

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Democracy doesn't work unless there is participation

Democracy can sometimes be a messy — or contentious — business.

A good example was Rep. Greg Walden's town hall session in Athena Sunday.

Eastern Oregon is traditionally a friendly place for the Hood River federal lawmaker. But on Sunday, Walden faced some tough questions regarding the immigration crisis and the climate.

That's how it should be.

We don't support town hall meetings becoming shouting matches and, thankfully, that didn't happen Sunday. We do, however, believe town hall meetings are essential for our democracy.

Not only do they allow voters to hear what their elected representatives are doing — or, in some cases, not doing — in Washington, D.C., but such gatherings allow voters to ask questions and seek answers.

Walden faced pointed questions — especially about the ongoing immigration and border crisis — and delivered his answers.

On the border issue, Walden stuck to his familiar mantra that America must have secure borders, while he said he didn't support the Green New Deal concept.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris, File

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden talks about breaking with President Donald Trump on his declaration of a national emergency during a March town hall meeting in Hermiston.

Those two issues generated some vigorous debate and that is a good thing.

Walden — and other members of the Oregon federal delegation — deserve kudos for sponsoring such

town halls across the region. Sure, it isn't easy to face tough questions from voters. However, that is part of the job and Walden and his elected colleagues seem to understand that.

Yet those who took the time — on

a Sunday no less — also should be lauded.

Democracy can be messy but it does not work unless people participate. Our system of government demands that lawmakers and voters interact with each other on a regular basis. Sometimes that isn't easy but it is essential.

Walden also brought up a good point — when answering a question about lack of bipartisanship — that lawmakers on both sides of the political fence typically cooperate to get things done.

Often that interesting fact gets lost in the daily, weekly and monthly white noise of the political atmosphere in Washington, D.C.

We all tend to focus on what isn't working — rather than legislative success — because that grabs headlines and good sound bites.

Walden and his colleagues could just as easily shed the town hall concept and choose to communicate with voters in a different manner — like Twitter. That they don't is a good sign that despite everything, our elected leaders not only want input but actively seek feedback from voters.

That's a good sign our democracy isn't in as dire straits as it is often portrayed.

YOUR VIEWS

PDC needs to refocus

We've all heard that old adage, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make them drink." That's exactly where the Pendleton Development Commission (PDC) is at with their "second story" program. Even with additional incentives, that same horse refuses to drink. Perhaps it's time to lead him over to Byers Avenue and put him to work.

Despite the rosy picture painted by both the PDC and the Pendleton Downtown Association (PDA), vacancies are on the upswing all over town. Penny's, Wicked Kitty, Curio Shop, Mosa, Pupcakes, the Bike Shop, Mann Mortgage, and United Grain, just to name a few, are all empty or closed, and that's just downtown. Have you checked that strip mall near Walmart? Empty would be an appropriate description. That Portland "Pearl District" mentality continues to permeate the PDC, and it just isn't working.

The question now is should PDC funding be used to fix Byers Avenue? The opposition contends this does nothing to increase the tax base, the purpose of the PDC programs. Au contraire! You'd be remiss claiming replacing a pothole-riddled street and new sidewalks wouldn't increase property values. Building value increases the tax base, and that's what urban renewal is all about. Byers' residents contribute property taxes to fund the PDC. Shouldn't they share in the benefits? Must everything go to business?

The precedent has been set for funding public projects: Riverfront Park, Main Street speed bumps, statues, repaving downtown parking lots and paying the salary of the PDA director. It's been suggested that only 25% of remaining PDC funds be used for public projects, far short of the \$3 million requested by the city manager, the actual executive director of the PDC. The PDC account seems now no more than a slush fund for the city council and they just don't want to give it up. Revenue that should be used for infrastructure repair is siphoned off for pet projects. Until the PDC expires, deferred maintenance on public infrastructure will remain just that, deferred.

Then there's this: After successfully convincing the PDA to provide grant funding for a new air-conditioning sys-

tem through the Main Street USA program, the new owners of the Elks Club are asking the PDC for a "historical building" grant, promising a brass plaque to thank taxpayers. Is that historical or hysterical?

**Rick Rohde
Pendleton**

Street funding shouldn't raise local taxes again

I hope every one read the article in the June 29 *East Oregonian* edition editorializing how Pendleton will fix the streets. No cuts in other parts of the current budget. They are proposing new taxes and fees. It is too bad we can't do that with our personal budgets.

The Street Fund budget for 2019 and 2020 is \$3,601,500, which is up over \$300,000 from last year's budget. The Capitol Outlay (street repair) budget is \$2,200,000 and more than we have heard from the city's propaganda (\$440,000 for residential streets and \$1,481,000 for collectors/arterial). A large portion of the \$1.4 million is for Southeast Byers Avenue.

If the city council decides to use Urban Renewal funds for Byers Avenue, the \$1.4 million could be used for other streets in the city, which may be decided at the next meeting PDC meeting.

The city council is planning a major campaign to push all these new taxes and fees by meeting with clubs and organizations like the Downtown Association, Lion's Club, Chamber of Commerce and others. Eventually they will work their way down to us common folk.

If the city decides to proceed with a gas tax, the council will propose it at the May 2020 primary election. Like Mayor Turner said, "Less people vote in the primary, so there is a better chance to pass it." May 2020 is a gubernatorial and presidential primary.

As you know, all the city gas taxes have been opposed. The last one was defeated by 60%. The proposed tax prior to this was for the famous "Road to Nowhere." We all remember that one. We won't be fooled again.

**Rex J. Morehouse
Pendleton**



OTHER VIEWS

Congress should keep after robocallers

Bend Bulletin

We've likely all had them, maybe at least once a day — those annoying robocalls that interrupt dinner or whatever else you happen to be doing at the time. Stopping them permanently may be difficult, even impossible. But Congress continues to try, and that's good.

Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, the top Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., committee chairman, are co-sponsors of the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act, which this week was sent to the full committee for a vote.

The measure tells the Federal Communications Commission to require telephone carriers, both of landline and cellular services, to use technology that prevents spoofing, which involves providing misleading caller identification. In addition, the bill would extend the statute of limitations for some robocall violations and pressure the FCC to enforce current robocall laws more strictly.

Robocalls are more than an occasional annoyance. The FCC says more than 5 billion of the calls, many of them fraudulent, were made in May alone. In 2018, for example, robocalls pitched phony health

insurance policies to unsuspecting victims. So far this year, more than 25 billion robocalls have been made in the U.S. Moreover, they cost Americans billions of dollars per year, according to Truecaller, the Swedish company that makes a robocall blocker by the same name for cellphones. Even important phone lines at hospitals get besieged by them.

It's no wonder the FCC has begun beefing up efforts against robocallers with its Operation Call It Quits campaign. And, it offers consumers suggestions for how to deal with the calls. Chief among them? Don't answer the phone if you don't recognize a telephone number, and if a robocall is answered, simply hang up without saying or doing anything.

As for the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act, if it's greeted with the same bipartisan enthusiasm a similar measure received in the Senate, it will be approved with little difficulty. Then, the two measures face the tricky business of reconciling differences between them.

Even all this effort is unlikely to eliminate robocalls permanently, unfortunately. There's big money to be made in suckering people, and robocallers will no doubt find new ways to reach victims. That said, both Congress and the FCC must keep trying.