

BMH named to top hospitals list

By BENNETT HALL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Blue Mountain Hospital has been recognized as one of the best small rural hospitals in the country.

The John Day facility was named to the Top 100 Critical Access Hospitals list for 2022, the Blue Mountain Hospital District announced on Friday, Feb. 18.

The list was compiled by the Chartis Center for Rural Health, an independent health care advisory firm. Hospitals are evaluated based on the Chartis Rural Hospital Performance Index, which uses publicly available data to rate eight metrics including quality, market share and patient perspectives.

Derek Daly, the district's CEO, said it was an honor to make the list.

"With over 1,350 Critical Access Hospitals serving rural areas across the country, it is humbling to be included with this group of hospitals," Daly said in a news release.

Oregon has 25 critical access hospitals, but only three made this year's Top 100 list, and all are in the northeast cor-



Contributed Photo

Blue Mountain Hospital in John Day.

ner of the state: Blue Mountain, Wallowa Memorial Hospital in Enterprise and Grande Ronde Hospital in La Grande.

The critical access designation was established by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services as part of a congressional effort to shore up the financial health of hospitals in remote rural areas. In general, it applies to hospitals with no more than 25 acute care beds that are at least 35 miles from the next nearest hospital.

Blue Mountain Hospital is licensed for 25 beds and is currently staffed for 16. It

is operated by the Blue Mountain Hospital District, which also operates the Strawberry Wilderness Community Clinic, Blue Mountain Care Center and Blue Mountain Home Health and Hospice Agency. The district has about 250 employees.

"I am proud of our entire organization and am thankful for all of the contributions of each one of our team members, providers, volunteers, and board members across our district that were necessary to make this happen," Daly said. "The work that our team members have accomplished over the last year during the COVID-19 pandemic has been amazing to see."

"Despite unprecedented adversity, rural providers continue to display resiliency and a steadfast commitment to their communities," said Michael Topchik, national leader of the Chartis Center for Rural Health. "Honoring the Top 100 is one of the highpoints of our year. We are delighted to recognize the exceptional performance and innovation of this year's recipients, particularly in light of the extraordinary challenges facing America's rural health safety net."

Palmer makes pitch for Senate nod

By BENNETT HALL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Sam Palmer brought his campaign for the U.S. Senate full circle last week when he spoke at a meeting of the Grant County Republican Central Committee at the Outpost Pizza Pub and Grill in John Day on Wednesday, Feb. 16.

"I've been speaking all over the state, from Malheur County to Coos County, and this is the one that hits home — because it is home," he said.

About 30 people attended the meeting, which was open to the public.

Palmer, a registered nurse and Grant County commissioner, is seeking the GOP nomination to challenge for the Senate seat currently held by Democrat Ron Wyden.

He is one of seven candidates running in the May 17 Republican primary and the third to make a campaign appearance in John Day. Darin Harbick and Ibra Taher spoke at a Jan. 27 meeting of the Grant County GOP.

"I'm tired of seeing what's going on in our state and our nation," Palmer said, adding he would uphold the conservative and Christian values that rural Oregonians hold dear.

Palmer touched on a variety of issues in a short stump speech, including:

- Wildfires: "I think mismanagement, misuse and negligence, rather than climate change, have to do with the fires we've seen."

- The River Democracy Act, sponsored by Wyden: "It will lock up 3 million acres. ... This is one of the biggest land grabs that is happening in the state in my lifetime, and probably anyone's lifetime."

- Illegal immigration: "We have to ask why we're not securing our border. It's what keeps us sovereign and free," he said, adding that his wife, an immi-



Bennett Hall/Blue Mountain Eagle

U.S. Senate candidate Sam Palmer speaks at a meeting of the Grant County Republican Central Committee in a John Day restaurant on Wednesday, Feb. 16.

grant, had achieved citizenship several years ago. "Immigration can be done legally, folks."

- Election integrity: Palmer said he would introduce legislation to tighten up voting requirements and eliminate voting by mail in national elections. "Federal elections will be done in person, with proper ID and no mail-in ballots." (He later clarified that U.S. military personnel serving overseas and some others would still be able to vote by mail.)

Palmer also fielded a wide variety of questions from the audience.

Asked what made him different from the other GOP contenders, Palmer made a veiled reference to Albany's Jo Rae Perkins, who lost to U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley in the 2020 general election, and talked about some of his accomplishments since being elected as a county commissioner.

"I have a history of winning," he said. "I have a history of working with Republicans and Democrats alike to get things done."

Asked about the danger to the U.S. posed by tensions between Russia and Ukraine, Palmer turned the discussion to communism (although Russia has not been a communist country since 1989)

and illegal immigration.

"My fear is there's going to be an attack on our own soil and it's going to come through our southern border," he said.

Asked if he supports term limits, he said he did but that he has to be careful about saying that because it could keep him from being given committee assignments if he's elected to the Senate.

"When you take someone like Ron Wyden," he added, "who's been in office 40 years ... It's just time to retire Ron Wyden. It's time."

