

Walden acknowledges gun bill error

Oregon representative inaccurately describes House-passed bill in radio interview

By JEFF MAPES
Oregon Public Broadcasting

PORTLAND — Oregon Rep. Greg Walden acknowledged Wednesday that he inaccurately described a House-passed bill he opposed that calls for expanded criminal background checks on gun purchases.

In an interview this week on KEX Radio in Portland, Walden said he voted against the measure because it would make it illegal for someone to swap shotguns with a companion while hunting if they didn't first go through a background check.

However, the bill explicitly exempts the temporary transfers of firearms for hunting, fishing and trapping purposes.

Walden spokeswoman Molly Jenkins said in an email that the Republican congressman “acknowledges that he misspoke on KEX. What he was intending to reference was if they were out shooting around

their ranch.”

Jenkins added that Walden was also concerned that, under the bill, ranchers could face penalties if they loaned an employee a gun to protect livestock from predators.

The Eastern Oregon legislator has walked a careful line on gun issues. Walden said he's willing to tighten some gun laws. But he has also maintained an “A” grade from the National Rifle Association, which has taken a hard line against attempts to tighten restrictions on guns. The group strenuously lobbied against the background checks bill that passed the House.

Following the mass shootings earlier this month in El Paso and Dayton, Walden declined several requests by OPB to discuss gun issues. He did release a statement last week that defended his overall approach, but he did not address gun legislation now under discussion by President Donald Trump and congressional leaders.

In an interview Tuesday with KEX Radio talk show host Mark Mason, Walden said he supported efforts to “clean up the background check system” and ensure that “we can keep the guns



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Rep. Greg Walden answers a question Wednesday at a town hall in Heppner.

out of the hands of the criminal elements.”

But he defended his Feb. 27 vote in the House against a measure that would expand background checks to cover private transfers of firearms.

“I admit I voted ‘no’ on it and here's why,” Walden told Mason. “You know, if I've got a farmer out in Eastern Oregon and his son-in-law shows up and they go out pheasant hunting, under their law they tried to pass in the House, if he loaned his son-in-law his shotgun — they just traded shotguns — without going somewhere and getting a background check, it would be a

one-year [in prison] felony, \$100,000 fine.”

However, that legislation, H.R. 8, says someone can temporarily transfer their firearm if it is “reasonably necessary for the purposes of hunting, trapping, or fishing.”

During the debate over the House legislation, Republicans repeatedly sought broader exemptions for farmers and ranchers. They also wanted to expand the exemption from background checks for family members to include a broader circle of those with family ties, such as in-laws. Democratic leaders refused, saying they did

not want to introduce too many loopholes.

Still, the first example that Walden mentioned — a rancher and a son-in-law out shooting on the ranch — could be covered by the hunting exemption. And depending on the circumstances, so could the second example.

Robin Lloyd, managing director for the Giffords Law Center, a gun-control group, said the exemption in the bill is intended to cover limited loans for hunting. What would not be covered is a long-term loan, she said.

“It was not meant to burden everyday Americans who are passing firearms along to their sons or daughters, or who use them regularly for hunting and trapping,” Lloyd said, adding that “it was meant to create a system that does not have the loopholes that exist in our system today.”

The legislation passed the House last February on a 240-190 vote, with only eight Republicans in support. Democratic and Republican leaders have been heatedly wrangling over background checks ever since the 2012 shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, that led to the deaths of 20 elementary school chil-

dren and six adults.

A bill requiring background checks on all firearm sales at gun shows, sponsored by Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Republican Sen. Patrick Toomey of Pennsylvania, failed to gain the 60 votes needed to overcome a filibuster in the Senate. And when Democrats took control of the House following the 2018 elections, one of their first priorities was to pass a more expansive background check bill.

Following the violence in Dayton and El Paso, Trump and congressional leaders have been discussing whether they can reach agreement on gun legislation.

Walden told KEX that he might also support national legislation on so-called “red flag” laws. Those allow judges to temporarily remove firearms from people deemed to be in imminent danger of violent action against themselves or others.

Walden noted that Oregon has a red flag law that has raised some questions but that “seems to be working.”

At the same time, Walden said he also has “an obligation to stand up for the Second Amendment.”

Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY

Partly sunny and very warm

SATURDAY

Very warm with some sun

SUNDAY

Clouds and intervals of sunshine

MONDAY

Mostly sunny and nice

TUESDAY

Plenty of sunshine

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST													
90°		60°		90°		63°		88° 61°		85° 58°		87° 58°	
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST													
93°		64°		93°		66°		91° 63°		88° 61°		90° 60°	

OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.

Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2019

ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	89°	68°
Normals	84°	55°
Records	106° (1915)	36° (1927)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.

