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Subject: Reflecting on the Final Accomplishments of 2019
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News from Representative Walden

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Dear Susan,

Reflecting on the Final Accomplishments of 2019

Happy new year! This last year we accomplished a lot, like, improving rural health care, expanding rural broadband, and improving forest management. Now, as we enter both a new year and a new decade, I look forward to all that we will accomplish in 2020. But first, I wanted to take the time to update you on a few of the final wins we achieved at the end of 2019.

Supporting the Columbia Gorge

For the past 21 years, I have been fighting for funding for the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area. The \$2 million included in this year-end funding package will support the ongoing economic development in the Gorge. I was glad to work with Senator Merkley, Senator Wyden, and our colleagues across the river in Washington to secure the remaining funding owed to our communities under the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area Act. As the area continues to recover from the effects of the Eagle Creek Fire, these funds are all the more important and I am glad that the President signed this into law.



Cross-river and cross-aisle federal business development grants directed at Eagle Creek fire damage recovery

A bipartisan press release from federal legislators from Oregon and



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Washington: Oregon's Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), and Representative Greg Walden (R-OR-2), recently announced that the 2020 spending bill passed by Congress will include \$2 million in new funding for rural business development grants, with priority given to National Scenic Areas that have been devastated by wildfires, such as the Columbia River Gorge.

Click [here](#) to read more from the Hood River News.

Providing for our Rural Communities

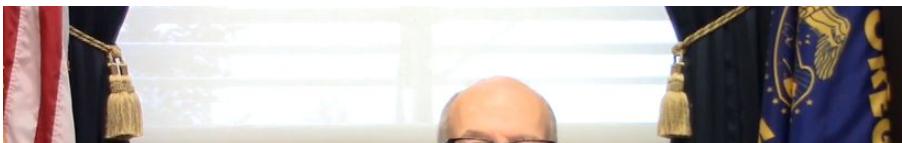
Our rural electric cooperatives should not get punished when they receive broadband buildout grants or emergency recovery funding. Yet, because of a drafting error in prior legislation, that's precisely what would happen. Thankfully, President Trump signed into law the Rural Act, a bill I co-sponsored that would help keep electric costs affordable and expand access to broadband in rural Oregon. This fix is essential to ensuring cooperatives and other consumer-owned utilities can continue doing their good work across the state.

I also helped the House pass into law full funding for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program. Full funding for PILT keeps an important commitment to rural counties in Oregon. The federal government controls much of the land in our district and these funds help to make up for lost property tax revenue and help counties provide basic services such as roads and law enforcement.

In continuation of Congress' efforts to support rural communities, we also extended funding for the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program for 2019 and 2020. Secure Rural Schools funding helps Oregon's forested communities pay for essential services like schools, roads, and law enforcement. SRS has never replaced the dramatic reduction in federal timber revenue lost over the last 30 years, but it does provide some level of support. Last year, we passed the most significant reform to forest policy in a decade to help improve the management of our forests. While this is progress toward reversing the decades-long decline in timber revenue, an extension of SRS is needed to ensure counties have a safety net as we work to further improve forest management and utilize our natural resources to provide sustainable jobs and revenue to Oregon's rural communities.

Lowering the Cost of Prescription Drugs

In December, I introduced the [Lower Costs, More Cures Act](#) which would help lower the price of prescription drugs and insulin. My legislation would ensure that Americans can see reductions in the cost of their pharmaceutical drugs and that we won't get in the way of new innovations to save peoples' lives. We need to incentivize innovation and develop more cures, but we also need to tackle the bad behavior by pharmaceutical companies when they stop generics from coming to the market and block access to some of these newer drugs that would bring down the cost of prescription drugs.





Click [here](#) or on the image above to watch Rep. Walden's video announcement.

My Columbia Basin
www.mycolumbiabasin.com

Walden wants to lower prescription costs

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) hopes 2020 brings passage of his Lower Costs, More Cures Act. He said the proposed bill would lower prescription costs without cutting into important medical research. "This is all designed to stop bad behavior by pharmaceutical companies and bring down the cost of drugs, but not do so in a way that upends the whole effort of revolutionizing medicine with new cures," Walden said.

