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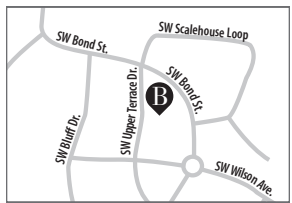
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LOCAL, STATE & REGION

Wyden: Path still open to social, climate proposals

BY PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden says there is still a path toward social supports and climate change projects, despite comments by another senator that appear to doom the prospects of the Build Back Better agenda laid out by President Joe Biden.

The Oregon Democrat leads the Senate Finance Committee, which he said has proposed a menu of revenue options that will fully fund priorities in Biden's agenda.

Wyden did not point any fingers at West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a Democrat, whose vote would be needed to pass any budget resolution in the evenly split Senate, given Republican opposition to Biden's agenda. Manchin said on Sunday he could not support the plan.

"Failure is not an option here," Wyden said in a statement issued after Manchin's comments.

"A package that addresses critical priorities over the long-term, like providing financial security for families, lowering the costs of health care and prescription drugs for seniors, and creating clean energy jobs by combating the climate crisis would go a long way toward addressing our challenges. The Finance Committee has put forward a revenue menu with more than enough options to permanently pay for these priorities."

Child tax credit

Wyden focused on three priorities on the agenda.

He spoke in the Senate last week, when the final of six monthly payments went out under the expanded child tax credit that Biden proposed and Congress approved earlier this year as part of the American Rescue Plan Act, Biden's pandemic recovery plan.

The credit was increased from \$2,000 per child to \$3,000 for children between ages 6 and 17, and \$3,600 for children under age 6. Half the money went to parents in the form of payments from the Internal Revenue Service — the final of six payments was Dec. 15 — and the other half will go to parents when 2021 tax returns are filed in the spring, even if they owe no taxes.

But the expanded credit was good only for 2021. The House version of Build Back Better proposed to extend it another year. Manchin opposes the extension, although there are income limits for qualifying families.

"Families . . . have come to depend on these payments to cover the essentials like rent, groceries, heat and clothing for their children. Food insecurity among families dropped by about 25 percent since these payments began. Child poverty has been cut nearly in half," Wyden said. "This program is Social Security for our children, and Democrats must keep it going over the long term."

Clean energy incentives

The Finance Committee also has authority over tax incentives and financing of the largest federal health insurance programs.



AP file photo

"A package that addresses critical priorities over the long-term, like providing financial security for families, lowering the costs of health care and prescription drugs for seniors, and creating clean energy jobs by combating the climate crisis would go a long way toward addressing our challenges," U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said in a statement.

Wyden spoke to objections by Manchin, whose state produces coal, about the incentives in Build Back Better to reduce greenhouse gas pollutants. Wyden said time is running out to avert the worst effects of climate change.

"The linchpin of the clean energy package is permanent, technology-neutral incentives tied to carbon emissions reductions. Fossil fuels that get cleaner are eligible for incentives, just like solar or wind," Wyden said. "This package is supported by utility companies and environmental advocates alike, and it's the only path forward that can secure 50 votes and achieve significant emissions reductions in the power sector."

"Sen. Manchin has long said he would only support technology-neutral incentives," he added. "That's exactly what this package is structured around."

Health care

Wyden also said it's time to enable the federal government to negotiate prices with drugmakers under Medicare and to continue expanded tax credits that enable people to obtain insurance coverage under the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

"Drug companies have been mugging Americans at the pharmacy window for too long, and there may not be another opportunity any time soon for Democrats to put a stop to it," Wyden said. "Fifty million seniors in Medicare have a lot of bargaining power, and it's long past due to put it to use."

The enhanced tax credits included in the American Rescue Plan Act were the first significant changes in the Affordable Care Act since its passage in 2010 under President Barack Obama.

"It's vital that we extend those subsidies to make coverage affordable," Wyden said. "At a time when many American families are concerned about basic costs of living going up, Democrats cannot allow their health care costs to increase unnecessarily."

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COVID-19 data for Monday, Dec. 20

Deschutes County cases: 24,694 (161 new cases)
Deschutes County deaths: 207 (zero new deaths)
Crook County cases: 3,542 (3 new cases)
Crook County deaths: 60 (zero new deaths)
Jefferson County cases: 4,343 (15 new cases)
Jefferson County deaths: 69 (zero new deaths)
Oregon cases: 407,153 (1,941 new cases)
Oregon deaths: 5,534 (3 new deaths)
COVID-19 patients hospitalized at St. Charles Bend: 21 (5 in ICU)

*Monday's report included new cases and deaths since Friday.