Month to date

Normal month to date

Year to date

Last year to date

Normal year to date

	Trace	0.12"	0.40"	9.73"	6.52"	8.35"
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HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	89°	66°
Normals	85°	54°
Records	102° (1972)	36° (1937)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.

Month to date

Normal month to date

Year to date

Last year to date

Normal year to date

	Trace	0.05"	0.19"	4.61"	5.15"	6.11"
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WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Sat.
Boardman	WSW 7-14	WSW 6-12
Pendleton	WNW 6-12	W 6-12

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today

Sunset tonight

Moonrise today

Moonset today

	6:13 a.m.	7:38 p.m.	6:16 a.m.	8:16 p.m.
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New

First

Full

Last

Aug 30

Sep 5

Sep 13

Sep 21

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 109° in Needles, Calif. Low 27° in Yellowstone N.P., Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

-10s

-0s

0s

10s

20s

30s

40s

50s

60s

70s

80s

90s

100s

110s

showers

t-storms

rain

flurries

snow

ice

cold front

warm front

stationary front

high

low

Union County man pleads not guilty to murder charge

By SABRINA THOMPSON
La Grande Observer

LA GRANDE — Ronald Lee, who was arrested in February and charged with murder and conspiracy to commit murder of his soon-to-be ex-wife, Loretta Williams, in November 2018, pleaded not guilty in a hearing Tuesday.

Lee, 71, has remained in the Union County Jail since his arrest. Tuesday's hearing was to state his plea, and for the state of Oregon to prove that he is rightfully being held without bail.

Lee is accused of having shot and killed Williams at her Cove home. She called 911 about 1:40 a.m. about a man in her yard, and dispatchers overheard a confrontation in the background and a loud noise before losing contact with her, according to the 911 call. When officers arrived they found Williams dead of one or more apparent gunshot wounds, *The Observer* previously reported.

During the hearing, the state submitted 50 pieces of evidence in addition to witness testimony to prove there is reason to hold Lee without bail. Evidence included the 911 call Williams made, testimony from Union County Sheriff's Office lead detective Jason McKaig and ballistics information.

When McKaig took the stand, Union County District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel asked him to detail the

events that led up to, during and after Nov. 17, 2018, when Williams was killed in her home. McDaniel asked Det. McKaig questions regarding the case and the evidence they had found as part of the investigation.

Prior to her death, Williams and Lee were going through a tumultuous divorce, McKaig said. The record and testimony by McKaig showed Williams filed for divorce on July 18, 2018.

According to McKaig's investigation and court documents, during this time Lee had hired an associate, Deva Williams, to drive him around because Lee's license had been suspended for driving under the influence of intoxicants.

According to McKaig's testimony, Williams recalled Lee making statements about wanting to kill his wife and saying he could kill her and get away with it. Also according to McKaig's testimony, Williams said Lee's behavior was getting increasingly erratic and violent in November 2018, and he planned to stop acting as Lee's driver.

During this time, Loretta Williams' friends and family said, she had begun making plans for the future, including getting a new job and selling the house. The divorce depositions were set for a week after Thanksgiving, five days before she was killed.

The audio of the 911 call Williams made the night she

was murdered was played for the court Tuesday. In it Williams can be heard talking about a man in her yard wearing a black jacket. The dispatcher asks for her address, and Williams identifies the man in her yard as her husband, Ron Lee, according to McKaig and the judge's remarks regarding the 911 call, which lasted about two minutes.

In the recording, Williams yells, “Ron Lee, stop!” The sounds of gunshots and glass breaking are heard, and Williams cries out that she has been shot. In all, a total of five shots can be heard on the audio.

“It's the victim of a homicide speaking beyond the grave,” McDaniel said.

When the Union County Sheriff's deputies and Oregon State Police troopers arrived at the scene, they found the house's sliding glass back door had been shattered and Williams was dead on the floor between the dining room and the kitchen, according to McKaig's testimony.

Within a few hours, the police found Lee in his trailer, McKaig said Tuesday. When told of his wife's death, Lee did not seem upset by the news, McKaig said. Lee later agreed to an interview with the police. In the interview he described Williams as “crazy” and as having suicidal tendencies, and he claimed he was the one who wanted the divorce, according to McKaig's testimony.

BRIEFLY

Magnitude 6.3 earthquake rumbles 150 miles off Oregon coast

COOS BAY — An underwater earthquake with an initial 6.3 magnitude has struck off the Oregon coast.

The U.S. Geological Survey said Thursday no tsunami is expected from the temblor, which happened about 150 miles from land.

It was at a depth of about 5.4 miles underwater.

There were no reports of damage or injuries.

— Associated Press

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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Regional Publisher and Revenue Director:

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Advertising Services:

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Business Office Manager:

541-966-0824

COMMERCIAL PRINTING

Production Manager: Mike Jensen

541-215-0824 • mjensen@eastoregonian.com