



Kathy Aney/Hermiston Herald

Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty fills out a questionnaire on Monday, May 9, 2022, as Boardman homeowner Tiffany Baldock provides the answers. Afterwards he collected a water sample from her filtered water to determine if the water is contaminated with nitrates.

NITRATES

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sample kits in hand, knocking and walking.

“I was hopeful as the first small set of samples were sent off to Kuo Testing Labs in Umatilla,” he recalled.

The testing company reported it would email the results in the ensuing days, he said, so a call from the lab to his cellphone was a bit of a surprise. He said the lab technician explained Kuo Testing is duty bound to warn people to suspend using any water if test results show there is an extreme and immediate health concern.

“I sadly have received that dreaded call for every sample submitted,” Doherty said.

The maximum level for nitrates in water is 7 parts per million, he said, and shared the result of 25 samples. One sample was .33 ppm. The second lowest was 8.24. The highest of that lot

was 51.22 ppm. The average was 30.77.

The majority of the homes tested had nitrate filters, he said, albeit not generally the more expensive ones that work, but instead the more disposable, more affordable variety.

More alarming, he said, is what the residents reported on a questionnaire asking if they had experienced any of a short list of nitrate-related health concerns.

“For a small sample, 70 tests to date, I was quite taken aback by the prevalence of persistent headaches, devastating cancers and failed pregnancies,” Doherty said. “This weighs incredibly heavy on my heart as I search my soul and wonder if I had only started earlier, could I have made a difference in these things.”

A hill worth dying on

Correlating responses to the question with the extremely high nitrate results is almost impossible.

But Doherty said he thinks it is “abundantly fair to suggest that in those numbers, the responses we got could certainly be attributed to the increasing prevalence of high nitrates.”

Policy making is about assessing what issues to address and how serious they are, Doherty said. And in this case, he said, it’s about making a stand.

“This certainly is, ‘a hill I am willing to die on,’ Doherty said, “if only that my friends and neighbors don’t face that literal peril.”

Doherty also touched on environmental justice. He said the very people who provide the labor force for the region are the same people bearing the brunt of the nitrate problem, yet they have been “discarded” from the environmental discussions, and they must have a voice in this.

“This is the missing community,” Doherty said. “This is a barrier that we must eliminate.”

ABORTION

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a lawsuit to the Idaho Supreme Court, temporarily blocking the bill before it could take effect in April.

Little in a letter to the Idaho Senate acknowledged this was a likely outcome: “I fear the novel civil enforcement mechanism will in short order be proven unconstitutional and unwise.”

Eastern Oregon will be the most accessible place for Idahoans to receive care. Planned Parenthood officials made it clear that by doing so they would be taxing an already taxed system. Providing a brick-and-mortar location in Eastern Oregon would take service providers that Planned Parenthood doesn’t have.

Eastern Oregon also has the most dissent to abortion laws inside of Oregon.

Father Daniel Maxwell of the Hermiston’s Our Lady of Angels Catholic Church expressed nothing but support for the possible Supreme Court ruling.

“We Catholics will be overjoyed because it will make abortion unthinkable by many people,” he said.

Maxwell emphasized that abortion is prohibited by the Didache, a text the Catholic Church holds sacred, and the church’s stance on abortion has not changed in hundreds of years.

“The Catholic Church has stood in opposition to abortion since the 15th century,” Maxwell continued. “It’s a mortal evil, you can’t change what’s true.”

“They can call it whatever they want, but it’s still taking another person’s life,” said

John Herman, a member of the parish of Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Church in La Grande, echoed that sentiment.

“They can call it whatever they want, but it’s still taking another person’s life,” he said.

Maxwell and his church parish are not alone. Anti-abortion protests are not uncommon in Eastern Oregon, and in fact, it was a major concern Planned Parenthood addressed in a press conference May 3. Several questions revolved around security measures at the soon-to-be Ontario Clinic and how the Organization would address suspected protesters.

Officials gave assurances they have been diligently planning for this for a while, but refused to make an affirmative statement to the question.

Oregon’s senior U.S. senator, Ron Wyden, in a statement blasted the Republican Party and the draft.

“The Republican party has set the stage for a total erosion of Americans’ constitutional rights,” Wyden said. “They have made clear they won’t stop at gutting the right for a woman to make decisions about her own body. Republicans know that the majority of Americans don’t support eroding fundamental rights like privacy, so instead, they packed the Supreme Court with right-wing extremists willing to do their dirty work behind

closed doors.”

Wyden said if this was a final draft, the United States will be one of a handful of countries moving backwards on women’s rights and mark a “devastating loss of constitutionally guaranteed bodily autonomy and privacy for more than half of America.”

He stated abortion is health care.

“Ending this protected and established right — a right generations of women have now known and that the overwhelming majority of Americans support — would harm the health, safety and lives of millions of women and families,” Wyden said. “This is going to be the fight of our lives, and we must use every tool at our disposal to stop this attack on constitutionally guaranteed rights.”

According to Politico, Chief Justice John Roberts confirmed the authenticity of the draft but stressed the document “does not represent a decision by the Court or the final position of any member on the issues in the case.”

Politico also noted, the draft opinion includes “a 31-page appendix of historical state abortion laws ... is replete with citations to previous court decisions, books and other authorities, and includes 118 footnotes.”

And the “appearances and timing of this draft,” according to Politico, “are consistent with court practice.”

— East Oregonian news editor Phil Wright and The Observer reporter Dick Mason contributed to this report.

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