

Walden questions Trump's border wall emergency

By Jayati Ramakrishnan and Phil Wright
East Oregonian

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden's town hall meeting Monday morning in Boardman was his first public appearance in the area since being re-elected to Oregon's Congressional District 2. By noon he was in Pendleton for a speaking appearance with the Pendleton Rotary Club.

During the two events he touched on immigration, energy, the government shutdown and more.

Wall emergency

The Republican congressman talked about the recent turmoil in Washington, D.C., as President Donald Trump shut down the government for 35 days over funding for a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border. Walden said he broke with his party on some aspects of the shutdown, saying he felt employees at agencies, such as the Forest Service and Department of Agriculture, shouldn't be suffering over a border security issue.

He said he was pleased to see a deal to avoid another shutdown and fund the federal government that included money for 55 miles of new border wall but also money for humanitarian aid on the border, more border agents and to help handle the increase in years-long backlog of asylum seekers.

Audience members asked Walden how he would vote if Congress tried to stop Trump in his declaration of a national emergency over the border wall. He said he was against executive overreach and did not like it when President Barack Obama made that kind of end around Congress.

"If what Trump is doing exceeds the authority Congress has given him, I'll have a big problem with it," he told the Rotary audience.

The other problem, he pointed out, is the precedent this sets. What happens, Walden asked, when the next president uses executive power to declare an emergency?

"I wish he hadn't done it, quite frankly," Walden said.

Still, Walden stopped short of saying for certain he would oppose Trump, and Walden called the Trump administration's policy of separating children from their parents at the border "a real mistake," but said he too supports securing the southern border.

"We see people coming for a better life, but we also see people coming across



Rep. Greg Walden, R-Oregon, greets a veteran on Monday before a town hall in Boardman.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney/East Oregonian



Rep. Greg Walden, R-Oregon, speaks about former Port of Morrow Director Gary Neal on Monday at a town hall in Boardman before giving him an honorary plaque.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

for human trafficking, drug trafficking," he said.

But he said border control had always been a bipartisan issue, and cited the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which authorized about 700 miles of fence along the southern border. He said several Democrats, including Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden and then-Congresswoman Darlene Hooley, voted for that bill. Walden also said the

country needs an immigration system that provides for workforce needs and a path to citizenship.

Changing climate

Walden also talked about his goals for forest manage-

ment and reducing forest fires in Oregon.

An audience member in Boardman, Steve Murray, noted in response to the recently proposed Green New Deal, Walden had said Republicans have better ideas on climate change.

"But on the Energy and Commerce Committee, you didn't hold any hearings on climate change," said Murray, who had traveled from The Dalles to hear Walden. "The biggest reason we're having forest fires isn't forest management — it's climate change. Something needs to happen."

Walden said he agreed something needed to happen, but said he focused more on expanding the energy grid to use more renewable energy.

"Climate change is real," he said, and the question is what to do about it. He said he comes down on the side of innovation to provide the

answers. He pointed to the recently announced Wheatridge project, which will be built in Morrow County to combine large-scale wind, solar and battery storage power.

"This is the kind of innovation I'm for," he said. "If we don't have the right capacity, we can't put renewable energy into it."

And the U.S. has a responsibility to tackle climate change.

"It should be us," he said. "We helped create this mess, we should help clean it up."

He also said while he thinks climate change is a factor in forest fires, he focused on forest management.

"Shouldn't we try to reduce the fuel load to cut those catastrophic fires?" he said.

Bob Haechrel, also from The Dalles, said he had called Walden's office, wanting to understand if there were parts of the Green New Deal on which he felt he could work with Democrats.

"To your point on the Green New Deal, it's a resolution, not actually implemented legislation," Walden said. "Clearly, there are things we can work together on."

But he said he was against some components of the proposed resolution.

"If the goal is to put down the cattle industry in 10 years, I'm not for that," he said. "If the goal is to put us all on high-speed rail, I don't think that will work very well. I don't want the federal government taking over that much," he said.

Debt and pot

The national debt reaching \$22 trillion is a concern, Walden said, but the real problem are programs, such as Medicare and paying the interest on the debt as opposed to defense spending. As Americans, he said, "we're going to have to have a pretty serious conversation" about the federal government not funding as many programs.

And Walden is changing his tune on marijuana. One propane dealer in southern Oregon said the government needs to change something, Walden said, because his clients pay in stacks of cash. Walden said he is not "quite there" in legalizing cannabis, but maybe the federal government could manage it like alcohol.

But items, such as marijuana gummy bears, smack of the tobacco industry's Joe Camel methods to lure younger users, he said, and if the feds did treat marijuana like booze, states are not going to receive federal help with treatment programs.

Walden will return to Umatilla County for a town hall at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, Hermiston, on March 15 at 4 p.m.

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