

County residents raise concerns at Merkley town hall

Owyhee, fire, healthcare costs among topics

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The proposed creation of an Owyhee Canyonlands national monument was a concern shared by many audience members at Sen. Jeff Merkley's town hall meeting Saturday at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School in John Day.

When Merkley asked the 50 or so Grant County residents in attendance if they were concerned about the issue, more than half the hands shot up.

Rancher and retired high school teacher Roger Ediger brought up the topic during the question and answer session.

Ediger said people in the county have a more vested interest compared with "a person on the 54th floor of a townhouse" and agriculture uses for that land, such as livestock grazing, would be removed with a monument.

Merkley said the community's worries would need to be reconciled, including grazing and fire concerns.

He said he's heard the U.S. Department of Interior is not planning a process to create a monument this year.

After the meeting, Merkley said he's been in regular communication with the secretary of the interior.

"My argument has been that, if they're going to have a monument process, they need to be in full dialogue with the community, and I want to present all the feedback I've gotten like access, fire management, grazing rights and juniper, for example," he said. "My impression is that there is not currently a process underway."

He noted the proposed project is in the hands of the executive branch, and they could change their mind.

A wide range of topics were raised at the meeting, which was Merkley's eighth visit to Grant County, his 275th overall town hall.

Merkley started the meeting by giving a flag that had flown over the Capitol to Lisa Weigum, a founding member of the Grant County chapter of New Hope for Eastern Oregon Animals.

He thanked Weigum for the organization's work, which

Merkley also pledged to do

The Grant County Road Department announced County Road 9, Fox Round Basin Road, will be closed due to road construction. This closure will begin at the junction of County Road 9 and County Road 25 and continue to the end of County Road 9. This closure began May 23. Work schedule will be Monday - Thursday, 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. for approximately 2 weeks. For further information regarding this closure, please contact the Road Department at 541-575-3783.



Sen. Jeff Merkley answers questions during Saturday's town hall meeting held at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School in John Day.

has helped over 500 animals with food, shelter and homes, as well as funding assistance with spay and neuter surgeries.

Before taking questions, Merkley covered a few of the issues he supports, including national funding for STEM and career tech education, such as shop classes.

"Often kids grow up with game controllers in their hands, instead of tools," he said. "I push for inclusion of those programs."

Merkley also said a major expansion of the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) is possible.

WIFIA establishes a new financing mechanism for water and wastewater infrastructure projects and provides low interest rate financing for large dollar-value projects, according to the EPA's website.

Looking at the May 17 Oregon election, the senator said Grant and Harney counties had "the best turnout in the nation."

Officials at the Grant County Clerk's Office said Grant County had 72.07 percent participation and Harney had 71.95 percent.

Merkley also pledged to do

all he can to keep the mill in John Day open.

He said the long-term stewardship contract has not been without its glitches but has significantly increased the amount of timber coming off the forest. He added the Blue Mountains Forest Partners Collaborative "has not had a single project in court."

"It's a reflection of folks working together for that," he said.

He also said pending legislation could improve forest health by preventing "fire borrowing," when agencies are forced to use funds intended for fire prevention to fight large blazes.

Jim Boethin asked about fire in the county.

"Global warming in Grant County is summer — right now the county is a tinder-



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Sun. 10 a.m.-5 p.m.



Sen. Jeff Merkley spent about two hours with an audience of about 50 Grant County residents during Saturday's town hall in John Day.



Mt. Vernon rancher and retired high school teacher Roger Ediger raises concerns about the proposed Owyhee Canyonlands national monument at Sen. Jeff Merkley's Saturday morning town hall meeting in John Day.

box," he said. "What can we do about this? Where does it end?"

Merkley said the unthinned forest remains "a mess," and he thinks coming together and developing a plan is the best course of action.

"Oregon is the most successful in the nation for developing a collaborative," he said. "We need to get people in the same room and develop a strategy."

Glenn Johnston, a member of the Blue Mountains Forest Partners, told Merkley he appreciates his support.

"I think we're moving in the direction Jim (Boethin) wants," Johnston said. "We have a lot more we agree on than we disagree on. (We need to) find a way to work through

our differences, and we want people like Jim to join us in our collaborative."

Dan Driscoll said an industry has been built from fires.

He asked how incentives to put the fire out could be offered when fires are used as an opportunity for employment.

