

Full morning for a senator

Ron Wyden visits Umatilla County, discuss veteran affairs, drones, Latino issues

By ANTONIO ARREDONDO
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden on Thursday, July 7, highlighted the move to block certain changes at the Veterans Affairs clinic in Walla Walla.

Wyden was on a swing through Umatilla County and also visited the Hermiston Hispanic Advisory Committee and learned more about the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range.

Wyden held a press conference in the morning at the Oregon National Guard Aviation Facility at the airport in Pendleton to discuss the VA's Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission's proposals to reclassify the Walla Walla veterans facility as a community-based outpatient clinic and move its 31-bed residential rehabilitation treatment program 180 miles north of Walla Walla to Spokane. That proposal would have caused Eastern Oregon veterans to have to drive 180 miles to Spokane for other care.

"I'm also a veteran," Pendleton Mayor John Turner said, "and I use the VA in Walla Walla all the time, and I know that there are hundreds of veterans in Oregon who do the same."

Wyden recently held town halls for Eastern Oregon veterans, their families and veterans service providers to ask top VA officials about the proposals to change the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla. In the end, a bipartisan Senate committee, including Wyden, blocked the commission, securing the Walla Walla center for years to come.

Ken McCormack, chair for the Veterans Advisory Council in La Grande, covered some of the staffing issues the VA has faced, a problem Wyden said he would look into.

"I want to pledge today that I will keep watchdogging this issue on behalf of rural veterans," Wyden said,



U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden speaks Thursday, July 7, 2022, at the Oregon National Guard Aviation Facility in Pendleton.

"because I know that there are a lot of questions."

Pendleton UAS Range

Wyden headed to the nearby Eastern Oregon Regional Airport for a meeting to discuss drone testing and its economic impact on the airport.

Wyden remarked he was shocked when driving in, noting the newly-built Radisson Hotel. It's certainly a far cry from what the airport used to be, a sentiment Steve Chrisman, Pendleton economic development director and interim airport manager, agreed with. "The airport was dying, there was no hope in generating operations," Chrisman said.

Chrisman estimates Pendleton's UAS range is one of the best in the nation, and the burgeoning work at the range is driving the construction of the Raddison and more.

The drone tech is something that interests Wyden. "I am a privacy hawk," he said, "I think we've seen the needs for some of that recently, but part of privacy policy is not freezing technology out, but about how we use technology."

The technology not only has increased airport revenue, it also increased interest. Sitting next to the senator and local officials were four interns — recent Pendleton

High graduates interested in the program.

With all that interest comes some complication.

"It's all about the red tape," UAS pilot and instructor Michael Avery said. "If it wasn't for the (certificates of waiver or authorization) with the UAS, we wouldn't be able to get off the ground."

Addressing cultural gaps

That meeting concluded a busy day for Wyden in Eastern Oregon, which began at 8:30 that morning with a meeting with the Hermiston Hispanic Advisory Council at the Hermiston Public Library.

"There's a lot of hate in the world towards immigrants right now," City Councilor Maria Duron told Wyden. "About how we're here to take other people's jobs. I would like for that to turn around."

Wyden used the meeting as one to build ideas, aiming to work with the committee to solve problems. He suggested designating Duron as someone who could find immigrant success stories to tell.

Other issues also arose. Some Hermiston Latino residents may not understand how to file taxes and delegate that task to their children.

"The children end up educating their parents and play a third parent role," City

Councilor Roy Barron said, "We want the next generation to be successful and balance those roles."

Mark Gomolski, vice-chair of the committee as well as the executive director for Agape House food bank, raised concerns about food access. While Agape House receives food from several vendors, it gets very little Hispanic food. Gomolski often has to travel to fields to distribute what little rice and beans he has.

Wyden agreed with most of the points made and challenged the group to take the next step.

"We need to start talking about what the legislative steps are," Wyden said. "I don't think we can recreate a big bill right now, I don't think we can, but we ought to get started."

After an hour, Wyden closed the meeting with the committee by offering his support. As a child of immigrant parents who escaped the Nazis from Germany, he related to many of the issues that the Hermiston Latino community is still dealing with today, including Duron's point made at the beginning of the discussion.