Click [here](#) to read more from My Columbia Basin.

Stopping Illegal Robocalls

Last year in the 541-area code, roughly 162.9 million robocalls were placed. On the second to last day of 2019, President Trump signed into law a bill I helped author, the TRACED Act, which will put an end to illegal robocalls. The legislation will give phone companies and the government new tools to help combat robocalls. The bipartisan law puts consumers first, enabling menacing robocalls to be blocked at no extra cost to the consumer. Now that this bill is law, I will remain vigilant in ensuring it is properly implemented and that Oregonians are protected from menacing robocalls.

Expanding Rural Broadband

At the end of 2019, the House passed two bills I co-sponsored that would help improve and expand access to rural broadband in Oregon. These bills would help improve broadband mapping, which will allow us to better understand exactly where communities are that still lack access to high speed internet. These bills will help strengthen connectivity in America and lessen the urban/rural digital divide.

In 2019, I brought the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

In 2018, I brought the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Ajit Pai out to eastern Oregon to discuss efforts to improve connectivity in rural communities, including making sure patients in remote areas have access to the best doctors through technology like telehealth. I also recently helped secure a \$6 million grant to John Day to further expand rural broadband in the region. I will continue to work to expand rural broadband and ensure that Oregonians have sufficient access to high speed internet service.

Delivering for Oregon Ag Producers and Small Businesses

In December, the House came together to pass the United States-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement (USMCA) which greatly helps Oregon's agricultural producers and small businesses. Oregon businesses export \$3.7 billion in goods to Canada and Mexico, supporting 7,421 jobs in our state. This agreement expands and solidifies the market opportunities that make that possible. USMCA will especially help Oregon wine, wheat, and dairy producers and provide improved market access for our agriculture products. I look forward to the Senate passing and the President signing this agreement so that we can continue to grow our economy and expand access to markets abroad.

Taking Care of our Servicemembers

Looking ahead, I wanted to bring your attention to an issue I am working on fixing concerning our servicemembers and veterans. Currently, when servicemembers are medically retired, they can enroll in different versions of TRICARE, which is the U.S. military health insurance program. If a veteran is injured to the point of becoming eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), they also become eligible for Medicare after 24 months. However, once the veteran becomes eligible for Medicare, they are no longer eligible for traditional TRICARE and instead become eligible for a supplement allowing access to TRICARE services called TRICARE for Life. In order to have access to TRICARE for Life, the veteran must enroll in Medicare Part B. If the veteran returns to work and is no longer receiving SSDI cash benefits, they continue to remain eligible for Medicare for 8.5 years. This can become a problem when a veteran returns to work but continues to have Medicare coverage because they cannot return to a different, more affordable, TRICARE product. In addition, since their SSDI payments ceased, these veterans must pay the Medicare Part B premiums out of pocket. Standard Medicare Part B premiums can represent over a 5-fold difference in cost, a clear disincentive to return to work for those who are able, and creates an equity issue between veterans.

There is a provision in the HEARTS Act which allows those veterans returning to work to opt-out of Medicare Part B when SSDI payments cease and enables them to maintain TRICARE for Life even after opting-out of Part B. Congress could act to offset any costs by passing the Prostate Misdiagnosis Elimination Act. Unfortunately, some members of the Oregon Delegation have worked to prevent the Prostate Misdiagnosis

Elimination Act from becoming law. It is my hope that Congress can come together in a bipartisan way to get this provision passed into law so that our veterans and servicemembers can have access to the benefits and services they deserve. I will be sure to keep you updated on the progress we make on this issue.

Ways My Office Can Help

We recently helped a constituent who is a veteran get his disability approved. The veteran had been denied disability twice, but our office helped provide evidence of his disability. Now, he will receive the services and support he earned through his service.

If you need help with any federal agency, please reach out to my office at 800-533-3303. My staff is available and ready to assist you with problems you are having with federal agencies, and my office will do everything in our power to get results for you.

That's all for this update. Remember, you can always keep in touch with me via [email](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

It is an honor to represent you in the U.S. Congress.

Best regards,

Greg Walden
U.S. Representative
Oregon's Second District

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