

Walden: Firm plan needed for Iraq

By Larry Meyer - Argus Observer
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ONTARIO - A small crowd of 30 to 40 people greeted U.S. Congressman Greg Walden, R-Ore., Saturday at a town hall meeting at Treasure Valley Community College.

Walden kicked off the session with comments regarding the 75th anniversary celebration of the Owyhee Dam. Walden linked the crucial role the dam plays, especially when its impact is considered, alongside the current concerns about global warming.

"How fortunate it was for the Northwest to be reliant on renewable resources. It speaks to the importance of maintaining the hydro system," he said.

He noted the four lower Snake River dams, which are the target of a removal process, produce enough power to service a city the size of Seattle.

"Dams are important, not only important to transportation and power, but to clean power," Walden said.

As far as saving salmon is concerned, Walden said part of the problem is the growing number of sea lions which are feeding on the salmon, and he is looking for ways to have their numbers reduced.

There is a glimmer of hope to have the payments to timber counties renewed for a longer term than the one year approved by Congress, Walden said. Congressman Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., is working on a bill to extend the payment to four or five years, with the amount phased down over time, Walden said.

It is a hard to sell the plan to states which have little or no federal land, Walden said. However, he said, the program is ". . . a 100-year-old commitment."

Walden also talked about Iraq.

"It's the most contentious issue in the nation. We have lost a lot of Oregonians," he said.

Walden said the United States will, one day, depart Iraq. The key question, he said, is how.

Walden talked about the "unplanned" way America went to war in Iraq and warned a firm blueprint for any kind of drawdown would be critical.

"We better not leave unplanned," he said. An unplanned, massive withdrawal could lead to a blowup that shakes the whole Mideast, he said. He said he is not overly hopeful the report from Iraq due this fall on the progress of the "surge" will be good. Walden also said it is important for the United States to take care of Iraq war veterans.

"We have to do everything appropriate to take care of those coming back," he said.

He said there has been an increase in funding in veterans health care and 1,100 case workers have been added to help veterans.

About immigration, Walden said it is important for the nation to secure its borders. However, "The hardest part is dealing with the 12 million (illegal immigrants) already here," he said.