

# Local & State

CONGRESSMAN WON'T RUN FOR RE-ELECTION IN 2020

## Walden reflects on 'great, joyful journey,' 'incredible opportunity'

By Pat Caldwell  
Malheur Enterprise

VALE — Some of the best moments from Greg Walden's tenure as a congressman happened far away from the lights and political drama of Washington, D.C. and occurred in places like Jordan Valley or Pendleton or Ontario.

It was in those rural and often secluded locations where Walden felt most at home. The memories of those visits will remain as he prepares to walk away from the nation's Capitol.

"I've had an incredible opportunity. It has been a great, joyful journey," Walden said in an interview with the Malheur Enterprise.

Walden, who is one of the most influential Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill, announced last week that he will not run for reelection.

The longtime Oregon lawmaker said no single event triggered his decision.

"You know, it is a personal decision. For me, after 30 years of public service, 22 in the House, I am ready to turn a chapter and close the chapter on public service," said Walden.

Walden said before every election he talks future plans over with his wife. Usually, he said, the vote is unanimous to continue.

"As we approached this one, it was a little different discussion. I was like, 'I am ready to do something new and different,'" said Walden.

Walden's decision is unique in that he will walk away from the halls of American political power at a time when his status and influence are at an all-time high.

He said people were surprised by his decision.

"Washington is not used to people in power who can continue in power giving up

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— Rep. Greg Walden, R-Oregon



that power," said Walden.

Walden has been a political fixture in Oregon for more than 25 years.

He kicked off his career as a press secretary and chief of staff for then-Congressman Denny Smith in the 1980s. Walden was elected to the Oregon House in 1988 and served there until 1995, when he was appointed to the Senate to fill a vacancy when Wes Cooley was elected to the U.S. House.

Walden rose to the position of assistant majority leader in the state Senate and even pondered a run for Oregon governor in 1994, though he eventually decided against the plan.

In 1998, Walden was elected to the U.S. House. Voters elected Walden to the position ten times and he never faced a serious challenge.

Walden is the only Republican member of Oregon's delegation.

Now, Walden serves as the ranking member on influential House Committee on Energy and Commerce, but has also over his tenure worked on other high-profile committees and subcommittees. For example, he was the chairman of the energy committee between 2017 and 2018 and was chairman of the energy and commerce's subcommittee on communications and technology.

Walden said he is proud of his legislative success and while he "never kept a list," he said several initiatives he pushed stand out.

Most recently, Walden said he was pleased of his work

on the support for Patients and Communities Act in 2018. The wide-sweeping and complicated bill essentially changes the Medicaid program to include addiction treatment in an effort to tackle the opioid crisis.

Walden said the law "sets into motion new pain management concepts."

"Hopefully non-addictive drugs will come out of this and hopefully treatment for people who have this disease of addiction. It is not just opioids. We expanded it to substance abuse disorder. I saw that as a big need to address," said Walden.

Walden said he is also proud of the work he did to help regenerate healthy forests in Oregon and across the West.

He also noted the success of protecting the Steens Mountains area for dual-use in the early 2000s as a triumph.

The law, called the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act, averted federal overreach, said Walden.

"That was one of the first things I tackled to prevent the Clinton Administration from declaring the Steens Mountains a national monument. Now, there have been different BLM folks who have interpreted it in different ways, but, you know, we headed off the national monument much like we did in the Owyhees," said Walden.

Walden said he is also proud of his work to get more broadband access into rural areas like Malheur County.

"There are just lots of

things, big and small, along the way," said Walden.

Walden said he has "no idea" about what he will do after he leaves the House.

"I have no plans to do anything," said Walden.

Walden said there is already speculation on why he is not running for reelection and what he plans to do after he departs Washington, D.C.

"If all the rumors were true I would have a banquet of opportunities before me but that table is pretty empty," he said.

The job hasn't been an easy one, said Walden. The political issues aside, for the past 20 years Walden spent a good share of his time flying over the county as he journeyed back and forth to Congress.

"You never settle anywhere. I live on an airplane. You are always in motion and we always plan out but you are always kind of living out there ahead of the clock and the calendar," said Walden.

Walden said he made 621 trips across the county and sponsored 40 town hall meetings a year in his district throughout his tenure.

"You get to that point in your life where maybe it is time to move on and do something different," said Walden.

He said he would miss his staff.

"They become family because I spend more time with my wonderful staff than certainly my wife because she is home in Hood River," said Walden.

Just a day after Walden announced his intent, state Sen. Cliff Bentz declared he would run to succeed Walden.

Walden said he isn't endorsing Bentz.

"At this point I am staying out of it. Cliff would do a good job but I am not going to get publicly involved in it at this point," said Walden.

## Nichols files for re-election

Baker County Commissioner Bruce Nichols announced Monday that he will seek another four-year term in the 2020 election.

Nichols was elected to his first four-year term in November 2016. He ran against Commission Chairman Bill Harvey in 2018 for a four-year term as chairman, but was defeated.



Nichols

Nichols is the only candidate so far for his position. The deadline to file as a candidate is March 10, 2020.

In a press release Monday, Nichols said: "I chose this Veterans Day to publicly announce that I will be seeking re-election in 2020 as one of the three Baker County commissioners. Veterans Day serves as a reminder to all Americans that our rights and freedom are precious and must be guarded and defended no matter the cost.

