

Sen. Wyden takes questions at Prairie City School

By Rudy Diaz Blue Mountain Eagle Oct 15, 2019

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U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, answers questions from Grant County community members during a town hall Oct. 7 at Prairie City School.

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The national debt, climate issues and the 2020 election season were among the topics at Sen. Ron Wyden's town hall at Prairie City School.

Wyden answered questions from students of Prairie City high school and members of the Grant County community Oct. 7.

Jessica Reames, a Prairie City student, asked Wyden for his thoughts on global warming and what actions Oregon could take to address it.

Wyden said the problem is real but that the state would have a difficult time making an impact by itself.

“If Oregon just does it by itself, how does that position us with the rest of the country?” Wyden said. “I think we have to do this as a country.”

There are 44 separate tax breaks for energy in the federal tax code, according to Wyden. He recommended getting rid of those and proposed three energy tax breaks: one for clean energy, one for clean transportation fuel and one for energy efficiency. This plan would help in working with the Republican Party and create “more green for less green,” Wyden said.

A community member asked about security regarding the 2020 elections.

“I believe that in the 2020 election there will be interference from hostile, foreign powers that will make what happened in 2016 look like really small potatoes,” said Wyden, who is on the Select Senate Intelligence Committee.

Wyden also discussed a bill he said would help, Protecting American Vote and Elections Act of 2019, with three components: hand-marked paper ballots, risk-limiting audits and a voting system that is not left open to internet access.

Carson McKay, a Prairie City student, asked how the Senate planned to pay off the national debt.

“The key to paying off the national debt is to help legislators be willing to take on the biggest items in the budget, which is why I mentioned Medicare, which is why I mentioned the tax breaks, the military port,” Wyden said. “You cannot reduce the national debt unless you go to the big items.”

Prairie City Mayor Jim Hamsher asked Wyden if he supported the Revitalizing Underdeveloped Rural Areas and Lands Act and if he believed it will pass during this session.

“You will have it,” Wyden said, indicating his support. “This is really a big deal in rural Oregon because it affects the tax exempt, and getting back tax-exempt stuff for rural costs.”

After the Grant County town hall, Wyden visited Malheur Lumber to view the progress on the torrefaction plant.

“I think what’s striking is that folks are really looking at what goes on in D.C. and they’re saying, ‘Hey! That’s important, but we’ve got to talk about our stuff,’” Wyden said regarding his visit to Grant County. “It highlights how important it is to get out on the ground (to visit each county).”
