

Joseph Charter students question Sen. Ron Wyden

By RONALD BOND
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Views on education, the current unrest in the Middle East, the U.S. Capitol attack and taxes were all among questions Joseph Charter School students asked U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden during a “Listening to the Future” Zoom call Monday, May 17.

The afternoon virtual meeting gave seventh through 12th graders at JCS an opportunity to inquire of the Democratic senator and chairman of the Committee on Finance anything they wanted.

One seventh-grade student asked Wyden about his thoughts on the U.S. Capitol attack on Jan. 6. The senior senator from Oregon called it “horrendous,” and said his first thought on it was that the attack was something one would hear about happening in other countries, but not America.

“This was, in my opinion, domestic terrorism, because domestic terrorism is when you are willing to resort to violence to obtain a political objective,” he said. “In our country, the Founding Fathers said absolutely peaceful protest, but violence is absolutely out. That applies in Portland, Oregon, that applies in Washington, D.C. that applies in rural communities. Violence, out.”

He was also asked about education, and talked about both the cost of it and addressed a question about trade schools. He brought up a bill he has proposed, the Retirement Parity for Student Loans Act (though he didn’t state it by name) that would give employers an option to pay into their employees’ retirement plans an amount equal to a percentage of that employee’s monthly student loan payment.

He was also asked why education seems geared more toward college rather than trade school, and said he is working to change that.

“I am spending a lot of time trying to reimagine education,” he said. “A lot of trade schools are a much better fit for a lot of students. They can see there is a path to a job that pays good wages. For a lot of young people, you may decide you want to pursue a trade.”

He said part of that would be aided by companies coming into schools to discuss their trades.

Sophomore Maleah Murray asked Wyden where he stood in the Israel/Palestine conflict, which has heated up again in recent weeks.

Wyden said in his opinion, the best option is a two-state solution.

“Right now we gotta have a case fire. The Biden people should be hip deep in the middle of trying to tell people ‘We gotta work together,’” he said. “This is doing enormous damage to everyone in the region.”

He also was asked about what employers should do given the challenges hiring employees — even with a high number of job openings — with the student citing current unemployment benefit levels as part of the reason people aren’t going back to work.

Wyden said he is intending to soon introduce legislation that would have unemployment benefits linked to the unemployment rate, that bring the amount of benefits down as the rate decreased, and vice versa.

“I think the fair approach for employers and for workers is let’s make future benefits tied to real life unemployment in our communities,” he said. “That is the kind of thing that I think is a winning strategy.”

And when asked what a citizen who is too young to vote can do to get heard, he said what was happening Monday in the students talking to their senator was an example of a step to take.

“The fact you are participating today is a way to hold elected officials accountable,” he said.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Seventeen-year-old Weston-McEwen senior Bailey Munck testifies remotely from Pendleton on March 25, 2021, for Senate Bill 649, known as Bailey’s Bill. The bill increases penalties for criminal sexual contact with an underage victim when the defendant is the victim’s teacher.

Rarely used House rule saves Bailey’s Bill

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

SALEM — Members of the House Judiciary Committee dusted off a seldom-used rule last week to force a hearing for Bailey’s Bill.

Officially named Senate Bill 649, Bailey’s Bill increases penalties for criminal sexual contact with an underage victim if the offender is the victim’s teacher. Currently, a coach convicted of sexual abuse in the third degree receives harsher penalties than a teacher who commits the exact same crime. The legislation is named for Weston-McEwen High School student Bailey Munck, who testified on March 25 to the Oregon Senate’s judiciary committee, telling of sexual abuse in 2019 during a volleyball road trip by Andrew DeYoe, an English teacher and scorekeeper for the volleyball team.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athens, and Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Milwaukie, introduced and shepherded

the bill through the Senate. Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee voted unanimously to send the bill to the full Senate, where it was passed without opposition. The bill then headed to the House, where it seemed a legislative slam dunk.

Last week, however, committee Chairwoman Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Clackamas, indicated she likely wouldn’t be scheduling a hearing for the bill, essentially stopping its progress.

Noble said committee members tried other strategies first. When efforts to urge Bynum to schedule a hearing failed, they finally resorted to House Rule 8.20. Noble said all nine mem-

bers simply thought the bill deserved to be considered.

“People who we entrust with our youth must be held to a higher standard,” he said. “They have to be held accountable.”

Tactics kept bill stalled

Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, who is shepherding the bill on the House side, felt relief when the bill became unstuck. Bynum had stopped by Levy’s desk to let her know the bill was moving again.

Levy said she had communicated with Bynum about her reasons for holding up the bill, but said, “I’m going to let her speak for herself.”

Bynum told Oregonian reporter Chris Lehman that she is frustrated about legislation designed to dial back the effects of Measure 11 that is stalled. She expressed no reservations about Bailey’s Bill, but seemed to be using it as a bargaining chip.

“I don’t have any problems with the bill itself,” she told the Oregonian. “I just have a problem with picking and choosing who gets justice.”

Noble, a former McMinnville police chief, said he knew about the rule because he studied the rulebook the same way he studied the criminal code as a law enforcement officer.

“It’s in my nature to get a feel for what’s out there,” he said.

Levy is all in. She hopes

to meet Munck, now 17, and tell her how proud of her she is.

“It’s criminally wrong that teachers aren’t held to the same high standard as coaches,” she said. “Children are our greatest assets and we need to protect them.”

Levy planned to testify May 18, along with Hansell, Munck and others.

While testifying remotely to the Senate Judiciary Committee of the Oregon Legislature in March, the teenager was direct.

“What is the significant difference between a teacher and a coach? Do coaches somehow carry more authority than a teacher might?” she asked the senators. “Coaches and teachers should be prosecuted equally as they both have responsibility for students’ safety and they both have positions of authority and power over their students and players.”

If Munck’s abuser, DeYoe, had been a coach, he might have been convicted of a Class C felony, a crime that carries sentences up to five years in prison and a \$125,000 fine. But DeYoe wasn’t technically a coach. Instead, DeYoe, 31, got a lighter sentence. In the plea deal, he forfeited his teaching license, terminated his housing lease in Athena and agreed to have no contact with minors who are not family members. He spent a night in the Umatilla County Jail and will serve five years probation. He wasn’t required to register as a sex offender.

Adding the words “and teachers” to the existing law would close the loophole, said Munck and others who testified that day. This is a simple fix, they said.

“This is a solid bipartisan bill,” Levy said. “It should pass out of the House with full support and go to the governor’s desk to be signed.”

“PEOPLE WHO WE ENTRUST WITH OUR YOUTH MUST BE HELD TO A HIGHER STANDARD.”

— Rep. Ron Noble, R-McMinnville

The deadline was Friday, May 14.

So on Wednesday, May 12, Hansell feared the worst, but by the end of the day his worry had whipsawed to jubilation. Rep. Ron Noble, R-McMinnville, called to say that the nine members of the judicial committee had invoked House Rule 8.20 that says if a majority of committee members request a hearing in writing, the chairman must schedule a hearing within five days.

“Every single Republican and Democrat on the committee signed a letter requesting a hearing,” Hansell said. “It’s scheduled for (Tuesday, May 18).”

Chief House Clerk Tim Sekerak mused that he had never seen the rule invoked in his almost 10 years at the Oregon Capitol. He said Deputy Chief Clerk Obie Rutledge has worked there since the early 2000s and also doesn’t remember the rule being used.

“This is an extremely rare occurrence,” Sekerak said. “When this many members of a committee want to do something, the chair usually works something out.”

Noble, a former McMinn-

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