Merkley said he hadn't



John Day River Veterinary Center proudly welcomes Dr. Christopher Kelly to its staff. Dr. Kelly enjoys all aspects of veterinary medicine, with interests in emergency medicine and livestock. In his free time, he enjoys archery, fishing, hunting and reading. Christopher is excited to be a part of the John Day community and Grant County. He received his Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine from Colorado State University.

Welcome to the Team!



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2016 Cinnabar Mountain Rendezvous
MAY 27TH - 29TH
MT. VERNON, OREGON
LET'S BRING THE TIMBER IN

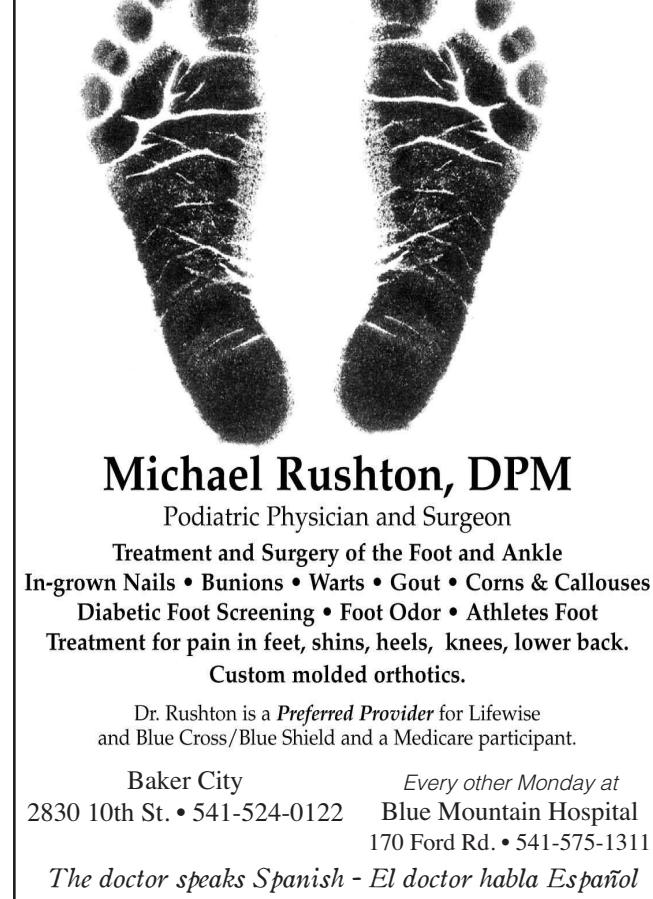
FRIDAY, May 27th
5:30 pm Potluck, bingo Mt. Vernon Community Hall. Bring hot or cold dish & table service.

SATURDAY, May 28th
10:00 am Parade lineup at the Mt. Vernon Community Hall. Youngest Rider Awards (must ride by their self to qualify)
11:00 am Parade

EVENTS AT THE CITY PARK FOLLOWING PARADE

12:30-3:30 Horseshoe Tournament directly after the parade
Golden Spike Scavenger Hunt - \$200 prize
Teen Scavenger Hunt
1:00 pm Axe Throw - Men's and Women's
2:00 pm Frying Pan Throw - Women's
2:30 pm Horseshoe Throw - Women's
3:00 pm Choker Setting - Men's
4:00 pm Bore & Buck (bring your own saw)
There will be a burger stand open from 1:00 - 4:00
8:00 pm Social gathering at the Mt. Vernon Community Hall

SUNDAY, May 29th
EVENTS AT THE CITY PARK
11:00 am Kids Day Begins
12:00 pm Horseshoe Tournament
For more information, contact:
Drew Harmer: 541-792-0393
Karen Hinton: 541-932-4111
Kristin Nodine: 541-620-8384
** Grand Marshals - Roy & Evelyn Cates**
All around prizes will be awarded for Saturday's events. To win you must participate in all events for your gender.
Men's prize is a \$250 gift certificate from Frontier Equipment and Rental
Women's prize is a \$150 gift certificate for Bar WB.
Raffle tickets for a 50/50 raffle and tickets to win either a Spinning Scope, an outdoor propane fireplace or a surprise item are available at the following locations:
OK Garage • Boyer's Cash Store • Dayville Mini-Mart • Shiny Thimble • Suds Pub • Frontier Equipment • ACE Hardware • True Value • Grant County Building Supply • Prairie Hardware & Gifts



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The doctor speaks Spanish - El doctor habla Español