

# Merkley: Expressed dismay over politicization of judicial appointments

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Saturday was his 385th town hall. He outlined his three main issues: corruption in elections; the failure of the U.S. to invest in health care, housing, education and infrastructure; and climate change.

Locals brought Merkley a range of concerns.

The senator shared his support at the federal level for strengthening financial aid, mental health and drug addiction treatment and renewable energy development. He also backed the college's efforts to expand its unique maritime sciences program with the help of a federal designation as a Maritime Center of Excellence.

He expressed dismay over the politicization of judicial appointments and President Donald Trump's stacking of federal courts with conservative judges.

Asked about a ramping up of tensions toward military intervention in Venezuela, Merkley, who serves on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, recounted his unsuccessful attempt to introduce an amendment requiring President Trump to seek congressional approval before committing troops to the South American nation.

He referenced similar legislation introduced by U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-New Mexico, to require congressional approval for war with Iran.

"I'm very concerned that the path to producing a conflict is being deliberately laid," Merkley said.

He was also asked about President Trump's effort to have Attorney General William Barr review Spe-

cial Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election. The U.S. is on the verge of a constitutional crisis regarding separation of powers and the legislative branch's ability to check the executive branch, Merkley said.

"Right now we're going into a scenario of an extraordinary blockade of the check of Congress on the executive branch," he said. "It's very unhealthy for our system. The Constitution does not envision an imperial presidency."



U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, right, started a town hall in Astoria on Saturday by highlighting the efforts of Keiko and Rex Ziak, co-founders of the Obon Society receiving battle souvenirs from World War II veterans and returning the family heirlooms to Japan.

Edward Stratton/The Astorian

# Kuhnly: Built his own greenhouse

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Kuhnly spent a lot of time with her last year when he started working at Blackberry Bog Farms in Svensen. The farm grows fruit and vegetables and maintains a plant nursery, Scottish Highland cows, poultry and a hop yard.

For Kuhnly, what began as an after-school and summer job became a realization. He kept wanting to learn more. He has since gone through training offered by the Clatsop County Master Gardeners. A \$1,000 scholarship he was awarded by the group for students going into agriculture and horticulture will help pay for his college classes.

His senior project was to work in the school greenhouse in Jewell. At home, he constructed his own greenhouse using a former chicken coop and goat enclosure.

Neat rows of young plants line the interior of the greenhouse at his family's home. Kuhnly's favorite plants to grow are tomatoes, but he's still figuring out the challenges of growing in different places, different environments.

In the forest-encircled hollow where he lives, soil quality and light are both tricky factors.

In farming, generally, "there's so many different variables and things that can happen," he said. "It's always a mystery."

The mysteries — even when they are frustrating — are what keep him interested. As he looked across the many plants he's grown himself or has been given by other gardeners in his life, he said, "I think I've learned more in a year than all my years in high school."



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