Palmer railed against the "anarchy" in Portland, "lawlessness" in the Willamette Valley, illegal marijuana grows in Southern Oregon and other problems happening around the state, and leveled complaints against Oregon Gov. Kate Brown and state Senate President Peter Courtney. That prompted a question from one audience member about why he wasn't running for governor.

"Because I can't count that high," Palmer quipped, a reference to the fact that 31 people have filed for that office.

Then he brought the focus back to his bid to take Wyden's U.S. Senate seat: "This is the one that's open and needs change."

Merkley fields questions during digital town hall

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley weighed in on the River Democracy Act of 2021, his support of a renewal of the long-term stewardship contract for the Malheur National Forest, and Secure Rural Schools Act funding during an hour-long digital town hall on Sunday, Feb. 20, with Grant County constituents.

Regarding a bill he is co-sponsoring in the U.S. Senate that would give "wild and scenic" status to an additional 4,700 miles of rivers and streams around the state, Merkley said he was not sure how many miles of streams or tributaries would be impacted in Grant County.

Merkley said fellow Sen. Ron Wyden's team is keeping track of the details of the maps and how different regions would be affected.

Nonetheless, he said, his office supports the bill.

Stewardship contract

Merkley expanded on a Jan. 20 letter he and Wyden sent to Glenn Casamassa, U.S. Forest Service regional forester for Region 6, throwing their support behind a renewal of the long-term stewardship contract for the Malheur National Forest.

While he believes in the value of a long-term stewardship agreement, Merkley said, he could also support changing some terms of the deal to bring in smaller contractors.

"Should the stewardship agreement be broken into smaller pieces so smaller companies could compete for it?" Merkley said. "I think those are all absolutely legitimate (questions)."

He added that the long-term stewardship agreement "doesn't have to be done in exactly the same way."

However, Merkley said, the Malheur National Forest does need the stability provided by a long-term stewardship contract to keep Malheur Lumber, the county's lone remaining lumber mill, operating.

Malheur National Forest Supervisor Craig Trulock announced last week that the U.S. Forest Service would issue another long-term stewardship deal in an open bid process starting in November, but it will also use another contracting mechanism to bring in additional independent contractors.

Heart of Grant County

Merkley presented the Heart of Grant County with a commemorative flag for completing construction on its new facility and for serving 37 survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence and providing over 1,000 shelter nights to those who had

been impacted.

Heart of Grant County Board Chair Nancy Nickel said that roughly 20% to 30% of the Heart of Grant County's budget comes from the Violence Against Women Act, which has not been reauthorized in the Senate. Nickel said there was a similar bipartisan bill that was passed in the House and asked Merkley what his sense was on the chances of getting legislation through the upper chamber.

Merkley said his hope was that the money could be put into an omnibus bill, which, he said, was a fancy name for taking all of the spending bills and rolling them up into one.

"We're already a good distance into it," he said.

Secure Rural Schools

Blue Mountain Forest Partners Executive Director Mark Webb asked Merkley if there could be a permanent funding solution for the Secure Rural Schools Act.

The Secure Rural Schools Act funnels federal dollars to timber-dependent counties in the West to pay for local services, including infrastructure and fire prevention programs, to replace former revenues from timber sales on federal lands.

Merkley said the challenge with SRS is that there's only a few states that benefit from the program. Additionally, he said, Oregon benefits far more than any other state.

"So we only have a few states that have a big stake in it," he said.

Merkley said he has tried to attach it to payment in lieu of taxes, a federal program designed to offset property tax losses in areas with high public land concentrations. But, he said, he has had a hard time in getting a permanent solution because Oregon gets the lion's share of the funding.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

SATURDAY, FEB. 26

Clay Pigeon Shoot

• 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., B Bar J Ranch, Highway 402, milepost 9, Kimberly (follow the signs)

This fundraiser for the second- and third-grade class at Monument School will feature several shooting events, including jackpot and Annie Oakley rounds at \$3 each, with prizes for the winners. From 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monument students will be serving a lunch of pulled pork sandwiches, chips, coleslaw and baked beans. Meals are \$8 for adults or \$6 for kids under 10. There will also be a dessert auction starting at 1 p.m. All proceeds will go to the second- and third-grade class library, learning materials and end-of-the-year field trip. For more information, call 541-934-2003.

Bingo night

• 5 p.m., John Day Elks Lodge, 140 NE Dayton St. Fundraiser for the Grant Union High School Class of 2026 eighth-grade class trip to the coast. Bingo \$5 a card. Pizza and snacks available for purchase. Raffle draw for a gun safe, smoker and other prizes. For more information, call 541-390-5790.

SATURDAY, APRIL 2

Lake Creek Youth Camp Gala

• 5 p.m., Trowbridge Pavilion, Grant County Fairgrounds, 411 NW Bridge St., John Day



This third annual benefit for the nonprofit youth and family camp in Logan Valley features a tri-tip dinner, games, live music, drinks by Spitfire Cocktails and live, silent and dessert auctions. Tickets are \$25 at the door or \$20 in advance, available at several locations in John Day and Canyon City. For more information, call Aimee Rude at 541-206-2421.

Do you have a community event in Grant County you'd like to publicize? Email information to editor@bmeagle.com. The deadline is noon Friday for publication the following Wednesday.

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