

OPIOID: ‘Brain drain in Eastern Oregon’

Continued from 1A

too, the roundtable participants told Walden. Dr. Joel Rice, a psychiatrist who operates the Grande Ronde Recovery Center anti-addiction clinic in La Grande and Pendleton, said the highly dangerous fentanyl is “very common in Hermiston now,” and he is seeing more of a problem with another drug called Kratom.

Rice said he doesn’t believe any doctors in the area are “pill pushers” who are knowingly profiting off of feeding others’ addictions, but instead are sincerely trying to help their patients manage pain.

“Ninety-five percent of the people they give opioids to don’t have a problem, so they don’t think it’s a big deal, but I’m working with the five percent,” he said.

Rice said one thing that would really help in preventing overdoses is having more providers who have a waiver to prescribe Suboxone, an opioid that can help addicts transition away from more harmful opioids as they work to get clean. The certification takes about 10 hours to complete, and would only apply to a small number of patients a provider sees, so Rice said he has seen good success with convincing a Union County hospital to offer a \$1,000 incentive to

get certified. He suggested to Walden that a similar government-sponsored incentive could be useful nationwide, something Dan Marier, a recently-retired Pendleton physician, agreed with. Walden said he was interested, and would look into it.

Marier, Rice, Umatilla County Director of Human Services Amy Ashton-Williams and Bart Murray, a consultant from Baker City, all agreed that a major problem in treating addiction is that mental health services, addiction treatment and physical health care are all separated out, often with very little communication between three different entities working to help the same person.

Ashton-Williams said the system was so “silo’ed and segmented” that there are many patients who have physical health problems, mental health issues and an addiction that are all interconnected and yet they are getting talk therapy without medication, or medication without counseling — even though the research is clear that integrated care is cheaper and more effective.

Carrie Sampson, quality director of Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center, said the clinic on the Umatilla Indian Reservation does offer a

more integrated care system, and it has been helpful for a physician to be able to walk someone with a mental health problem right next door to a behavioral health specialist instead of giving a referral and hoping the patient follows up.

She also said that they don’t prescribe opioids on a longterm basis, and patients given addictive painkillers in the short term have to sign a pain management agreement that involves safeguards to make sure they get off the drugs as soon as they can.

Short term pain management can morph into a full-blown drug addiction, something that Good Shepherd COO Jim Schlenker said he knows well. His brother-in-law died of an overdose in a parking lot after initially being prescribed painkillers for a knee surgery.

“My sister was shocked,” Schlenker said. “She didn’t see anything that was out of the ordinary until after, when she started putting the pieces together, and by then it was too late.”

He said patients need more education about the dangers of what they’re being prescribed and more safeguards. He couldn’t speak to exactly how his brother-in-law’s initial prescription had been handled, but all the pieces of the system “didn’t

come together right for him.”

The group also pointed to a dwindling number of physicians and mental health professionals in parts of Eastern Oregon, low salaries for crisis workers and funding/billing structures that don’t allow Rice, for example, to bill the Oregon Health Authority for mental health services at his clinic even though he is a psychiatrist.

“There is a brain drain in Eastern Oregon because the people with brains can’t get paid,” he said.

Walden thanked the group for their stories and suggestions, and at several points during the meeting said he would follow up with what being proposed. He also shared some things he would like to see. That includes closing loopholes that allow people to sell fentanyl and other synthetic drugs legally if they adjust the formula slightly, holding drug companies accountable for their role, developing new non-opioid pain management drugs and coming up with better ways to monitor prescriptions without sacrificing privacy or the ability to get opioids when they are legitimately needed.

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Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

Congressman Greg Walden, left, learns about the brewing process from brewer Logan Mayfield and owner Craig Coleman of Ordnance Brewing Company. Walden visited the brewery on Wednesday morning.

Walden visits Ordnance, talks brewing tax cuts

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
East Oregonian

Cold beer and conservation of funds — that’s what Congressman Greg Walden hopes the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will accomplish for small breweries in Oregon. Walden stopped by Ordnance Brewing Company in Boardman on Wednesday to tour the facility and discuss the federal excise tax cut, passed in 2017, which contains a provision that he said will benefit craft brewers.

“The tax bill we passed cuts the excise tax on brewers in half,” Walden said. “It took it from \$7 to \$3.50 (per barrel).”

Ordnance owners Craig and Janna Coleman, who showed Walden around the brewery and distillery, said they’re happy with any extra funds they’re able to put toward their business.

“We spend every dime we get our hands on on marketing,” Craig said.

The Colemans started Ordnance Brewing in 2014, and have been farmers for many years. They use their own blueberries in the beer. Much of the product that isn’t grown on their farm is sourced from family and friends, Craig said.

Janna said they have begun to see some positive returns. “Any help is good,” she said. “It frees up money to spend elsewhere — for expansion, production and payroll.”

Ordnance employs about 25 people, Craig said, between its brewing staff, salespeople and its taproom staff in Boardman, Hermiston and Wilsonville.

