

Local & State

Wild Turkey Federation banquet Saturday

The Baker County Longbeards, the local chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, will have its annual hunting heritage banquet Saturday, Feb. 2, at the Baker Elks Lodge, 1896 Second St. Doors open at 5 p.m., with dinner

beginning at 6 p.m. Ticket prices are \$60 for an individual, \$85 for a couple and \$25 for those younger than 18. Attendees can also choose from a variety of sponsor packages that include

raffle tickets, hats and other items. More information about the banquet and about activities of the Baker County chapter is available by calling Bob Reedy at 541-403-1352 or by email, breezy68@msn.com

Wyden weighs in on shutdown, health care, clean energy future

By Gary A. Wamer
WesCom News Service

EUGENE — All things being equal, Ron Wyden would rather have been in Bend Saturday.

Instead, the senior U.S. senator from Oregon was in Washington, D.C., called back to take part in what were mostly party-line votes attempting to end the record partial government shutdown. Both votes failed to pass legislation Thursday.

“The question is how do you get out of this fact-free zone?” Wyden said last week.

The shutdown ended Friday when President Donald Trump agreed to a deal to reopen the government, at least temporarily.

Wyden, a Democrat who was first elected in 1996 to represent Oregon in the U.S. Senate, had to cancel town halls in Central Oregon, including one scheduled for Saturday in Bend. Wyden said he hopes to reschedule the events for the near future.

In advance of the planned Bend town hall, Wyden recently sat down for a conversation in a Eugene coffee house, part of a busy morning that included a local public radio interview and an appearance at the local version of the annual national Women’s March.

It has been a generally frustrating couple of years for Wyden, as a member of the Senate minority dealing with Trump, a Republican. From his perspective, there is hope for change in the Capitol after Democrats captured the House in the 2018 election.

Being in the minority has meant most often having to act as a guerrilla political fighter on issues such as alleged corruption and influence peddling in the Trump administration, Russian interference in American elections and judicial appointments that Wyden says are moving the courts to favor the rich and powerful. There have been few recent political wins in the Senate for Democrats, but Wyden says he has tried to use his position to ask questions he thinks the public has the right to know.

On Thursday, Wyden joined with 14 Democratic senators (plus Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., who caucuses with the Democrats), to call on the Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission to investigate how wireless carriers allowed data brokers, bounty hunters

“If you believe, as I do, in border security, there’s a right way to do it. A way grounded in facts and evidence. This isn’t it.”

— U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., talking about why he opposes funding for the wall President Donald Trump wants to build along a section of the U.S.-Mexican border

and other “shady users” to track Americans’ cellphones without their consent.

For Wyden, the recent record-length federal shutdown is evidence of a system that has damaged the country in countless ways because of Trump’s willingness to shut down the government over funding for a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

“If you believe, as I do, in border security, there’s a right way to do it,” Wyden said. “A way grounded in facts and evidence. This isn’t it.”

Meanwhile, he said Thursday, his constituents are being hurt.

“We’re starting to see the effects on Oregon,” Wyden said. “If you’re a farmer or student, you’re having problems getting loans processed. If you’re a small business with a tax hassle, there isn’t anybody home at the IRS. And if you live next to a heavily forested community, we’re not getting the wildfire work done. The fire season is not that long away.”

Republicans will retain control of the Senate for at least the next two years, but Wyden said some recent changes have opened the door to a few areas of bipartisan work. He praised the new chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, who he said has an open mind on some renewable energy efforts.

“Chuck Grassley, hey, has been very supportive of wind,” Wyden said.

Wyden is hoping that his idea to radically revise energy tax breaks will at least get an honest hearing.

“I propose taking 44 separate tax breaks on energy — mostly relics of yesteryear, dirty relics — and throwing them in the garbage can,” Wyden said. “Substitute three instead: one for clean energy, one for clean transportation and one for fuel efficiency.”

Wyden said such a move would align economic and

environmental benefits.

“That means when someone in Central Oregon wants to replace a piece of equipment, they are going to want to buy something newer, cleaner and more energy efficient.”

Clean energy is a natural move for Oregon, Wyden said.

“We don’t have fossil fuels in Oregon, so our choice is either look for ways to speed up this transition that is good for Oregon, is good for the country, or just cling to the idea of spending more money for yesteryear,” he said.

Wyden said that while hot-button issues like building the wall come and go, one issue dominates questions at his town halls: health care.

“Health care costs are gobbling up everything in sight,” Wyden said.

Wyden said he was hopeful he and Grassley could continue earlier work they did together on bipartisan legislation to curb “prescription drug rip-offs.”

Wyden said the burdens of medical costs were especially sharp for middle-aged and older Americans who get health coverage on the open market.

“Right now, they have protection for having pre-existing conditions, but Donald Trump wants to roll that back.”

Getting back on track with health care reform and supporting Medicare is a bedrock issue, Wyden said.

“If you and your loved ones don’t have their health, then nothing else matters,” Wyden said. “It makes it hard to do things on a daily basis that are important to your job and your family.”

Wyden said health care should not just be for “the healthy and wealthy,” with big profits going to corporations and “middlemen.”