"A lot of people are angry about immigration, but they forget where they come from," Wyden said. "Unless you are Native American, you are part of the immigrant experience like the Wyden family."

LOCAL BRIEFING

May, June were the wettest of this century

PENDLETON — Almost twice as much rain fell in April, May and June in Pendleton as the 30-year normal for those months, 1991 to 2020, according to National Weather Service records.

In January, February and March, the region still was in drought, with 3.60 inches of precipitation at Pendleton, versus the normal of 4.04. But a deluge fell in April, May and June, with 7.22 inches of rain, 1.95 times the norm of 3.71.

June was the wettest of this century in Pendleton, at 2.16 inches of precipitation. It barely beat June 2017, when 2.15 inches of rain fell.

May also set a record for this century, at 3.04 inches, versus 2.97 in 2010. April 2010 and 2012 were soggy, at 2.04 and 2.50 inches, than this year's 2.02.

The rainiest May since 1894 occurred in 1906, when 3.36 inches fell. The record for June was set at 2.90 inches in 1923. The accuracy of early weather records at Pendleton has been challenged, however.

Pendleton renews convention center catering contract

PENDLETON — Food service at the Pendleton Convention Center is set for the next three years, but that could turn into a nine-year run for the Pendleton Catering Co.

The Pendleton City Council at its meeting on Tuesday, July 5, approved a new contract with Pendleton Catering to provide food and drink service for the convention center. According to a statement from Pat Beard, convention center manager, the new three-year contract ends June 21, 2025, and the city can extend it twice after that date, potentially giving the company a nine-year deal.

Pendleton Catering Co. began in 2018 and took over the food service and catering contract at the convention center in 2021 for one year. Since then, the company has broken every sales record the center tracks: most gross sales in a month, most offsite sales in a month and most alcohol receipts in a month.

Beard said he expected the business this year to surpass the annual sales record of \$500,000.

Per the terms of the contract, Pendleton Catering collects 15% commission on in-house catered events and 5% offsite.

Hermiston city councilor earns spot on ODC

HERMISTON — Hermiston City Councilor Nancy Peterson recently took a seat on the Oregon Disabilities Commission.

The ODC is a governor-appointed commission housed in the Department of Human Services. Peterson will be one of 15 members of the commission, which aims to identify and hear the needs of Oregon's disabled individuals and prioritize public policy that should be addressed.

"You know all of the lobbyists for companies that come to the government and talk about their company?" Peterson said. "Well, we are the lobbyist groups on

behalf of the public."

Most of the members of the ODC have disabilities; Peterson is a non-binary disabled person. Along with their work on the city council and now the disabilities commission, Peterson also works for Columbia Basin College as a disability services accessibility specialist.



Peterson

Peterson has been a member of the Hermiston City Council since winning

an election in 2020 and has a long history of diversity rights activism, advocating for many disabled people.

"Government is not about wearing a tie or sweaters," Peterson said, "it's about letting people know which road to walk on—or in my case, roll on—to get the job done."

If you are interested in joining one of the 250 commissions available in the state of Oregon, go to www.oregon.gov/gov/Pages/board-list.aspx.

Umatilla County burn ban to start Thursday

PENDLETON — Umatilla County's burn ban begins Thursday, July 14, the board of commissioners decided at its July 6 meeting.

The unusually wet spring left conditions about a month behind last year, county Planning Director Bob Waldher reported.

Airport passenger traffic up 32% in first half of 2022

PENDLETON — Air travel at Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, Pendleton, was up in the first half of this year compared to last.

Departing and arriving passengers were higher every month in 2022 than in 2021. Enplanements were up 31.6% and deplanements were up 32.5% for the six-month period, according to data from the city.

There were no delayed or canceled flights during the Fourth of July weekend, according to Boutique Air's records, despite widespread chaos in the national air transport system.

Steve Chrisman, Pendleton economic development director and interim airport manager, Erica Stewart, administrative specialist, reported Boutique in 2021 had 4,108 boardings and 3,994 disembarkations. The first six months of last year saw 1,725 passengers deplane and 1,803 board. In the first half of this year, 2,372 passengers departed and 2,285 arrived.