Walden said he was excited to see the progress of the local brewery.

“This is the American entrepreneurial dream,” he said. “For Oregon, with our incredible agricultural base, we’ve always worked to figure out, how do we get value out of raw product by making it something else? Can we take what we do well, and get value added from that? That’s what’s happening here.”

Aside from the tax cut, Walden said he would like to make other processes for breweries more streamlined, especially in their dealings with the Tax and Trade Bureau.

“Part of it is regulatory overhang, how long it takes to get permits,” he said. “We still have more work to do there. We need to figure out what the hangup is.”

On this trip, Walden said he would also meet with members of the Wal-Mart Distribution Center to discuss how the tax cut had impacted them.

‘Fix it!’ plea to Trump from students

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Spilling out wrenching tales of lost lives and stolen security, students and parents appealed to President Donald Trump on Wednesday to set politics aside and protect America’s school children from the scourge of gun violence. Trump listened intently to the raw emotion and pledged action, including the possibility of arming teachers.

“I turned 18 the day after” the shooting, said a tearful Samuel Zeif, a student at the Florida high school where a former student’s assault left 17 dead last week. “Woke up to the news that my best friend was gone. And I don’t understand why I can still go in a store and buy a weapon of war. An AR. How is it that easy to buy this type of weapon? How do we not stop this after Columbine? After Sandy Hook?”

Trump promised to be “very strong on background checks.” And he suggested he supported allowing some teachers and other school employees to carry concealed weapons to be ready for intruders. But largely he listened, holding handwritten notes bearing his message to the families. “I hear you” was written in black marker.

The president had invited the teen survivors of school violence and parents of murdered children in a show of his resolve against gun violence in the wake of last week’s shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and in past years at schools in Connecticut and Colorado. The latest episode has prompted a renewed and growing call for stronger gun control.

Trump invited his guests to suggest solutions and solicited feedback. He did not fully endorse any specific policy solution, but pledged to take action and expressed interest in widely differing approaches.

Besides considering concealed carrying of weapons by trained school employees, a concept he has endorsed in the past, he said he planned to go “very strongly into age, age of purchase.” And he said he was committed to improving background checks and working on



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

Samuel Zeif, an 18-year-old senior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., cries after speaking during a listening session with President Donald Trump and students and teachers in the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington on Wednesday.

mental health.

Most in the group were emotional but quiet and polite.

But Andrew Pollack, whose daughter Meadow was killed last week, noted the previous school massacres and raged over his loss, saying this moment isn’t about gun laws but about fixing the schools.

“It should have been one school shooting and we should have fixed it and I’m pissed. Because my daughter, I’m not going to see again,” said Pollack. “King David Cemetery, that is where I go to see my kid now.”

A strong supporter of gun rights, Trump has nonetheless indicated in recent days that he is willing to consider ideas not in keeping with National Rifle Association orthodoxy, including age restrictions for buying assault-type weapons. Still, gun owners are a key part of his base of supporters.

The NRA quickly rejected any talk of raising the age for buying long guns to 21.

“Legislative proposals that prevent

law-abiding adults aged 18-20 years old from acquiring rifles and shotguns effectively prohibits them for purchasing any firearm, thus depriving them of their constitutional right to self-protection,” the group said in a statement.

Several dozen people assembled in the White House State Dining Room. Among them were students from Parkland along with their parents. Also present were parents of students killed in massacres at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut. Students and parents from the Washington area also were present.

The student body president at the Parkland school, Julia Cordover, tearfully told Trump that she “was lucky enough to come home from school.”

She added, “I am confident you will do the right thing.”

Trump later tweeted that he would “always remember” the meeting. “So much love in the midst of so much pain. We must not let them down. We must keep our children safe!!”

Angry teens swarm Florida Capitol; demand new gun laws

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A week after a shooter slaughtered 17 people in a Florida high school, thousands of protesters, including many angry teenagers, swarmed into the state Capitol on Wednesday, calling for changes to gun laws, a ban on assault-type weapons and improved care for the mentally ill.

The normally staid Florida Statehouse filled with students, among them more than 100 survivors of the Feb. 14 attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, on the edge of the Everglades. They held signs, chanted slogans and burst into lawmakers’ offices demanding to be heard.

The teens were welcomed into the gun-friendly halls of power, but the students’ top goal — a ban on assault-style rifles such as the weapon used in the massacre — was taken off the table a day earlier, although more limited measures are still possible.

Many protesters complained that lawmakers were not serious about reform, and they said they would oppose in future elections any legislator who accepts campaign contributions from the National Rifle Association.

“We’ve spoke to only a few legislators and ... the most we’ve gotten out of them is, ‘We’ll keep you in our thoughts. You are so strong. You are so powerful,’” said Delaney Tarr, a senior.

at the high school. “We know what we want. We want gun reform. We want commonsense gun laws. ... We want change.”

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