

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Town halls offer chance to participate in government

Voters across the region will gain an excellent opportunity to give input and ask questions at a series of town hall meetings this week sponsored by U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley.

The Democratic lawmaker will be in Wheeler County for a 2 p.m. Thursday session at the Wheeler High School gym. Later that afternoon, he will hold a town hall meeting in Gilliam County at the Gronquist Building in Arlington at 5:30 p.m.

Merkley will also sponsor town halls in Harney and Grant counties.

Merkley likes to tout the fact that since he took office in 2009 he has held a town hall in every one of Oregon's 36 counties at least once a year, and that kind of effort deserves praise.

His willingness to step into the rural sections of the state that are — for the most part — deeply conservative shows he is not a “democratic” lawmaker but the senator that represents all the people of this state.

While Merkley surely



Staff photo by Kathy Aney, File

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, speaks to a crowd at BMCC's Bob Clapp Theatre in 2018.

deserves credit for canvassing the state to gather input, the real focus of the town halls should be — and is — voters.

Whether you are Republican or a Democrat, town hall sessions like the ones sponsored by Merkley are invaluable tools for democracy. Each session gives folks from rural areas

the opportunity to voice concerns or offer praise to the men and women who represent us in Washington, D.C.

Venues for a give-and-take kind of discussion with senior lawmakers are dwindling. That's why when a town hall — such as the two hosted by Merkley — is announced voters

should mark it on their calendar or clear their schedule to attend.

Democracy works only when the people who make up that type of government actually participate. And political participation often lags in the United States. We're not talking about the quick blurb on Facebook or the last tweet on Twitter. For far too long, social media has served as a new type of political discourse that is both interesting and, in the end, discouraging.

Americans must participate in their government for it to succeed. That means paying attention to what city government does or how county elected leaders are doing their work, and it also means taking time out to attend town hall sessions like Merkley's. We are all creatures of habit, and once in the routine of shrugging off a lawmaker as a “Democrat” or a “Liberal” or a “Republican” then we stop being active in our democracy.

Town halls offer one of the best ways to participate in our form of government that, when it works, is pretty extraordinary.

OTHER VIEWS

B2H is the right project at the right time

Growth has come to the Northwest. The signs are everywhere: new buildings, new roads, more cars, more people. And lights.

It's Idaho Power's job to make sure those lights come on for customers in Oregon and Idaho. Repeated, in-depth studies show we'll need new energy resources to keep doing that. That need could become more urgent as Idaho Power and other energy companies transition away from coal and toward clean energy.

The Boardman to Hemingway line offers the most cost-effective way to meet growing needs and continue Idaho Power's 100-plus-year tradition of reliable, affordable, clean energy. And it will be crucial to our goal of a 100% clean energy mix by 2045, helping us deliver energy from clean, intermittent sources like wind and solar without sacrificing reliability or affordability.

The 300-mile, 500-kilovolt (kV) line will connect a substation near Boardman, to another west of Boise, Idaho. It will provide extra capacity to move energy back and forth between the Pacific Northwest and Mountain West. Utilities in both regions will be able to buy energy when their customers need a little extra. Others can sell what they're not using.

B2H, as the project is called, also would benefit areas that aren't seeing as much growth. It would free up capacity on existing lines so that local businesses can expand or new ones can take root. It would give entrepreneurs an opportunity to connect new energy projects to the grid.

From Boardman to Ontario to Pocatello and beyond, homes, farms and businesses

will benefit from this project. Millions of businesses and residents across the Pacific Northwest and Mountain West would receive power from B2H.

The public utilities commissions of Oregon and Idaho — state agencies that regulate utility companies — have acknowledged Idaho Power's long-range plan, of which B2H is a key component.

In Eastern Oregon, B2H would help local governments through tax money the project generates. Local businesses would benefit from increased spending in the area during construction. More favorable prices

and reliable service will be available to electric service providers that buy energy from Bonneville Power Administration, including the Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative and the Umatilla Electric Cooperative in Eastern Oregon.

Idaho Power is committed to minimizing the line's impacts. We're working with the public, local and state governments, federal agencies, private landowners and businesses to finalize the route for the line. Most towers would be about half as tall as a typical wind turbine.

B2H is a key piece of the Northwest's energy and economic future. It will help Idaho Power, PacifiCorp and BPA provide our customers an energy mix that's cleaner, more reliable and more affordable.

Mitch Colburn is resource planning and operations director for Idaho Power, which is taking the lead on planning and obtaining permits for the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line.

MITCH COLBURN
COMMENT

YOUR VIEWS

Not all grass roots citizens favor a new county government

Well, citizens of Umatilla County, we have a big challenge ahead. The Umatilla County Charter Review Committee is wrapping up its work. Per the *East Oregonian*, Wednesday, May 1, 2019, edition, they will “be pitching the recommendations” to the board on May 29 at 5:30 p.m. at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton.”

According to the board's schedule, they have a Charter Review Committee Workshop scheduled for 5:30 p.m. on May 29.

In the *EO* article, committee chairwoman Michele Grable said the recommendation “is to change the structure of our county government.” She also said, “This is government at its best,” and, “This is grass roots.” Well, based on the

“fruit” of this committee's work, I'd say that this committee is made up mostly of people not of the Umatilla County Grassroots. The “fruit” looks like it came from a Washington, D.C., committee hooked on transferring accountability to an enlarging “bureaucracy.”

This move on our county citizens is like the one we recently experienced by the Oregon Extension Service. Yes, there are a number of citizens that would welcome an ever-enlarging, ever-distancing (from the citizen) local government, but that is not the majority, nor does it represent the culture of Umatilla County.

In short, show up to the “workshop” and let this committee of “grass roots” members know that we, the “other” grass roots citizens, want to keep “in touch” with “our commissioners”!

Please let your commissioners know how you stand on this issue.

Larry and Jean Nye
Athena

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