

Wyden talks gun control with area students

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

There was one major issue on the minds of students who showed up at U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden’s town hall meeting at Umatilla High School on Tuesday.

“How many of you would like to talk about guns?” Wyden asked. Many students raised their hands.

The meeting was open to the public, with about half the audience comprising community members and the rest students. Though audience members were able to ask questions on any subject, after a student asked a question about guns, Wyden switched focus, talking mostly with students about their concerns from a variety of viewpoints.

“I heard you talking about guns, and people who shouldn’t have them,” said a student.

“How do you plan on stopping that? There’s always going to be a way for someone to get guns.”

Wyden outlined his goals for gun violence prevention.

“If someone has mental health problems, domestic violence in their background, on a terrorist watchlist,” Wyden said. “I want background checks for every time a gun is sold in America. That applies to gun shows, any kind of sale at all. Right now, we have this hit-and-miss system.”

Wyden said he’d like to ban bump stocks, a modification that allows a semi-automatic weapon to fire as an automatic, and lift restrictions that prevent research from being conducted on gun violence.

Finally, he said, he’d like to ensure that people can’t have military-style weapons on the street.

“Those four things I described can be done within the Second Amendment,” he said. “I haven’t said to get rid of the Second Amendment.”

A student suggested that schools should conduct a mental evaluation for each student each year, to determine what resources schools might need to support them.

“That might be a little hard to operate,” Wyden said. But he said that getting protective orders should be easier, if a family member or teacher notices that a student is showing signs of a problem.

“In the case of the shooter in Florida, everyone in town knew there was a problem,” Wyden said. “But they didn’t put the pieces of the puzzle together.”

The student also asked if there would be more funding toward mental health programs and help for students showing signs of problems.

“I have been supporting, and think we should be getting more money for law enforcement at schools, and

health care services,” Wyden said.

Some students disagreed with Wyden’s stance on guns, with one asking why, if gun violence accounts for fewer deaths than car accidents, Congress was focusing on it. Aden Cappello, a junior, said there are a lot of false statistics about gun violence.

“I don’t think the focus should be on assault weapons,” he said. “Anything can be turned into an assault weapon.

He noted that a .223 caliber rifle, a semiautomatic weapon, is smaller and speedier, but bullets from a 30.06, a gun used for deer hunting, are bigger and can cause more damage.

“More crimes and murders are committed with handguns daily,” Cappello said. “How do you suggest we fix that instead of going after assault rifles?”

Cappello noted that he agrees with the policy of background checks, and would like to see them conducted every year.

Wyden reviewed his gun policy with Cappello, commending him for doing his research.

“I think the assault weapon issue is complicated,” Wyden said. “What I feel strongly about, and which is backed by the police of this country, is that these military-style assault weapons are clearly not used for sport.”

Cappello said he understood the policy, but that

it may not be so simple to enforce.

“There are always things that can happen outside of a law,” he said. “There are people that make firearms from scratch.”

Though gun violence was the prevailing topic, Wyden fielded questions from students and adults on a variety of issues. A woman whose husband is a veteran said she was concerned about the privatization of the VA.

“What can we do as citizens and elected officials?” she asked.

Wyden said he encouraged people to continue speaking up.

“Policy change doesn’t start in D.C.,” he said. “It’s just the opposite — bottoms up.”

He said providing health care and assistance is part of the commitment elected officials and citizens make to veterans.

Audience members spoke to Wyden about irrigation, farming, disability services and immigration.

The final question came from another student, who asked what could be done to protect children from exploitation on the internet.

“We have online reporting, but it almost seems like it’s ignored,” he said.

The student noted a time that his friend had tried to report a site that posted explicit images of minors, but did not get a response, and the site was not taken down.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
A procession of hundreds follows actors during the Way of the Cross on Good Friday in Hermiston.

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Butte on Good Friday as part of the annual Way of the Cross hosted by **Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church**. The pageant took participants through 14 “stations of the cross” depicting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the hours before his death.

...
Hermiston/Pendleton Local Program #510 revived its **Special Olympics** powerlifting program this winter with training at the Boardman Recreational Center.

Coached by **Jason Bartman**, four athletes powered their way through the competition March 17 at McArthur Court in Eugene. **Jose-Angel “JoJo” Ramos** earned two gold and two silver medals, **Camron Goldie** received three bronze medals, **Jeff McEachran** garnered a bronze medal and **Timothy Tichy** took home

four silver medals.

Special Olympics provides year-around training and athletic competitions for people of all ages with intellectual disabilities. There is no charge to participate.

Practice for the summer sports season begins in April. If interested, call **Angela Scheider** at 541-314-0166.

...
A fourth grade student at **Charlotte Latin School** in North Carolina is requesting readers send items that will help his class learn about **Oregon**.

Ivy Young sent a letter saying part of his class project for the **North Carolina State Fair** is to research a state. Ivy is hoping people will send small items — such as postcards, pictures and facts — by April 30 to help..

Send items to:
Ivy Young, Mr. McConaughy’s Class
Charlotte Latin School
9502 Providence Road,
Charlotte, NC 28277

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