“This year we are going to clock in about \$3.5 trillion in health care spending,” Wyden said. “There are about 320 million of us. If you divide \$3.5 trillion by 320 million,

you could send every family of four in America a check for somewhere in the ballpark of \$40,000 a year to buy health care. We’re spending enough. We just aren’t doing enough to contain the cost. That is really the Achilles’ heel of current policy.”

Wyden said some of the key points to holding costs down is to rein in pharmaceutical companies, cut back benefits managers, add more non-M.D. medical providers such as nurse physicians and create a centralized medical billing system.

“The bureaucratic water torture, with this flood of forms and processes — that is something both sides should be addressing,” Wyden said.

Medicare reform has to be bipartisan, Wyden said.

“Medicare is now dominated by cancer, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, chronic pulmonary disease and the like,” Wyden said. “We’re looking at 80 percent of Medicare spending going to people who have two or more of these conditions.”

One way to streamline the medical system is to increase focus on caring for people with chronic illnesses at home instead of in hospitals or other institutions.

“You get better care for lower cost and more happiness,” Wyden said.

Technology and media have rapidly expanded the availability of resources for in-home care.

“In Central Oregon, expansion of telehealth and rural broadband are two sides of the same coin,” Wyden said.

Demographic-driven change is coming, Wyden said — it’s just a question of how the change will be handled.

“Medicare is the biggest structural budget challenge facing America,” Wyden said. “There are 10,000 people who turn 65 every day and it will be the case for years to come.”

Wyden said “Medicare is a guarantee” the government has made to its citizens. But he said it is up to voters to keep the issue at the top of the political conversation.

“If you ask your congressman or other official about the federal budget, and they don’t talk about Medicare, it’s not on the level. It’s not a real conversation.”

LOCAL BRIEFING

Locals on Montana State honor roll

BOZEMAN, Mont. — Two Baker City students, Allison Brown and Zachary Tomac, were named to the President’s Honor Roll for earning perfect 4.0 grade-point averages during the fall 2018 semester at Montana State University.

Students on EOU dean’s list

LA GRANDE — More than 20 local students were named to the dean’s list for the fall 2018 term at Eastern Oregon University. To qualify, students must maintain a grade-point average of at least 3.5 and have a minimum of 12 hours of graded coursework.

Baker City

Dione Ashby, Keaton Bachman, Dylan Chaves, Amanda Daugherty, Evan Daugherty, Tonya Dias, James Dunlap, Madison Elms, Isabella Evans, Austin Folkman, Melissa Foltz, Aiden Hayes, Makenna Huggins, Matea Huggins, Wyatt Knadle, Samantha Martin, Megan McGuinness, Whitney Rilee, Ashley Smith, Braden Staebler-Siewell, Molly Wynn

Halfway

Mayen McCoy

Huntington

Gabrielle Smith

North Powder

Kate Jesenko

Oxbow

Nathan Seggerman

Homeless resource event set Jan. 30

Community Connection has scheduled a homeless resource event Wednesday, Jan. 30, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the Baker County Senior Center, 2810 Cedar St.

The event is part of a nationwide one-day effort to record the number of homeless people. During the Baker City event homeless individuals and families can meet officials from local support agencies such as Northeast Oregon Housing Authority, Baker County Public Transportation, MayDay Inc. and more. Food, beverages and cold weather items will be available for no charge.

More information is available by calling Amanda Reeves at 541-523-6591.

Baker City Tree Board to meet

The Baker City Tree Board will meet Wednesday, Jan. 30, at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St.

Agenda items include a tree inventory project, a landscape plan for the Churchill School project and discussion of trees for Central Park.

Bunco night fundraiser for MOPS

A Valentine-themed Bunco night for women that’s also a fundraiser for a local mothers’ group is set for Feb. 7 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Baker City Nazarene Church, 1250 Hughes Lane.

Cost is \$5. Snacks will be provided. Proceeds benefit the local MOPS group — Mothers of Preschoolers.

County planners to hear cell tower plan

The Baker County Planning Commission will have a public hearing Feb. 12 to consider a request for a conditional-use permit to build a cellphone tower on private land near Unity.

The applicant is New Cingular Wireless. The company wants to build a 199-foot-high tower on land owned by Bill and Nancy Moore. The tower would fill a gap in cellular service coverage for AT&T customers in the Unity area, according to the Baker City-County Planning Department.

The public hearing will start at 5 p.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St.

Copies of the application and other documents are available by email for no cost. More information is available by calling Eva Henes at 541-523-8219, by email at ehenes@bakercounty.org or by visiting the Planning Department in the basement of the Courthouse.

Weekly Specials Jan 28 - Feb 3

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Tuesday	All You Can Eat Spaghetti.....	\$8.95
Wednesday	Teriyaki Chicken.....	\$8.95
Thursday	Chicken Fried Steak.....	\$9.95
Friday	All You Can Eat Mini Shrimp.....	\$9.95
	Steak & Shrimp.....	\$10.95
	Pan Fried Oysters.....	\$10.50
	Prime Rib.....	\$13.95
Saturday	NY Steak.....	\$13.95
	Prime Rib.....	\$13.95
Sunday	Please call for special.....	\$9.50/8.95 sr

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