

TOWN HALL: Barreto criticized a \$1.4B carbon tax Democrats may try to introduce

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of questions. In Pendleton, opioids and climate change were on constituents' minds. Milton-Freewater residents were concerned about renewable energy. Wolves, water and health insurance were all discussed in Echo.

At Hamley's, the conversation veered into environmental issues after Barreto expressed frustration that Oregon was one of the only states in the country that lost jobs during August and September. He said Democrat-led bills such as the minimum wage increase continued to lay new burdens on Oregon businesses, and criticized a \$1.4 billion carbon tax that Democrats may try to introduce during the short session as another burden for local food processors and generating plants.

"We're already leading the country in CO2 reduction and yet we're trying to add to the cost to the people of Oregon," he said.

He said he does believe in climate change, but "what hasn't been proven is how much is man-made," and damaging the economy over it would be a mistake.

Some Pendleton residents disagreed. Chuck Wood said he was "very, very concerned" about climate change and Oregon needed to maintain its leadership on the issue. Marie Hall said she thought the state's biggest polluters should pay more, and asked that Hansell and Barreto work toward a compromise that balanced the environment and economy.

"I urge you both to advocate for Eastern Oregon ... I urge you to work with the rest of the state and not have an isolationist attitude," she said.

Many of the topics discussed over coffee that morning were ones the Republican legislators had heard before, but they did hear a new twist to the PERS problem: Two retirees on the Public Employee Retirement System said they would be willing to give up a part of their pensions to help keep the system solvent.

"You are the first PERS recipient who has ever told me, 'We need to take a cut,'" Hansell said. "Every other constituent has told me, 'It's mine, I earned it, keep your hands off of it.'"

Both legislators said they were willing to consider the proposals put forth by the governor's PERS task force, but they also believe the state must rein in government spending as part of the equation.

Later that day at the Milton-Freewater community center, Hansell and Barreto were the keynote speakers at a chamber of commerce luncheon where wind turbines, solar panels and hydropower were hot topics.

"You're putting a manufacturing plant on zoned agricultural land," one person said about windmills, calling for the state to limit the number of turbines allowed.

Others questioned why most hydropower doesn't count toward the state's renewable energy portfolio. Barreto said it would be too hard to get a bill on that subject passed through a Democratic-controlled House, Senate and governor's desk, but anyone could do the work to get it put on the ballot as a citizen initiative. The Democrats have a 35-25 majority in the House and a 17-13 advantage in the Senate.

One woman asked the legislators to help her understand Measure 101, which the public will vote on during a special election on Jan. 23. Hansell explained that hospitals had agreed during the last legislative session to pay a "provider tax" to help fill a hole in the Oregon Health Authority's budget and keep as many people as possible insured. But after Democrats also added a 1.5 percent tax on health insurance premiums, Hansell changed his mind about supporting the bill. A "yes" vote on Measure 101 will keep that premium tax, while a "no" will erase the tax, leaving a hole in the state budget that Barreto said could end up becoming the main focus of the legislature's 35-day

session in February.

For most of Oregon's history, the legislature met only on odd-numbered years, but in 2010 voters approved a 35-day session on even years, meant to make budget corrections and tweak laws passed in the regular session that had created unintended consequences. During the 2016 session, however, lawmakers pushed through major pieces of legislation, including a minimum wage increase and clean energy bills.

Standing in front of constituents at Echo's Butter Creek Coffeehouse and Mercantile on Thursday morning, Hansell and Barreto said they hoped the upcoming short session stayed true to its original design. Hansell said this year senators are only allowed to drop one bill for the whole session, and representatives are only allowed two. While Hansell is still keeping his options open, Barreto said he is introducing a bill that would cause the amount of money set aside for wolf depredation payouts to ranchers to automatically increase in proportion to the wolf population in Oregon. His second bill would allow for private building inspectors who can step in and help when cities' inspectors are overwhelmed or have a conflict with a builder.

"We need to have enough qualified people to do these inspections so it doesn't hold up construction and create a bottleneck," he said.

Patrons at the cafe had ideas for the next long session, including adding deposits to Gatorade bottles and — from Umatilla County Undersheriff Jim Littlefield — increased funding for jails to help deal with mental health crises among inmates.

As the conversation wrapped up the legislators prepared to hit the road to their next town hall in Wallowa County ... right after Hansell bought one of the giant snickerdoodles he had been eyeing.

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Navy veteran Bob Deno of Pilot Rock, at right, talks with fellow veterans Jerry Stangler, third from right, and Glen Snively, both of Pilot Rock, during a Veterans Day breakfast at Pilot Rock High School on Thursday.

VETERANS: Deno has nine relatives who have served the Navy

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the first time, the U.S.S. Lexington, an aircraft carrier. He remembered thinking how unlikely it was that it would float, much less act as a launch pad for airplanes.

When he came aboard, he was told that the life expectancy during an attack on the deck of an aircraft carrier was only 45 seconds.

"I don't know about you, but that scared this ol' boy to death," he said.

He was also handed shoes with suction cups on the soles and a .45 caliber pistol. When he asked why he had received a pistol, he was told it was because of the expert firing skills he had displayed during training — with a rifle.

Deno didn't have much use for the pistol during his tours. When he returned at the end of his service, the person who collected the gun asked where the firing pin was. Turns out his gun never had one.

