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Bentz talks southern border, veterans issues in Boardman

Representative holds public town hall at SAGE Center in Boardman

BY ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Immigration, veterans' benefits and child care were a few of the issues Rep. Cliff Bentz fielded Wednesday morning, Aug. 10, during his town hall meeting in Boardman.

"This has been an exciting year," Bentz said, as he introduced himself to attendees and proceeded to answer their questions.

The Republican from Ontario also talked about water purity and the environment, too, and gave some indication as to how things might change in Washington with the upcoming midterm election.

If Republicans are in the majority next year, he said, they will be looking for ways to cut back on government spending.

The Boardman Chamber of Commerce promoted the public meeting at the SAGE Center at the Port of Morrow. Around a dozen people were in

attendance, and several of them spoke with the congressman and interacted with him about their particular concerns.

He said he has frequently met with people during his term. As a U.S. representative, he said, he is often approached by people who want something.

In addition to people who simply wanted to express their appreciation to Bentz for his work at the town hall, there were others who wished to communicate their stories and ask for government assistance.

Debbie Radie of Boardman Foods asked Bentz about issues related to employment.

Radie pointed out the nation has a low unemployment rate, but Boardman Foods is having trouble finding enough employees. She said businesses such as Boardman Foods could benefit if the federal government acted on child care, freeing parents to work. Also, she said, businesses need foreign immigrants for their labor, and government could help with that, too.

Cameron Krebs agreed, saying foreign workers are key to our community and essential to local business. He called for Bentz to support their efforts,



Mackenzie Whaley/Hermiston Herald

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, brings laughter to the table Aug. 10, 2022, at the town hall meeting in Boardman.

possibly with a program to offer amnesty.

Bentz responded to both, saying the U.S. is facing an "organized wave" of immigration that will need to be addressed before it can expand a visa program.

He said he has visited the U.S.-Mexico border, and he has seen immigrants massing there. Many of the people, he said, are poor, uneducated and lacking proficiency in English. According to Bentz, many people are illegitimately claiming asylum. And Bentz expressed the hope the border could be fixed.

He answered another ques-

tion from Radie, regarding nitrate contamination, a major issue of concern in the Boardman area. Bentz acknowledged there has been a long-standing practice of imprecise nitrate use, which has led to the contamination of many private wells. He said this problem needs addressing, both in short and long terms.

"It'll be years before this is solved," he said, including new solutions to nitrates. In the meantime, homes in the Boardman area need more filters. This needs to be done quickly, he said.

ANSWERING OUR VETERANS

A few people at the town hall represented themselves as veterans and said they have worries, too.

Chris Brown said he suffers from health problems and has had difficulty receiving care. According to Brown, the system of providing health care to veterans is "not user friendly." Other vets agreed more needs to be done.

Bentz expressed his appreciation to the veterans for their service.

Although he "lucked out" by not being drafted into the military during the Vietnam War, he said, he is grateful to service people.

He said he would look into the issue and communicate further with people who were having troubles.

Health care, he said, is not a problem limited to veterans, but he said he would try to address the issues former military personnel expressed.

As for other issues brought up at the town hall, Bentz said he would try to address those concerns, too.

And he said he would return for additional town halls.

BRIEFS

Boardman seeks city council candidates

Boardman is looking to fill two vacancies on its city council.

The Boardman Clerk's Office announced the city needs to fill the seat Katy Norton left when she resigned July 12 due to moving away from the area. And Paul Beagle's resignation July 15 for personal issues created the second opening on the council. The city council accepted both resignations at its Aug. 2 meeting.

Both terms expire Dec. 31, 2024. The Boardman City Council is seeking letters of interest from individuals willing to be considered for appointment to fill the vacancies. Anyone interested must have resided in the city of Boardman during the 12 months immediately preceding the appointment and be a registered voter, according to the announcement from the Boardman Clerk's Office.

Letters of interest must be received no later than 5 p.m. Aug. 24 to City Manager Karen Pettigrew at Boardman City Hall for consideration. The city council will interview the candidates, and appoint the new councilors at the Sept. 6 council meeting.

In a related matter, the filing deadline for residents in Boardman seeking office in the November election is 5 p.m. Aug. 30.

The clerk's office reported the city council has three positions open in the election with terms ending Dec. 31, 2026. Candidates must be at least 18 years old, reside within the city limits and have lived within the city limits 12 months immediately preceding election day and be a registered voter no less than 20 days immediately preceding the election.

Residents who wish to file for city council can obtain filing packets Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., at Boardman City Hall.

For more information on local filing, call the clerk's office at 541-481-9252 or visit sos.oregon.gov/voting-elections.

—Hermiston Herald

Echo city administrator warns of potential dangers

BY ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Herald

Echo City Administrator David Slaght is alerting people of the flooding dangers that remain.

Though much work has been done to protect property around his town from a rising Umatilla River, he said many more actions need to be taken.

"It's a big pie, and we're working our way through each piece," Slaght said.

This year, water crept toward homes. One land owner, Slaght said, lost between 7 to 10 acres in the course of the last year. Rising water has affected other landowners, too, he said.

"The damage was substantial," he said.

To combat rising water, approximately 560 feet of riprap was placed on the shoreline. The rocky material was put on the west bank to protect homes, and it remains, still.

The water retreated, but concern remains, Slaght said. City officials continue to meet with government agencies, including the Oregon Department of State

Lands, as well as elected officials, such as Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. Local landowners, engineers, Echo City Council members and other elected officials have met recently, too, to address this issue.

He said the riprap is not a permanent fix and certainly is not the final correction for the problem of rising water.

"They're not going to let us leave the rocks there without doing something," Slaght said.

He added the city is proposing placing large logs under the rocks. This will involve first pulling the rocks up and placing the logs at the riverbank and then setting the rocks on top.

According to the city manager, this setup will protect the habitat of fish.

Other structures, Slaght added, may be constructed on the river to divert flows. These structures, and the log setup, will be the first stage. There are other actions to be taken, though, he said.

The second stage is to repair properties, shoreline and river

area to the north of the bridge, the eastside of the river and the south end of Echo, according to Slaght.

Long-term projects, also being planned, include a levy system, which Slaght said engineers have recommended.

"I don't know what that looks like, or how that is going to work," Slaght said. "It's very expensive, time-consuming and a lot of work has to go into it to get it done."

He said that such work is necessary, however, as "the ultimate goal here is to protect homes, protect the fish and keep the river moving through."

In addition to these goals, the city manager said he wants to increase plantings in the area of the river. Different plant species, including willows and cottonwood, are planned.

"These are things that are in the works," Slaght said. "Nothing is set in stone, other than the fact that we are committed as a community. The city of Echo, the county and the state are committed to protect Echo

and its properties."

He said the city is interested, too, in filler removal from the river, though he said that such work is time-consuming and complicated.

"We're trying to get some short-term fixes done to protect the town from the next high-water event, if we have one," he said.

Ultimately, he said, he wants the city to get to the point where people do not have to worry about flooding.

"There is potential for way-worse damage, if we don't do this," he said.

He added the buffer zone between the river and homes has been removed. The floods of previous years, and the high-water event of this year, have "set the stage" for something much worse, according to the city manager.

If nothing is done, he said, people could be hurt and further property could be lost.

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