"It has been my honor and privilege to serve as one of your Baker County commissioners. I will continue to advocate for viable partnerships within our County and throughout Eastern Oregon. Keeping our public lands public and open access to all is imperative to our economy and to the health and wellbeing of our citizenry. Law enforcement, fire protection, health care including ambulance services are vital and are included in my top priorities."

### LOCAL BRIEFING

#### Thanksgiving meals to be distributed Tuesday at Safeway, Albertsons

Employees from the Baker City Safeway and Albertsons stores will distribute Thanksgiving meal packages starting at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 19 in each of the stores' parking lots.

The meals were bought with donations from customers through the Turkey Bucks program, offered at checkouts for the past few weeks.

#### Soroptimist Christmas Party Friday

The annual Soroptimist Club of Baker County Christmas Party, with the theme "Life's A Beach," is set for Friday, Nov. 22 at the Baker Elks Lodge, 1896 Second St.

Doors open at 4:30 p.m. with a prime rib dinner starting at 6 p.m. There will be live and silent auctions, along with a raffle of a standup paddleboard. The fundraising event makes possible the club's scholarships, InnovateHER grant and a variety of other projects.

Tickets are \$30 and are available at Gregg Hinrichsen State Farm, 1722 Campbell St., The Grove Team, 845 Campbell St., or from any Soroptimist member.

Beach attire is encouraged.

#### Turkey shoot Sunday at Virtue Flat

The Powder River Sportsmen's Club's annual turkey shoot is set for Sunday, Nov. 24 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Club's Virtue Flat range, about six miles east of Baker City and about one mile east of the turnoff to the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center off Highway 86.

There are four events — lucky .22 shoot, centerfire handgun at 50 yards, running deer target and centerfire rifle at turkey head targets — with a \$3 per event entry fee. Winners of each event will win \$10 cash.

Range safety rules will be in effect, and competitors should keep weapons unloaded until ready to shoot.

## SCHOOLS

Continued from Page 1A

At BMS, where the regular-attenders rate is at 73%, the school last year hired Briana Peppers, former school secretary, to fill the role of student-family support specialist.

At South Baker Intermediate School, where students in Grades 4-6 are enrolled, the free and reduced-price meal rate is slightly lower, at 60%. The regular-attender rate is at 86%, an increase of 1% from last year.

Individual student progress also is higher in math (up 2% from a year ago to 43%, compared to the state average of 40%). English language arts test scores are up 3% from a year ago to 49%, but still below the 53% Oregon average.

Haines and Keating elementary schools again are bright spots among the school report cards. The rate for free and reduced-price meals at those schools are 38% and 39% respectively and the regular attenders top the statewide average of 80%. Students who attended more than 90% of their enrolled school days hit 87% at Haines and greater than 95% at Keating, their At-A-Glance School Profiles show.

Another impact of the Baker Charter Schools is recognized in the District's on-time graduation rate.

The overall District rate is at 79%, up 6% from the previous year and meeting the Oregon average.

At Baker High School, a

*"We have good teachers, good leaders and they are working very hard together."*

— Betty Palmer, assistant superintendent, Baker School District

variety of strategies have been employed, which have resulted in a 5% increase in the rate from the previous year to 84% for 2018-19.

To continue the improvement, Kati Stuchlik, a former BMS teacher who taught freshman English classes last year, was hired this year to serve as a graduation coach. Palmer said Stuchlik works alongside Adriene Oster, Future Center director, to ensure that students are making good progress toward graduation, with an eye on their goals after high school.

Eagle Cap Innovative High School has shown improvement in all areas except regular attendance. Tom Joseph, former language arts teacher, has been named director of specific secondary programs, which includes overseeing Eagle Cap. Tracie Smith directs Eagle Cap classes and Annetta Evans, former Haines sixth-grade teacher, was hired to teach an alternative school program at Eagle Cap this year. Both programs are housed at the North Baker School Building.

The Baker Web Academy and Baker Early College will be moving from that location into the former Ellingson

Lumber Co. office at 3000 Broadway St.

Palmer said the programs are designed for students who prefer a setting that is different than the traditional high school classrooms.

About half of the alternative school program students were not in school at all before the new program was developed and the other half were barely hanging on, Palmer said. The District hopes to build enrollment as the year continues to about 20 students.

"We are trying innovative things to see if we can make a difference in students' lives," she said.

The number of students taking the tests also is below state standards of 94.5% and that affects the overall

ratings. Test participation is another area on which the District will be focusing in the coming year.

The District as a whole is working on its continuous improvement plan, a requirement by the state Department of Education for all districts to complete every three to four years, Palmer said. As part of that process educators will be looking at data and considering different viewpoints to develop a district plan for improvement for the next several years.

Eagle Cap Innovative High School and the Baker Web Academy were identified in 2017-18 under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act as schools requiring comprehensive support

and improvement to better their student performance and graduation rates.

In this year's report, Eagle Cap's on-time graduation rate had improved 15% over the previous year to 85%, which is 6% above the Oregon average of 79%.

The on-time graduation rate at Baker Web Academy was up 10% this year to 63%,

but still has a ways to go to meet the state average.

Palmer said that although progress might seem slow, it is happening as student scores, graduation rates and regular attendance goals make steady gains.

"We have good teachers, good leaders and they are working very hard together," she said.

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