Former airport manager John Honneman provided figures for previous years of Boutique's service. The effect of the pandemic on flights is dramatic, crashing from 561 boardings in January 2020 to 58 in April.

Passenger numbers have not yet recovered to their pre-pandemic peak of 642 enplanements in October 2019. That year, 6,763 passengers boarded. Enplanements fell to 3,565 in 2020, then rose to 4,108 in 2021. If the trend for the first half of this year continues, 2022 could register more than 5,400 boardings.

—EO Media Group

UMATILLA COUNTY

Commissioners OK election banning psilocybin

By JOHN TILLMAN
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Umatilla County voters get to decide in November if they want to prohibit psilocybin businesses.

The county board of commissioners at its meeting Wednesday, July 6, in Pendleton voted to place a county law on the November general election ballot to ban psilocybin manufacturing and service centers.

"I passionately move to adopt Ordinance No. 2022-08," Commissioner Dan Dorran said.

Commissioner George Murdock "passionately" seconded the motion.

The motion passed 3-0.

Psilocybin is a hallucinogenic alkaloid in some toadstool mushrooms, the spore-bearing, fruiting body of a fungus. Oregon voters in November 2020 approved Ballot Measure 109, the Oregon Psilocybin Service Act, which allowed for the manufacture, delivery and administration of psilocybin at licensed facilities.



Peter Dejong/The Associated Press, File

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners are letting voters decide in November if they want to prohibit psilocybin businesses. This photo from Aug. 3, 2007, shows psilocybin mushrooms in a grow room in the Netherlands.

The vote in Umatilla County was strongly in opposition to the state measure, with 64% against and 36% in favor. The county board at its June 29 meeting expressed its desire to have local voters decide whether to allow psilocybin manufacturing and centers in the county. Staff drafted an ordinance to implement a ban and refer the matter to the voters.

Under Measure 109, the Oregon Health Authority regulates the manufacturing,

transportation, delivery, sale and purchase of psilocybin products and the provision of services for the psychoactive drug in the state. OHA initiated a rule-making process to implement the state's psilocybin regulatory program and intends to begin accepting applications for related licenses on Jan. 2, 2023, according to the board.

OHA by July 6 had not completed the rule-making process for implementing the state's psilocybin regu-

latory program. The county board was uncertain how the manufacture, delivery and administration of psilocybin at licensed facilities would operate within the county.

Measure 109 also provided the governing body of a county or city may adopt an ordinance to be referred to the electors of the jurisdiction prohibiting the establishment of state licensed psilocybin product manufacturers and service centers in the area subject to the local government.

Based on Umatilla County voters' rejection of Ballot Measure 109, commissioners sought to let voters decide the question of establishing a ban on state-licensed psilocybin product manufacturers and service centers within the unincorporated areas of the county.

The county board unanimously adopted the ordinance, deeming it necessary for the immediate preservation of public peace, health and safety.

If voters approve it Nov. 8, the county law would go into effect 30 days after.

Hand Crafted Loans for Eastern Oregon Homes
Umpqua offers a full range of home loan programs, whether you are buying, refinancing, building or renovating.

UMPQUA BANK Home Lending

Lee Ann Ottosen
HL Loan Officer
NHLS 277636

T (541) 304-6112
C (541) 969-8020

LeeAnnOttosen@umpquabank.com
UmpquaBank.com/Lee-Ann-Ottosen

Member FDIC Equal Housing Lender SBA Preferred Lender NHLS 4026

Wildflower
SALON AND SPA

540 S Main St Stanfield
(541)-561-5653

FARM CITY PRO RODEO

Kids ages 4-7 years weighing 55 lbs. or less
24 contestants will be chosen from a blind draw
MUTTON BUSTIN' SIGN-UPS

EOTEC
RODEO MERCANTILE
1705 E Airport Rd
Hermiston, OR 97838
July 14, 2022
Sign up - 6:00 pm
Draw - 6:30 pm

Child and parent/guardian must be present for sign-ups and weigh-in. Insurance documents must be signed.