

Walden: ‘I will close the public service chapter of my life’

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term limits.

While the overwhelming majority of his votes were solidly in line with the Republican agenda in the House, Walden has not been in lock-step with President Trump on issues.

As chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, he supported Trump’s position on repealing the Affordable Care Act, to relax net neutrality rules, and has backed Trump on the current Ukrainian scandal.

In his statement, Walden recounted his more than 20 years in office, saying that he had worked to find solutions to the opioid crisis, improve forest health, and increase access to high-speed broadband. Walden said he was proud to champion the issues facing Oregonians east of the Cascades and south of the Willamette Valley.

“Rural Oregon values run deeply in my veins,” Walden said. “My ancestors arrived here in 1845 and I grew up on a cherry orchard in The Dalles with parents who survived the Great Depression. They taught me the true meaning of community; the importance of giving back; and the value of hard work. That’s why I’ve given it my all for the people and the way of life we so enjoy in Oregon.”

The son of former state Rep. Peter Walden, Greg Walden was elected to the Oregon House in 1989. He was Majority Leader for the 1991 and 1993 legislative sessions. He served two years in the Oregon Senate from 1995 to 1997.

Walden has a reputation as one of the Republican’s most effective GOP fundraisers. He was deputy chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee when the GOP won control of the House in 2010 and kept it in 2012. He was chairman in 2014 and 2016, when the Republicans solidified their dominance in the House.

Republicans lost control of the House in the 2018 election. They still control the Senate.



Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said Walden’s departure raises the broader concern of politics continuing to shift to the extremes at either end of the spectrum.

Walden and his wife, Mylene, owned and operated radio stations in Hood River and The Dalles for more than two decades. They are the parents of two sons, Anthony, 29, and Garrison, who died of a congenital heart defect in 1994.

Despite his moderate leanings, Walden has maintained a relatively sanguine relationship with President Donald Trump over the last three years.

“My job is to get things done for the 2nd District of Oregon, first, and for the country,” he told OPB in late 2017, less than a year into Trump’s presidency. “I’m more valuable in doing that if I have a good strong, thoughtful relationship with the president of the United States.”

As Trump faces an impeachment inquiry by Democrats — and questions about whether he withheld foreign aid to Ukraine in an attempt to win political

favours from the country — Walden, like his Republican colleagues, has declined to criticize the president.

He’s accused Democrats of a flawed process in the inquiry, and in late September, he suggested that the known facts about Trump’s much-publicized phone call with the Ukrainian president did not amount to “high crimes and misdemeanors” that would be impeachable.

Still, Walden has not been in lockstep with his party’s standard bearer. He chafed in 2017 after he’d worked with the White House to craft legislation to overturn the Affordable Care Act. Trump first encouraged the bill, before calling it “mean” because it would result in millions losing their health coverage.

“It was not appreciated,” Walden told OPB. “I conveyed my displeasure to the White House.”

More recently, Walden

has parted company with Trump on legislation involving a border wall and sanctions on Russia, among other things.

While Walden’s departure from Congress had been a subject of speculation, it came as a surprise to Republicans in his home state.

State Rep. Daniel Bonham, R-The Dalles, represents a swath of Walden’s district. He said recently he’d heard nothing of the congressman’s plan to resign. “I’d bet against it, if I were a betting man,” he said.

Dan Lavey, a strategist who has helped with Republican campaigns, said last week he believed talk of Walden’s departure was “premature.”

Then there was Bentz, who said he’d talked to Walden months ago, shortly after speculation the congressman wouldn’t run again emerged. Bentz said

Walden made no mention of future plans, and he’d assumed the longtime lawmaker would run again next year.

“I would just hope that he is running again,” Bentz said last week. “Please, Greg. Please.”

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock said Walden’s departure raises the broader concern of politics continuing to shift to the extremes at either end of the spectrum.

Oregon is in effect a one-party state, he said, and political balance is crucial to good governance. He said he hoped Walden’s move out of politics does not continue the slide at the federal level.

When it comes to spitting about which Republicans might run for the seat, Murdock said, “You have you look at who has the horsepower.”

Bentz brings that kind of broader visibility, Murdock said, as does Knute Bue-

hler. The former state representative from Central Oregon ran a credible campaign for governor and thus has the experience to campaign throughout the district.

“And nobody in Portland is going to vote on this one,” he quipped.

Murdock also said he appreciates that Buehler ran as a moderate, again advocating for that sense of balance.

