

Wyden criticizes Trump at town hall in Seaside

Democrat says Charlottesville response 'horrifying'

By Edward Stratton
EO Media Group

When immigration or white supremacy comes up at his town halls, U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden sometimes recounts the story of how his parents fled Nazi Germany and how his father joined the U.S. Army to produce propaganda for the war effort.

In his 844th town hall, and the first since the deadly violence at a white nationalist rally this month in Charlottesville, Virginia, Wyden on Friday, Aug. 25, called President Donald Trump's response horrifying.

"All the people I know believe that when you see a swastika, this is not something where there are two sides of the debate," the Oregon Democrat said to applause from a full crowd in the Seaside City Council chambers. "It's wrong."

Wyden took questions on a variety of national issues and promised to continue fighting for the values of his constituents.

Taxes and spending

Wyden, the ranking member on the Senate Finance Committee, blasted the Trump administration's one-page tax



EDWARD STRATTON/EO MEDIA GROUP

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, was in Seaside for his 844th town hall since joining the U.S. Senate in 1996.

reform proposal, which would lower top-tier rates on individuals and businesses and reorder much of the federal tax code.

In the guise of helping small businesses, he said, there is a disturbing proposal to reclassify ordinary income as capital gains, taxed at a lower rate. "On my watch, I'm going to fight that every single step of the way," he said, promising to advocate for bipartisan tax reform that benefits the middle class and helps produce more jobs.

Asked about Trump's recent threat at an Arizona rally to shut down the government this fall unless significant money for a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border is included in the federal budget, Wyden said Trump will find bipartisan resistance.

"Republicans do not want to have anything to do with

paying for this wall," Wyden said, adding the U.S. instead needs infrastructure investment.

Health care

Amid widespread opposition, Republicans narrowly failed to repeal and replace the federal Affordable Care Act. Wyden said the efforts made a mockery of Trump's campaign promises to expand insurance coverage and lower costs, with federal analyses concluding the two iterations of Trumpcare would have increased premiums and cut coverage for millions of people. The senator said Congress needs to pass bipartisan legislation to stabilize the private insurance market, clamp down on prescription drug prices and give states more flexibility to set up public and single-payer health care options.

Wyden highlighted bipartisan efforts with U.S. Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, to pass legislation on chronic care, which would use telemedicine, coordinated care and value-based payment to decrease costs and expand access. The bill, forecasted by the Congressional Budget Office to reduce direct spending on Medicare and Medicaid by more than \$215 million over the next four fiscal years, was recently approved by the Senate Finance Committee.

Environment

Astoria recently joined a number of cities formally opposing a proposed oil terminal in Vancouver, Washington. Wyden was asked what he will do to protect the Columbia River from becoming a fossil fuel highway to Asia.

Wyden said the federal government can't play Russian roulette with people's safety and needs to support initiatives that create incentives to improve tracks, replace aging trains and support first responders. So far, he said, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt hasn't said much regarding oil trains.

"Under normal circumstances, I'd say, 'Well, maybe that isn't all bad,'" Wyden said. "But ... when I hear about all the stuff his staff is working on behind the scenes, I think we got to get him on the record on his plans. That is what I intend to do in September."

Russia

Speaking of federal investigations into interference by Russia in U.S. elections, Wyden, who serves on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said both Congress and special counsel Robert Mueller are both trying to follow the money.

"What I said on the (intelligence) committee is that our job is to tell all of you, the American people, what happened, how our democracy was hacked and do it in a way that doesn't compromise classified information," the senator said.

Wyden talked about his legislation, the Presidential Tax Transparency Act, to require all presidential candidates to release their tax returns, while

lauding the new sanctions against Russia overwhelmingly passed by the Senate.

Pushing back

Faced with a woman who said Trump was causing people mental health issues, Wyden reminded the audience that despite all the dramatic rhetoric, President Trump has not been able to pass major legislation and faces mounting opposition from both Democrats and Republicans.

"I do think the last few days have seen a lot of pushing back," Wyden said about Trump's arguments with even conservative Republicans. "I don't know how he expects to get his legislation passed. And that's probably a good thing, because most of it is so flawed."

Environmentalists object to proposed Arcadia Beach park site

RV park from Page 1A

"Just because the parks system didn't have plan for this plot didn't mean it was valueless to the public," La Follette said. "Put in a trail loop, install other interpretive uses. There are lots of things you can do there. But an RV park in this area is something we don't feel comfortable with."

Smejkal said he intends the project to be executed like another RV park he developed in Wallowa County, which he described as "upscale."

Cease-and-desist order

Four parcels of Smejkal's land are zoned for recreation management and one parcel for agriculture-forestry.

It is legal for Smejkal to log the parcel zoned for forestry, but the county issued a cease-and-desist order in July after the Department of Forestry reported he was planning a logging operation on the other four parcels without county approval. Caplinger said.

For now, Smejkal is only permitted to clear brush in the right of way granted by ODOT for a temporary service road. Smejkal said he is brushing his property under the state Forest Practices Act to provide a firebreak, a gap in vegetation that acts as a barrier to slow the progress of a brushfire or wildfire.

"We're brushing it according to firebreak standards so engineers and geologists can wade through it for surveys," he said.

Caplinger said this does not apply the same way on land zoned for recreation management — the majority of Smejkal's property. He said he is working with Smejkal to find a way to temporarily allow legal brushing on the land to accommodate the geohazard surveys the county requires to move forward in the process.

ORCA president and Ecola Watershed Council member Mike Manzulli said these kind of violations not only disregard the planning process, but the survival of the marbled murrelet, which only lives in increasingly rare, old-growth, coastal forests.

While surveys have yet to be conducted to show whether Smejkal's property is directly home to these birds, the Department of Forestry identi-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Blue lines on this county aerial indicate approximately 17.5-acre parcel owned by James Smejkal across from Arcadia Beach.

'It is in the best interest of the threatened marbled murrelet and people that care about the birds' dwindling critical habitat to try and purchase this land now.'

ORCA president and Ecola Watershed Council member Mike Manzulli



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The marbled murrelet, an endangered species that halted plans for development on the 17.5-acre parcel in 2009.

fied the property as immediately adjacent to a marbled murrelet management area in 2009.

"Given the time frame, and Mr. Smejkal's disregard of our local ordinances, it is in the best interest of the threatened marbled murrelet and people that care about the birds' dwindling critical habitat to try and purchase this land now," Manzulli said. Smejkal said no one has

come forward with any kind of an offer, but said "anything is for sale."

Next steps

Caplinger said many of the aspects of the plan, like water and sewer infrastructure, will be guided by ecological and geological surveys.

Because the property is in a resource zone, anyone 300 feet from Smejkal's property line will receive a notice from

the county after his plan is submitted for the opportunity to participate in a public comment period and hearing.

Both the county and ORCA said they are keeping a close eye on development to make sure local ordinances are followed. But until more surveys are completed, a timeline for when this could be completed is not clear.

"It's going to be awhile," Caplinger said.

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