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THE SEARCH FOR THE LONG LOST BLUE BUCKET MINE

Merkley faces tough questions at town hall meeting

By Richard Hanners Blue Mountain Eagle

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley faced questions about impeachment, gun rights and abortion right off the bat during a town hall meeting at the Madden Brothers Performing Arts Center in John Day May 30.



Sen. Jeff Merkley

I've never had so many tough questions in a row," he said after addressing all three.

About 200 people attended the meeting. Merkley met earlier with officials from the Grant County Court, the city of John Day and other local cities and timber industry representatives.

After 10 years in the Oregon Legislature, Merkley was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2008. The ranking Democrat of the Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on Agriculture and Rural Development, Merkley also sits on the Senate's Budget, Foreign Relations and Environment and Public Works committees.

On the tough questions at his town hall meeting, Merkley said he felt comfortable that gun rights could be protected even if background checks were made stronger. While a broad consensus exists in favor of background checks, other measures were more controversial, he said, such as restricting high-capacity magazines.

When asked by Grant Union High School freshman Riley Robertson if liberal abortion policies were a convenient form of birth control, Merkley said no. Government was not a suitable decision maker for this issue, he said. Abortion decisions should be made by women, their spouses and their spiritual advisers, he said.

Several people asked if Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, was blocking bills in the Senate. Merkley explained that Senate rules have created a situation where the majority leader can control what bills are brought to the floor and the amendment process. Both Democrats and Republicans have abused this position and contributed to the degradation of the system, he said.

Merkley said he didn't know why McConnell was blocking efforts to protect U.S. elections from interference by Russians or other foreign governments, but the White House has shown no interest in this issue. McConnell's sole focus now was on getting federal judges approved, he said.

Russia hacked election equipment and used social media and robots to influence elections in the U.S. and in other democratic countries, Merkley said. While Russia has a modest-sized economy, about the size of Spain's, it exerts a greater global influence by possessing nuclear weapons and using the

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Contributed photo Stephen Meek was a fur trapper and mountain guide who led a large wagon train across Eastern Oregon in 1845.



Contributed photo/Grant County Historical Museum Charles Brown, the first curator of the Grant County Historical Museum, prepares to lead the '62 Days parade in Canyon City in 1930. Brown participated in an unsuccessful search for the Blue Bucket Mine in 1897.

Prospectors looking found gold in Canyon Creek in 1862

By Richard Hanners Blue Mountain Eagle

An overconfident mountain guide and an errant wagon train in Oregon's early pioneer days could be credited with sparking one of the greatest gold rushes in American history.

It was prospectors in search of the Blue Bucket Mine who discovered gold in Canyon, Dixie and Griffin creeks in 1862, drawing thousands of people to Canyon City, Prairie City and Auburn in search of riches.

"The Blue Bucket Mine is the most celebrated and publicized mine in the Pacific Northwest in importance," Canyon City amateur historian Lawrence Roba wrote. "It will even outrank such famous mines as the Lost Dutchmen and Peg-Leg Smith mines of the Southwest."

Stephen Meek was the younger brother of Joseph Meek, one of Oregon's founding fathers and the man behind one of the state's earliest maps. In 1845, perhaps wanting to live up to his brother's name, Stephen Meek offered to guide 800 people in 200 wagons on a shortcut across the Eastern Oregon wilderness.

Shortly after the party sighted Fremont Peak on the North Fork of the Malheur River, now known as Castle Rock, Meek was surely lost. Members of the wagon train mistook Steens Mountain for the Cascade Range near Bend and Silvies River for Crooked River.

Several people succumbed to bad water or diseases during the trip, and as water became hard to find, lynch mobs formed twice. A few loyal members hid Meek and his wife, who finally left for their own safety.

Meek was gone when members of the wagon train found the now infamous gold nuggets. Gold wouldn't be discovered at Sut-

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Road rage case ends with \$26.5 million verdict



Contributed photo Matthew and Sara Allison pose for a photo at Crater Lake in 2016 before driving back home to Boise, Idaho, when Sara was killed in a collision with a semi.

Commercial drivers caused collision in Harney County

By Phil Wright EO Media Group

Matthew and Sara Allison are beaming in the photo they took in front of Crater Lake, their last bit of Oregon sightseeing before leaving June 5, 2016, for home in Boise. He was 27. She was 30. They were married five years.

They never made it back. Sara was behind the wheel of their Ford Focus so Matthew could rest during the drive on narrow Highway

20 east of Burns when James Decou of Clearfield, Utah, drove his flat-bed hauling semi head-on into the couple's car.

Matthew suffered broken ribs, a lacerated spleen and head trauma, requiring a flight in an emergency helicopter from Harney District Hospital in Burns to Legacy Emanuel Hospital in Portland.

Sara died in the crash. Matthew Allison recounted the story May 7 in Pendleton while testifying in federal court during the civil trial for his injuries and his wife's death. Court records show he brought the urn containing Sara's remains to the witness stand.

"I hadn't really found a sense of

purpose until I met her," he told the jury. "I found a purpose in her. We had — it seems cliché to say it, but we had that type of love that most people spend their entire lives looking for."

The trial ran nine days and concluded May 10. The jury awarded almost \$26.5 million against two trucking companies and their drivers and found them negligent for engaging in road rage antics for 90 miles, according to the lawyers for the Allisons, right up to the end.

The road to disaster The Portland law firm of Tom

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Governor wants to cap higher kicker rebates

By Claire Withycombe Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown wants to limit the money that Oregonians could get back through a popular tax rebate next year.

Oregon is currently expected to hand about \$1.4 billion back to taxpayers in 2020 through what's known as the "kicker."

Created by the legislature in 1979 and ratified by Oregon voters the next year, the kicker was introduced as a control on state spending.

The unusual policy comes into play when state tax revenue ends up being more than 2 percent higher than what economists predict.

In 2000, 62% of Oregon voters approved a ballot measure baking that law into the state's constitution,



Gov. Kate Brown

making it harder to roll back.

Brown wants to cap next year's rebate to \$1,000 per taxpayer, which could reduce the amount that higher-income earners receive.

The median taxpayer, though, who is expected to get \$338 back, would not be affected.

Since the kicker rebate is calculated as a percentage of your tax bill before credits, people who make more money and pay more taxes get bigger kicker rebates.

Oregon taxpayers whose adjusted gross income in 2018 was less than \$55,000 would not see lower kickers, according to the governor's office.

But about 331,000 Oregonians

would get back less money than they expect.

The governor wants to put the money the state would keep under her plan — about \$500 million — toward rural infrastructure and housing projects and to pay down schools' pension debt.

"I think it's fiscally responsible and makes common sense," Brown told reporters Thursday.

Brown's proposal appears to be a gesture to lawmakers representing rural areas of the state — for the most part Republicans whose approval is needed if the proposal is to have any legs.

The idea would need to get approval by two-thirds of members in each chamber of the Legislature.

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