

Hermiston's Joseph Franell testifies before Congress

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Eastern Oregon Telecom President Joseph Franell jumped into the fray of Congress' net neutrality debate Thursday.

Franell traveled from Hermiston to Washington, D.C., to testify in front of lawmakers from the House's Energy and Commerce Committee by invitation of Rep. Greg Walden, the committee's top-ranking Republican. Walden has introduced legislation that would prohibit internet service providers from practices such as blocking or throttling traffic to lawful websites and requiring sites to pay for prioritization.

The idea that all websites, from the page of a small local business to Amazon.com, should be treated equally is known as net neutrality. Video of Franell's opening remarks shows he told lawmakers he believed internet service providers, such as EOT, should be able to prioritize some traffic over others — a 911 call over other calls, for example, or emergency medical information over online gaming.

"Students participating in distance education or online standardized testing should get priority over those streaming online movies for entertainment," he said.

Defenders of net neutrality — which Franell accused of "fear-mongering" — have pushed back on the idea of allowing internet providers to pick and choose which traffic they prioritize. They say it would open the door to less ethical practices, such as slowing traffic to websites owned by a competitor or promoting a political ideology the provider disagrees with.

Advocates for a "free and open"



Joseph Franell, president of Eastern Oregon Telecom, testifies before the Energy and Commerce Committee on Thursday in Washington, D.C.

Contributed photo

internet want to preserve an internet where a local news website or personal blog is on a level playing field with websites like Netflix, which could afford to pay if providers like Comcast or Charter started charging fees for access to their customers.

In 2015, to enforce net neutrality, the Obama-era Federal Communications Commission classified broadband internet as a Title II utility, allowing the FCC to heavily regulate service providers. In 2017, under the Trump administration, the internet was reclassified as a Title I utility, ending net neutrality.

Franell told committee members Thursday that the Title II era

had a "dramatic chilling effect on rural telecommunication in the Pacific Northwest." Investors were extremely hesitant to invest in rural broadband, he said, and companies had to spend large amounts of time and resources on reporting to the federal government, drawing those resources away from serving customers and expanding service to more rural areas.

Franell urged lawmakers to avoid changing the internet back to a Title II utility as they considered rules to prevent bad behavior by service providers — behavior he said EOT and other rural internet providers in Oregon have never engaged in, even when legal.

"I believe Title II had begun to

harm the internet in the U.S., and a reapplication of it has the very real possibility of resulting in unforeseen and irrevocable damage," he said.

In a news release, Walden said Title II had given "big government unlimited authority to micromanage every single aspect of a provider's business." He said since its repeal both Democrats and Republicans have agreed that there does need to be limits on some behaviors, however, such as, arbitrarily blocking access to websites.

Walden told the other members of the Energy and Commerce Committee on Thursday that the internet was "the single most important driver of eco-

nomie growth, job creation, and a better quality of life for all Americans" and it was important to create legislation that would provide more stability for providers than having the FCC reclassify the internet at the whim of every new administration.

"For me, this debate is very much about the impact on providers like (Franell) who are trying to close the digital divide," Walden said. "Heavy-handed, one-size-fits-all regulations hurt small internet service providers like Eastern Oregon Telecom the most, and this in turn hurts their ability to expand broadband to underserved communities in rural America."

Franell told the *Hermiston Herald* that he had seen so much misinformation about net neutrality that when he was invited to testify he felt it was important to do what he could to tell the truth. He said he was interested to see the emotional progression that took place over the three-and-a-half hour hearing.

There was a lot of passion and anger on display in the first hour, he said, but as the hearing continued people on both sides of the political aisle seemed to realize "they were on the same sheet of music for the most part."

"Everyone thought that Democrats were for a free and open internet and Republicans are against it, but that's not true," he said. "... Everyone in the room, I think, agreed that throttling, paid prioritization and blocking are wrong."

He said he felt more confident at the end of the hearing that Congress can come up with a good piece of legislation to protect the internet without unduly burdening providers.

"It went really well," he said.

Hermiston nonprofits help people stay warm

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston has been experiencing a cold snap, with a winter storm that sent snow Friday night through Monday. Eastern Oregon is expected to get more snow before the month is out.

That has some local organizations busy trying to help people stay warm.

The Warming Station, which offers a free, warm sleeping place during winter months, has hosted 12 to 14 people a night in the past week. Addie Zumwalt, vice chair of the nonprofit's board, said the emergency shelter usually sees more like eight to 10 people.

