

'This, for me, is a fight for the ages'

**TOWN HALL continued
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to do it," Wyden said, adding that he thinks a possible way to fund such a system would be to allow employers, who cover about 160 million Americans, to allocate the money they would spend on health care to a single-payer system and then allow the employer to write the money off on their taxes.

Wyden said he thinks it makes sense to try a single-payer health care system in the states before trying to overhaul a national health care system that accounts for one-sixth of the economy.

Section 1332 of the Affordable Care Act allows states to apply for a State Innovation Waiver to pursue "innovative strategies" for providing their residents with high quality, affordable health insurance.

"It's not a question of defending the status quo," Wyden said. "It's indefensible. It's a question of how do we get from where we are going forward, and I think we have found a way to do it."

Wyden also told Grand Ronde resident Patrice Qualman, who attended with her wheelchair-bound 14-year-old son Cody, that he would fight to preserve Medicaid funding and against those who want to unravel the health care safety net in the United States.

"This, for me, is a fight for the

ages," Wyden said. "It really is a fight about who we are and what are our values."

Wyden spent much of the 90-minute session leaning against the gym stage, holding a microphone in his left hand while gesturing with his right hand.

He was introduced by Tribal Council members Chris Mercier, Tonya Gleason-Shepek and Denise Harvey, who gifted him a Tribal beaded necklace before the start of the question-and-answer session. Tribal Council member Kathleen George also attended the Town Hall, as did Tribal Attorney Rob Greene and Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez.

Wyden started the Town Hall – his 828th since being elected in 1996 – by asking that he not receive any partisan questions and that he not be queried about recent tweets sent out by President Donald Trump.

"No subject is off-limits," Wyden said, "but I would just as soon not get into presidential tweeting. The last day or two has kind of been over the top."

Tribal Cultural Resources Department Manager David Harrelson asked one of the first questions, expressing his concern that language being used by current Trump administration officials in the Department of the Interior is reminiscent of rhetoric used during the

Termination era of the 1950s.

"Grassroots pressure really matters," Wyden said, referencing an outpouring of protest before Congress's Fourth of July break that stalled passage of the Senate's "horrible" health care bill. "That is what we are going to need as it relates to these Termination policies as well. It goes right to the heart of the survival of the Tribes. ... What we saw this week is that political change doesn't start very often in Washington, D.C., and trickle down. It's almost always bottom up so that as people get involved, they see what it really means if we were to walk all over history and throw out Tribal rights, rights that have been acknowledged for decades and decades, what a setback that would do to the cause of freedom and liberty. What people don't realize is the government's word is probably as fundamental as anything else. I'm all in with the Tribes in this fight."

Several attendees, including Tribal Elder Wink Soderberg, asked Wyden what he is doing in the U.S. Senate to find common ground between Republicans and Democrats to get results.

"I made, as my kind of priority No. 1, trying to find common ground," Wyden said. "Trying to find common ground built around what I call common sense, which is sort of the Oregon way. We try to stand for good ideas. We'll take

them wherever they are from. Liberal. Conservative. Whatever. We'll just try to come up with practical results. So much of what is going on back there just kind of misses the point. People on the right and the left just throw rotten fruit at each other and nothing gets done.

"What I try to do in every way possible is to focus on the really big issues – health care, taxes, transportation, education – the kinds of things that relate to how do you make the quality of life better for working people, seniors, typical Oregonians. ... It requires recognizing that there are values that both sides feel strongly about and they can respect the other's point of view."

During the Town Hall, Wyden also discussed the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision, federal funding for the Newberg-Dundee bypass project, improving the state's economy, a free and open Internet, federal aid for first-time homebuyers and defending Oregon voters' decision to legalize recreational and medical marijuana use.

"This is fundamentally a states' rights question," Wyden said about the Justice Department possibly cracking down on marijuana use in states that have legalized its use. "A lot of politicians say they are for states' rights. What they really mean is that they are for states' rights if they think the state is right." ■



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