

Lawmakers weigh in on need to bridge digital divide

Letter requests \$40B for rural broadband development

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
EO Media Group

Members of Oregon's congressional delegation are joining the call to close the so-called "digital divide," extending high-speed internet access to citizens in rural parts of the U.S.

Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden joined 16 colleagues from across the country in sending a letter last week to President Donald Trump, requesting at least \$40 billion in infrastructure spending for rural broadband development.

"In an increasingly interconnected world and global economy, we must include in our discus-



Walden

Wyden

sion of infrastructure not just roads, bridges and waterways, but also high-speed internet access," the letter states.

According to the Federal Communications Commission, 39 percent of Americans who live in rural areas, or roughly 23 million people, lack high-speed internet access, versus just 4 percent of Americans in urban areas.

"While the vast majority of Americans have access to high-speed internet service, there is a

stark disparity between urban and rural America," the letter continues. "This digital divide puts many rural Americans at risk of being left out of critical technological advancements and economic gain."

Oregon's lone Republican congressman, Greg Walden, has also honed in on the digital divide, leading a hearing on broadband solutions last week in Washington, D.C.

Walden, who is chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, represents most of rural eastern, central and southern Oregon. He stressed the need to reduce what he described as "unnecessary roadblocks" to siting new broadband in rural areas, saying the environmental review process to build on federal lands is especially burdensome.

"I run into this issue all the time on siting," Walden said. "We're

trying to get broadband out there, and we're trying to get three-phased power in some of our communities that have waited three years to get an (environmental impact statement) to get four power poles on BLM land. So I think there is an issue here with siting."

Closing the digital divide has made headlines early in 2018 after Trump signed a pair of executive orders in January to cut red tape for rural broadband deployment. Both orders are intended to make it easier for private companies to build broadband infrastructure, such as radio towers, on federal property.

A coalition aimed at bridging the digital divide, called Connect Americans Now, also launched in January and is focusing on new technologies to deliver high-speed internet in rural America. Specifically, the group is pressuring the

FCC to make TV "white spaces" available as part of the solution.

When asked about TV white spaces, Walden said he thinks they could be harnessed by internet providers, but he wants to make sure they do not interfere with existing users.

"You don't want to create unintended consequences," Walden said. Last year, the National Association of Broadcasters opposed TV white space technology under development by Microsoft, saying it would threaten millions of viewers with loss of TV programming.

Both the Oregon Farm Bureau and Oregon Cattlemen's Association have joined the Connect Americans Now coalition, saying internet is crucial for farmers and ranchers to use precision farming tools and remain competitive in the market.

John Brenne receives posthumous President's Volunteer Service Award

East Oregonian

During the first Pendleton City Council meeting since his sudden death, Councilor John Brenne received a tribute.

Teresa O'Halloran of the Oregon state office of the Corporation for National & Community Service presented the council with a President's Volunteer Service Award addressed to Brenne.

Fighting back tears, O'Halloran explained how Brenne committed to moving out to Eastern Oregon more than 40 years ago because the region was low in senior services. He became the executive director of Pendleton's Foster Grandparents program and never left.

O'Halloran read aloud a letter signed by President Donald Trump, which touched on Brenne's thousands of hours of service and his contributions to the community.

She joked that Brenne, a registered Democrat, would have been displeased that he had received a commendation from Trump, of whom he was not a fan.

"He'd kick my butt," she

said with a laugh.

The council's remaining seven members later made their own tribute when they voted on the consent agenda, a package of agenda items considered minor enough that the council votes on them without discussion.

With Brenne known to be quick to second a motion for approval, the council simultaneously seconded the consent agenda before it was passed.

Contained in the consent agenda was a resolution declaring a vacancy for Brenne's Ward 1 seat, which covers South Hill, the downtown area and Riverside.

The council will appoint a replacement to fill the rest of Brenne's term through the end of 2018. If the replacement wants to stay beyond the end of the year, he or she will have to file to run for a full term in the municipal election by March 6, the same deadline for potential appointees to send their applications.

Retired firefighter John Cook is the only person to file for the Ward 1 race, but he was noncommittal about seeking appointment in a previous interview.



Brenne

New Pendleton city planner comes from Forest Grove

East Oregonian

The city of Pendleton pulled its new city planner out of retirement to replace its previous planner, who is retiring.

City planner George Cress introduced himself to the council at a meeting Tuesday, giving members a brief personal history.

Cress said this actually marked a return to Pendleton having already worked as a land use manager and economic development director for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

He moved from Pendleton several years ago and became the director of light and power for Forest Grove.

Cress returned to Pendleton 10 months ago, but he said he was excited to begin a new job in a city that's changed a lot since he left.

This wasn't the first time Cress has talked before the council. In October, Cress spoke in favor of a park smoking ban that was ultimately approved by the council.

Cress will replace George Clough, who held the city planner position since 2016.

STANFIELD Factory receives three odor citations

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

The Stanfield factory that prompted citizen complaints throughout 2017 has been cited by Stanfield Police for odor three times in 2018.

Stanfield Police Chief Bryon Zumwalt said the pet food plant, owned by 3D Idapro Solutions, has received three citations in the past few weeks, and that each citation costs \$435.

Stanfield City Manager Blair Larsen said the plant had a court date for one citation last week, and for two others Wednesday.

"To my understanding, they pleaded no contest, and they have to make arrangements to pay the fines," he said.

If the city receives at least four odor complaints from different households in a 12-hour period, it violates the city ordinance, and the city can issue a citation.

Mark Johnson, 3D Idapro's vice president of operations, said the company had no comment



EO file photo

Stanfield Police have cited the pet food plant, owned by 3D Idapro Solutions, for odor three times in 2018. Each citation costs \$435.

about the citations.

Larsen said that in fall of 2017, plant operators struck an agreement with the city council, which allowed them until November to make all their improvements before they began issuing citations for odor complaints.

"They were a little delayed, but they got it done by mid-December," Larsen said.

Larsen said the city has kept a log of the complaints

they have received, which record the name and address of the complainant, the date and time it was received, and specific issues, if any.

According to the log, the first time the city received enough complaints to fit the nuisance ordinance was on Jan. 18. They received enough for two more citations on Jan. 20 and 22.

"It's clear that the problem is not solved," Larsen said. "Having the equipment is one thing.

Using it properly and making sure people know how to use it is another."

The plant, which dehydrates potatoes that are used primarily to make dog food, was the subject of many complaints this summer, when the odor forced many indoors. In October, officials from the company's midwest headquarters held a public meeting in Stanfield to go over the plan they had to mitigate odors.

They said they had a three-step plan to mitigate odors, which included putting up a large tent in which potatoes could dry, which they said would reduce the odors to surrounding areas. They also planned to install a new scrubber, an air purifying device. The old scrubber was too small, and was damaged by a fire in the plant last February. The plant has since replaced the scrubber.

Contact Jayati Ramakrishnan at jramakrishnan@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4534

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