.

Harris amicably ended her stint last year and returned to being a full-time artist. A studio she shows at in St. Thomas was reconstructed following a hurricane.

Sarah Lu Heath, executive director of the downtown association, said downtown parking behaviors have improved since her presence, with more spaces for customers.

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