



EO Media Group/Antonio Sierra
Weston Mayor Jennifer Spurgeon speaks to FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and Rep. Greg Walden at a meeting on rural broadband in Weston Saturday. John Day City Manager Nick Green is at Walden's right.

FCC chairman rolls through Eastern Oregon

By Antonio Sierra
EO Media Group

The recent repeal of net neutrality has raised hackles across the U.S., but Ajit Pai and Rep. Greg Walden found a mostly friendly audience Saturday in Eastern Oregon.

Pai, the lightning rod chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, was in the midst of an 1,800-mile tour of rural communities in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana to discuss the "digital divide" between rural and urban communities.

Walden, who oversees the FCC as the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, joined Pai as he stopped in Hermiston, Pendleton and Weston.

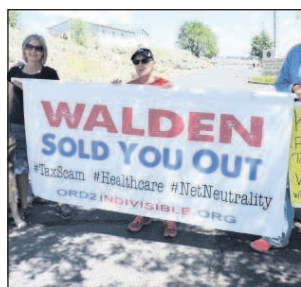
According to Walden, Pai was likely the first FCC chairman to visit Eastern Oregon. The last stop of the day was at Weston's Memorial Hall, where Pai and Walden spoke with local elected officials and representatives from communication corporations.

While Pai was there to discuss how rural communities could gain access to broadband internet services, the conversation did touch on the FCC's recent repeal of net neutrality.

Net neutrality is a rule that requires internet service providers to treat all internet traffic equally, regardless of how much they pay or where they are located.

With the repeal having gone into effect on June 11, Pai shot back at some of his critics.

In both an interview before the meeting and in his discussions during the meeting, Pai said the sky hadn't fallen since net neutrality ended 12 days prior and the "fear mongering" coming from "grandstanding politi-



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Protesters Vickie Hendricks, Sue Petersen and Colleen Blackwood wait for Rep. Greg Walden to arrive at the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office in Pendleton.

cians" opposed to the move was overblown.

Walden backed him up, saying the communication technology had benefited from the FCC's "light touch" approach in the past, and the old policy was hampering expansion into rural areas.

Weston Mayor Jennifer Spurgeon said improving her city's internet access has been a personal "pet project."

Spurgeon said the idea of net neutrality isn't relevant in her city, because her town's internet access is already inconsistent and slow.

"Out here, we're still in dial-up mode," she said.

A real estate appraiser who works from home, Spurgeon said she recently tried to upload real estate photos onto her computer. After they failed to load a few times, she went to lunch in the time it took them to publish.

Weston wasn't the only town that local officials reported having problems.

John Day City Manager Nick Green said his city has already received \$2 million from the Oregon Legislature to build fiber lines to rural John Day, but the town needs another \$3 million to get the project done.

With John Day being a \$40,000 market at best, Green said a private company voluntarily extending broadband to John Day was unlikely.

"If it's not publicly owned or publicly available, we're screwed," he said.

While the audience mostly nodded in agreement with one another, not everyone in Eastern Oregon was a fan of Walden and Pai's policies.

Walden and Pai spent the first two legs of the trip visiting Mirasol Family Health Clinic in Hermiston to talk about tele-health and the Umatilla County Dispatch in Pendleton to talk about gaps in 911 coverage. They were greeted at the latter by five activists dissatisfied with the pair.

Standing in the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office parking lot, the protesters focused most of their ire on Walden.

They carried a sign that stated "WALDEN SOLD YOU OUT" and Colleen Blackwood fashioned "Vote McLeod-Skinner" apparel out of tape and a jean jacket, referring to the Hood River Republican's Democratic opponent this November.

Among the hashtags on the protest sign was "#Net-Neutrality." Protester Sue Petersen wasn't keen on the repeal.

"For rich people, they love it," she said.

When Walden's car rolled into the parking lot, their signs and voices elicited a wave and a smile from the 10-term congressman before he was quickly escorted into the building.

Questions raised about marijuana tax funds

Complex and evolving law

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

How state tax revenue from marijuana sales is distributed to cities, counties and mental health providers in Oregon generated more questions than answers during the Grant County Court's June 13 meeting.