“We moderates could have a voice,” he said.

Walden’s announcement took Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, by surprise.

“He’s made a decision, and I respect that,” Hansell said. “It will be a huge loss for us in the district.”

He said he hailed Walden’s work with local national forest plans and with securing funding for the Eastern Oregon Airport as some of the involvement that made him “a champion” for the district.

“It’s an open seat, I think the Republican Party will work very hard to keep it,” Hansell added.

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepburner, who interned for Walden’s office in the early 1990s when the congressman was working as a state representative, wasn’t as taken aback by the Monday announcement.

“I think after 22 years, elected officials get tired and want to move on and do other things with their life. Greg has been a tremendous statesman,” he said. “We’ll be losing a tremendous amount of seniority in D.C.”

Smith said his “phone has been ringing off the hook” with people asking him if he’s going to run for Walden’s seat, but he feels like he’s better off serving as a senior legislator in Salem rather than a freshman representative in Washington.

Smith predicted that the Republican primary contest would be a “race to the right,” but a “mainstream” candidate would emerge as the nominee.

Oregon Public Broadcasting and the East Oregonian contributed to this report.

Science: Girls in Science STEM event has been enriching girls since 2001

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through a crime scene, sometimes they have to solve an environmental problem. This year was more health based: Is a zombie apocalypse possible?

Students from as far away as Fossil in Wheeler County made the trip to figure out how “Dr. Digory Potshard, Distinguished Fellow of Anthropology” turned gray-skinned and limp, unable to do much more than cast a vacant gaze from the confines of a wheelchair. The clues pointed to several possibilities. Could this be due to contact with mercury? Was it the sushi he ate? Perhaps some sort of poison? Had he provoked the ire of a Vodoun high priest and now existed under a curse?

The girls would need to check the evidence, run tests and create hypotheses about what happened to the good professor. And they had to act fast. The zombiism was spreading. Cavinato told the students she found two wandering the halls of the science building and had them captive in her lab for testing.

That prompted a murmur among the students and questions.

“Are the zombies tame?” one girl asked? Another said she understands zombies “eat brains.”

Cavinato assured the crowd these zombies were not rampant monsters. But she warned if anyone turns into a zombie, they might end up in the lab.

Working in three large groups, the students conducted an array of tests and experiments.



Owyhee Harguess, a student at Enterprise Elementary School, picks a fellow participant with a pointy object to test sense of touch during the 2019 Girls in Science event at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande on Saturday.

Brooke Eckstein of Stella Mayfield School, Elgin, and Malana Spencer of Sunridge Middle School, Pendleton, sought to determine if the white powder Potshard encountered could be the culprit. One deposited the powder into the testing tray, the other dropped vinegar over it, and they watched it bubble.

“I’m going to say it released a gas,” Eckstein stated before jotting down the observation in her lab book.

Several students at a time rotated through testing stations, and some were a tad

reluctant at first to get too near the zombies — university volunteers for the day — in the bio lab. But the girls soon enough tested the poor creatures to see the pupillary response to light, the knee-jerk reflex, their heartbeats and more.

Angela Baird of Baker said this was her first time attending and she enjoyed learning about DNA and using pipe cleaners to make a replica of a neuron.

“I call it Medusa because it looks like Medusa,” she said.

Paige Wolfe of Baker said she enjoys learning

about science so the whole day was a kick. Madison Bryant with Sunridge gave a similar assessment: “I like all of it.”

The event culminated with parents and other family members filling the back rows of Huber Auditorium at the university to witness the groups present their findings and conclusions. The three groups also reached consensus.

The zombies were conscious and human, they said, but as one young scientist told the crowd, Potshard was “sitting there like a bump on a log.” Only one



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
A “zombified professor” is rolled through the group of participants during introductions at the 2019 Eastern Oregon University Girls in Science event in La Grande on Saturday afternoon.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Eastern Oregon University student Austen Kalivas, center, assists La Grande Middle School students Kallin Burgess, left, and Ella Johnson in measuring the freezing point of an unknown metallic liquid during the annual Girls in Science event at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande on Saturday afternoon.

scenario accounted for his affliction, they said: Potshard ingested tetrodotoxin, the deadly neurotoxin of the puffer fish. And Potshard subsequently infected the

other zombies.

The mystery solved, the girls remained jazzed as they returned to their regular lives. And perhaps the zombies were as well.