"We've had a little more than usual," she said.

Zumwalt said when it gets extra cold or snowy numbers don't jump up as significantly as might be expected because the weather often inspires extra generosity from friends and family of potential guests. The shelter has a capacity of 24 people, including the two volunteers per shift.

Some local groups have seen an uptick in the number of people coming in seeking warm clothing.

Jamie Crowell, a community health educator at Good Shepherd Medical Center, said they just finished a monthlong coat drive, and distributed some of them during last week's Homeless Point-In-Time count.

Crowell said they gave out eight to 10 coats, as well as gloves, hats and socks, but they still have lots left over.

"Anybody that needs them can get one from us,"

she said.

Dave Hughes, director of Hermiston's Agape House, said he hasn't seen an increase in people coming in to get food, but has noticed more people asking for coats and blankets. While they still have some left, the supply is quickly growing smaller.

"That's where we can help," he said.

"We've had a pretty good increase in donations for hot food."

Glenn Dohman, Volunteer

Desert Rose Ministries, which is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays, has seen some more people coming in to get out of the cold. But more than that, said volunteer Glenn Dohman, they've been serving more hot meals since the snow fell on Monday.

While some of the people that spend the day at Desert Rose are people doing court-ordered community service, many others are homeless. Dohman said in addition to hot meals, they can get vouchers for cloth-

ing at the thrift store that Desert Rose operates. He said they've been giving out more of those so that people can get warm clothing and boots. They also keep hats, gloves and socks on hand to distribute to guests.

Dohman said they have sufficient supplies to get them through the cold weather, although they could use more warm clothing donations, as well as sleeping bags, tents, and tarps for people to sleep on.

"We got very fortunate," he said. "We've had a pretty good increase in donations for hot food."

Some of the people sitting inside Desert Rose on Thursday afternoon are no stranger to having to spend a night in the cold.

"It's not fun," said Mark Patterson. "It's not Boy Scouts camping — it's survival 101."

Patterson said he has been coming to Desert Rose since last summer. During the winter, he's been staying nights at the Hermiston Warming Station, and going to Desert Rose during the day.

He said the stigma of being homeless, whether in cold weather or not, is tough — but he's glad to have places where he can go.

"This place has been so gracious," he said as he sat at the table of Desert Rose, drinking a cup of coffee. "A warm place to come and talk to people."

He said every town could use more places for homeless people to stay, if only to take the pressure off the organizations that support them.

"I'm just a lost sheep looking for his way back home," he said. "One day I will get there."

Morrow County planning commission to meet

Morrow County planning commissioners and staff have held three work sessions over the past four months to gather information about how renewable energy facilities are sited.

At the Jan. 22 work session, acoustical engineer Kerrie Standlee shared about wind energy facilities and sound. Staff are compiling information for the Planning Commission to begin consideration of potential regulations to be applicable to renewable energy facilities, said Shambra Cooper, outreach coordinator.

The public is invited

to the upcoming meeting Tuesday, Feb. 26 at 7 p.m. at the Port of Morrow Riverfront Center, 2 Marine Drive, Boardman. A public hearing will include discussion on reconfiguration of farm land, temporary use of a recreational vehicle for a medical hardship, and a proposed aggregate mining operation. Information about the topics is available by contacting the Morrow County Planning Department.

For more information, call Cooper at 541-922-4624 or visit www.co.morrow.or.us/planning.

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The Foundation is again pleased to partner with Tualatin Imaging to offer additional scholarships for students who have expressed interest in pursuing a diagnostic imaging career

Please call 541-667-3419 for further information
Applications can be accessed online at www.gshealth.org/foundation/scholarships

PET OF THE WEEK

Holly was found as a stray on the streets with a large mass that turned out to be malignant. She has had two surgeries now and it appears that the cancer has all been removed. She is a very sweet dog that is great with kids. She would love a lap to lay in and be your little shadow. Holly is spayed, Microchipped, Vaccinated. She is potty and crate trained.

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STUDENT OF THE WEEK

Antonio Juarez
Hermiston High School

Antonio has taken it upon himself to volunteer as a peer tutor, specifically, our monolingual (knows little English) student population, after school on a regular basis in all subjects. He even keeps them focused when they get off task! He engages with staff in the building respectfully and is eager to learn. Always looking for ways to help in the building, offering to give tours for new students, translates in a pinch, and is future focused on reaching his goals!

He is an Awesome young man.

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