Deno called these humorous bits "Navy wisdom" and shared another story about how the Lexington's admiral was concerned that his men weren't getting enough exercise. As a result, Deno hiked Mount Fujiyama in Japan one day, marveling at how old Japanese men easily surpassed him during the ascent.

He said that people who



Staff photo by E.J. Harris
Eighth-grader Emily Lambert waits on veteran Bill Safford of Pilot Rock during a Veterans Day breakfast on Thursday in Pilot Rock.

watch the sunrise on Fujiyama are a supposed to live a long life.

"Well, I'm holding them to that," the 79-year-old said.

Deno kept the material light, but he also occasionally reminded the audience of the stakes.

He reminded the students that Veterans Day was held in honor of the Nov. 11 armistice in World War I, a war that took the lives of 116,516 soldiers between 1914 and 1918. 419,400 more service men died over the course of World War II.

"Strictly by the grace of God, I made it home in one piece," he said. "But many of my friends didn't."

After the assembly ended, Deno said he edited his speech multiple times before Thursday and decided to leave out a

specific reference in his final draft, the story of how his best friend had been blown off the boat by a plane, his body never recovered.

When Deno returned home, he raised a family in Pilot Rock and continued a tradition of sending family members to the Navy. In total, Deno has nine relatives who have served the Navy, including two sons, two grandsons and a son-in-law. Deno suspects that it's all a coincidence.

Ultimately, Deno said he was humbled by the reception he received after his speech ended. Out of all the performances and speeches, his was the only section of the program that garnered a standing ovation.

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GOVERNMENT: Federal leaders can be harder to get ahold of

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chance to complain to them in the grocery store.

Hermiston city councilor John Kirwan cites constituent feedback while discussing ordinances with his fellow council members, and some of it does, indeed, come from the grocery store. Other feedback comes from people in restaurants or at work, in addition to more official contacts like email and city open houses.

"I interact with people all the time," he said.

Kirwan said he always take those comments into consideration, but it's also helpful for people to show up to bimonthly city council meetings and get those comments on the public record in front of the entire council.

In most cities in Umatilla County, a paid city manager hired by the city council runs day to day operations, supervising department heads over areas like roads, water/sewer, parks, police and the library. The city manager is supervised by an elected city council and mayor.

Kirwan said some of the most frequent feedback the city hears from residents includes code enforcement, road maintenance, traffic problems and construction projects. Sometimes the problem falls outside city limits and is actually a county issue, however.

"I think sometimes people get confused because we have so many people who consider themselves Hermiston residents but don't live in city limits," he said.

Kirwan said if people are unsure, it's always better to call city hall and have someone help them find the right person to talk to than to not contact anyone at all.

Counties

If one of those pesky potholes isn't in city limits, it might be a county issue. Umatilla County's government — run by three paid,

elected county commissioners who oversee department heads — covers roads, the sheriff's office, code enforcement and other issues outside city limits, as well as services like the district attorney's office, health department and tax office.

Commission chair Larry Givens said code enforcement is always a "hot-button issue" that the county gets a lot of calls about, along with information about burn days, both of which fall under the county's planning department.

Givens said county commissioners and staff get calls "all the time" about things that are actually a state issue, like rules by the Department of Environmental Quality.

"They'll be wanting to know about traffic on state highways, and we'll have to tell them we have no jurisdiction over them," he said.

Information about each county department is listed on the Umatilla County website, and Givens said it can be helpful for people to check that out before calling the courthouse.

State

If the pothole that wrecked your car's alignment was on an interstate, that falls under the state.

Sen. Bill Hansell is one of 30 senators that pass laws for the state with a 60-person house of representatives, before those laws are sent to the governor to be signed or vetoed. State legislators can also step in and help citizens navigate the vast maze of state agencies or get the attention of someone in one of those agencies. Hansell said people frequently call him or his staff about federal issues like veterans services, which he refers to Oregon's congressional delegation, but he doesn't mind people calling "about any issue." If someone has an idea for a state law, Hansell wants to hear about it.

"We actually solicit bills,"

he said. "We say, if you have an idea or a concern, please contact us."

Out of the bills Hansell worked on last session, 36 were constituent bills, 33 he was asked to sign onto by colleagues and seven were proposed by lobbyists representing interests in eastern Oregon.

If constituents want to weigh in on a law already proposed, Hansell's staff creates a file for every bill during sessions, and any feedback goes into the file, whether it's an email or notes from a phone conversation.

"It's very helpful because sometimes a bill is coming through that will be detrimental to our area and that gets it on our radar," he said.

Federal

Federal leaders can be harder to get ahold of — you're not likely to run into President Donald Trump at the grocery store or reach him by phone — but each citizen is represented by their state's two senators and the representative for their Congressional district. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Rep. Greg Walden all appear in Umatilla County at least once per year for town hall meetings, and they have regional offices with staff who can take down feedback or provide assistance with a federal agency.

Special Districts

In some cases, government can take the form of a district. Schools, for example, are run by an elected school board with no oversight or budget input by the city or county. In Pendleton, the fire department is run by the city, but in Hermiston, fire and ambulance services are provided by a district run by a separate elected board. Pendleton's cemetery is run by the city's parks office, while Hermiston's cemetery is run by an elected cemetery board with no city oversight. Ports, dispatch centers and mosquito control are other common special districts.

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