LOCAL BRIEFING

Redmond Police seek driver who hit pedestrian

Redmond Police are asking for help finding the driver who struck and killed Redmond resident Cleland Weber, 54.

Weber was hit while he crossing SW Highland Avenue at SW 15th Street around 9:52 p.m. July 2. He died Oct. 15 from complications of injuries sustained in the crash.

Police say Weber was struck by a vehicle traveling west on Highland Avenue.

"The Redmond Police Department is asking the community for any information they may have regarding this incident," reads a statement sent Monday afternoon by the department.

The department asks anyone who witnessed the incident or has information to contact the nonemergency dispatch line at 541-693-6911.

—Bulletin staff report

Kristof makes his bid for governor official

Associated Press

Former New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof said Monday he has officially filed to run for Oregon governor in the Democratic primary.

Kristof, who announced his candidacy in October and raised more than \$1 million in less than a month, said the state needs a political newbie to solve problems like homelessness and rural despair.

Kristof joins a crowded field of Democrats in the 2022 gubernatorial election, including Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek and state Treasurer Tobias Read. Democrats have held the governor's office since 1987.

Republicans seeking their party's nomination include state Rep. Christine Drazan,

R-Canby, former Republican nominee Bud Pierce and Sandy Mayor Stan Pulliam. Former Democratic state Sen. Betsy Johnson is running as an independent.

Kristof has faced questions of whether he's eligible to run for governor. According to the law, a candidate must have been a resident of the state for at least three years before an election.

Kristof voted in New York state in November 2020.

A legal opinion by lawyers working for Kristof said Kristof has always considered Oregon his home, even though his job required him to live around the world.

Kristof and his wife, Sheryl WuDunn — who also was a New York Times reporter — bought a 150-acre property in Yamhill in 1993.



Kristof

HERMISTON

Bank robbery suspect was released from prison due to COVID

BY PHIL WRIGHT

East Oregonian

HERMISTON — About three weeks before his arrest Friday in a Hermiston bank robbery, Clifford Uptegrove, was let out of federal prison under a compassionate release because of COVID-19.

Uptegrove, 58, of Yakima, Washington, remains in the Umatilla County Jail in Pendleton on suspicion of first-degree robbery, first-degree theft and felony fleeing.

The robbery occurred just before 3 p.m. at Umpqua Bank, according to Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston.

Moments after the robbery, a Umatilla County sheriff's deputy spotted the suspect in a vehicle, he said. That led to a vehicle chase, but the suspect eventually pulled over.

Records show Uptegrove has a history of robbing banks.

In 2005, he was sentenced to federal prison for more than 20 years after he pleaded guilty to armed bank robbery and using

a firearm during a crime of violence, according to a news release issued that year by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Washington.

According to the news release, police caught Uptegrove in March 2004 after a robbery at the Riverview Community Bank in Hazell Dell, Washington, and during questioning he admitted to nine robberies of credit unions from 2001-04, including hitting the Kennewick Community Federal Credit Union twice and robbing the Oregon Central Credit Union in Portland three times.

Federal court records show Uptegrove was serving time at the Federal Correctional Institution in Otisville, New York, and had a release date of March 17, 2022. But last year, Uptegrove sought a compassionate release.

Uptegrove suffers from asthma, according to court documents, and was at an increased risk of developing COVID-19.

According to the release or-

der, the court found Uptegrove took "commendable strides to grow and change while in prison, completing a number of self-help and educational programs in anticipation of his eventual release and maintaining a clean disciplinary record for the last nine-plus years."

The court also ordered him

to live with his sister in Yakima, where he could "rehabilitate in a smaller community with family nearby, while offering his sister, who is struggling with lymphoma, the help she needs."

U.S. Senior District Judge Marsha J. Pechman signed the release order Nov. 17, 2020, freeing Uptegrove from prison

14 days after and immediately placing him under supervised release.

As far as the Hermiston robbery goes, Edmiston said, police were planning on obtaining a search warrant for the vehicle Uptegrove drove to look for evidence from the bank robbery.

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