Community Counseling Solutions Executive Director Kimberly Lindsay emphasized that she was not there to tell the court how to spend its share of the tax revenue, but she also said she wanted the money spent on drug abuse treatment and not prevention.

CCS, the contract provider for mental health services in the county, has been dipping into its reserves to maintain its drug abuse treatment program, but that was not sustainable, Lindsay said.

Commissioner Jim Hamsher disagreed with Lindsay's interpretation of the state's marijuana law and read a portion of the statute to the court. The county had discretion on how to spend the marijuana tax revenue it received, he said.

While no decision was made and the court agreed to seek more information, Judge Scott Myers assured Lindsay that CCS would get the funding it needed for drug abuse treatment.

Complex law

State law authorizing the distribution of marijuana tax revenue is complex and evolving.

A Mental Health Alcoholism and Drug Services Account was established in the state's general fund in 2017 for the purpose of distributing a designated portion of marijuana tax revenue to grants for alcohol and drug abuse prevention, intervention and treatment and to registered sobering facilities.

As a result of a state budget shortfall in 2017, however, general fund dollars were removed from the Oregon Health Authority's Health Systems Division and replaced with marijuana tax revenue.

According to a May 2017 memo from Chris Norman at OHA's Health Systems Division, marijuana tax revenue allocated to the Oregon Health Authority was earmarked for the Mental Health Alcoholism and Drug Services Account.

"However, instead of the



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Community Counseling Solutions executive director Kimberly Lindsay listens to the Grant County Court discuss marijuana tax revenue during their June 13 meeting.

funds going directly to the community mental health programs (as they had previously), the programs would need to work with their local county to access the funds," Lindsay told the Eagle.

In April this year, Nicole Corbin at OHA's Health Systems Division informed Lindsay that each county in Oregon should have received three quarterly payments from the Mental Health Alcoholism and Drug Services Account.

According to Grant County Treasurer Julie Ellison, the county has received three marijuana tax payments from the state. The first two totaled \$15,175, and those funds were provided to Blue Mountain Hospital on behalf of the Community Health Needs Assessment group's Substance Abuse Committee. The third payment was for \$18,362 and remains in a

county account, she said.

"The counties can decide who receives the funds and how they are spent, however (state law) is clear on what they need to be spent on," Lindsay told the Eagle. "I recently found out that the funds had been released to the counties, hence the meeting with Grant County."

New law

A new law signed by Gov. Kate Brown on April 3 establishes an Oregon Marijuana Account separate and distinct from the state's general fund. The Department of Revenue will distribute funds from the account on a quarterly basis as follows:

- 10 percent to cities that have not banned marijuana sales, with 75 percent of that share based on each city's population and 25 percent based on the number of marijuana industry licenses.

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- 40 percent to the State School Fund.

- 20 percent for mental health treatment or for alcohol and drug abuse prevention, early intervention and treatment as provided for in the 2017 Mental Health Alcoholism and Drug Services Account.

- 15 percent to the Oregon State Police.

- 5 percent for purposes related to alcohol and drug abuse prevention, early intervention and treatment.

According to Corbin, the new bill will allow OHA to provide money directly through intergovernmental agreements between counties and mental health providers without having to go through the Mental Health Alcoholism and Drug Services Account.

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NOTICE OF FILING DEADLINE FOR CITY OF JOHN DAY 2018 ELECTION FOR MAYOR OR COUNCIL POSITIONS

Notice is hereby given, under the provisions of Ordinance 94-79-5, adopted June 28, 1994, the filing deadline for persons wishing to run for City Mayor or City Council (3 open positions) must be submitted to the City of John Day at 450 E Main St, by 4:00 p.m., Friday, August 17, 2018; to be elected during the November 6, 2018 election.

Candidate Filing Form and Nominating Petitions may be picked up at City Hall during working hours, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Monday - Friday or from the City's website at www.cityofjohnday.com.

Nominating Petitions shall contain at least twenty-five signatures of qualified electors residing in the city that are registered to vote.

If a nominating petition is not used and an individual wishes to declare his or her candidacy for city office, a fee of \$50.00 must be paid to the City of John Day by the filing deadline.