

Bill to fund broadband will spur high-speed internet in rural areas

BY PAM MARSH

For many Oregonians, the scarcity of internet access is a thing of the past, an experience limited to getaways in rural and wild areas of the state. But at least 400,000 residents currently lack internet, and 26 of the state's school districts have no or minimal service.

The communications gap extends to southern Oregon. Data from the American Community Survey of 2017 indicates that, while some census tracts in Ashland and Medford already had greater than 80 percent connectivity through cable, fiber optic or DSL broadband service, the part of the Applegate Valley in Jackson County had just 53.8 percent. Although areas of Grants Pass had more than 70 percent connectivity, the census tract encompassing Williams had just 25.87 percent of homes with internet.

The good news is, if House Bill 2184 passes successfully through the Oregon Legislature this year, rural communities across the state may finally get online.

Accessible, affordable broadband technology has become integral to every aspect of work and life, including education, healthcare, employment, public safety, and civic engagement. Studies show that broadband generates

more than \$1,850 per household per year in economic benefits, so lack of technology exacerbates the gap between those with resources and those left behind. Data also suggests that rural areas with widely available broadband are more likely to retain and attract young adults.

In the 2019 legislative session, I am sponsoring the Broadband for All Oregonians bill that would develop an ongoing source of funding for broadband through an extension of the current Oregon Universal Services Fund. Broadband fund revenues will be disbursed through grants and loans to help bring broadband to unserved and underserved communities. A second piece of legislation, HB 2173, will create an Oregon Broadband Office within Business Oregon (oregon4biz.com) to focus on building a statewide broadband infrastructure.

As a member of the state's Broadband Advisory Council and the Joint Legislative Information Management and Technology Committee, I know that state-level strategies and programs must ensure that all individuals and communities have access to affordable

communications and information technologies. Broadband is a critical component of community infrastructure, innovation, and new opportunities in education, health, and economic development.

Schools will benefit

For Oregon's K-20 schools, increased broadband connectivity means enhanced career and college-ready standards, access to high-quality digital content and courses through distance learning, and online access to professional resources. It enables schools and libraries to serve as technology hubs, boosting access to education and jobs.

Contributing more than \$8.25 billion to Oregon's economy each year, agriculture will become the largest driver for broadband infrastructure deployment in rural areas. Lack of high-speed internet infrastructure is the main barrier for farmers to adopt new technologies and equipment, resulting in less efficient status-quo practices and ripple effects leading to higher food costs and unnecessary environmental impacts.

Telehealth, the remote delivery of health care using various telecommunication technologies such as video-conferencing equipment, is increasingly part of the solution to current healthcare access, outcomes, and financing issues. Thus the lack of high-speed internet access is a significant barrier for underserved areas. Telehealth

services can improve access to specialists, save costs of patient transports, and provide remote patient monitoring for care for people with chronic diseases.

Broadband has tremendous potential for public safety communications, giving first responders the ability to send and receive voice and text messages, images, and video. Oregon's emergency services are at a transition point for migration to new broadband Internet Protocol (IP) technologies.

And our civic life also relies on the internet. Nearly every agency, board, commission, and branch of state government participates in the centralized Oregon E-Government service, including websites, online applications and payments, and public information.

It's time to close the digital divide. House Bill 2184 will give all Oregonians access to the benefits of high-speed internet for school, work, health, safety, and community—and downloadable movies and music when it's time to relax.

Representative Pam Marsh
rep.pammarsh@oregonlegislature.gov
Pam Marsh serves Oregon House District 5, which includes Ruch, parts of the Applegate within Jackson County, Jacksonville, the southwest corner of Medford, Phoenix, Talent, and Ashland. To follow legislative updates and news from Representative Marsh, visit oregonlegislature.gov/marsh and e-subscribe.

LEHI

Family Owned & Operated Since 1976

Licensed-Bonded-Insured
CCB# 96496

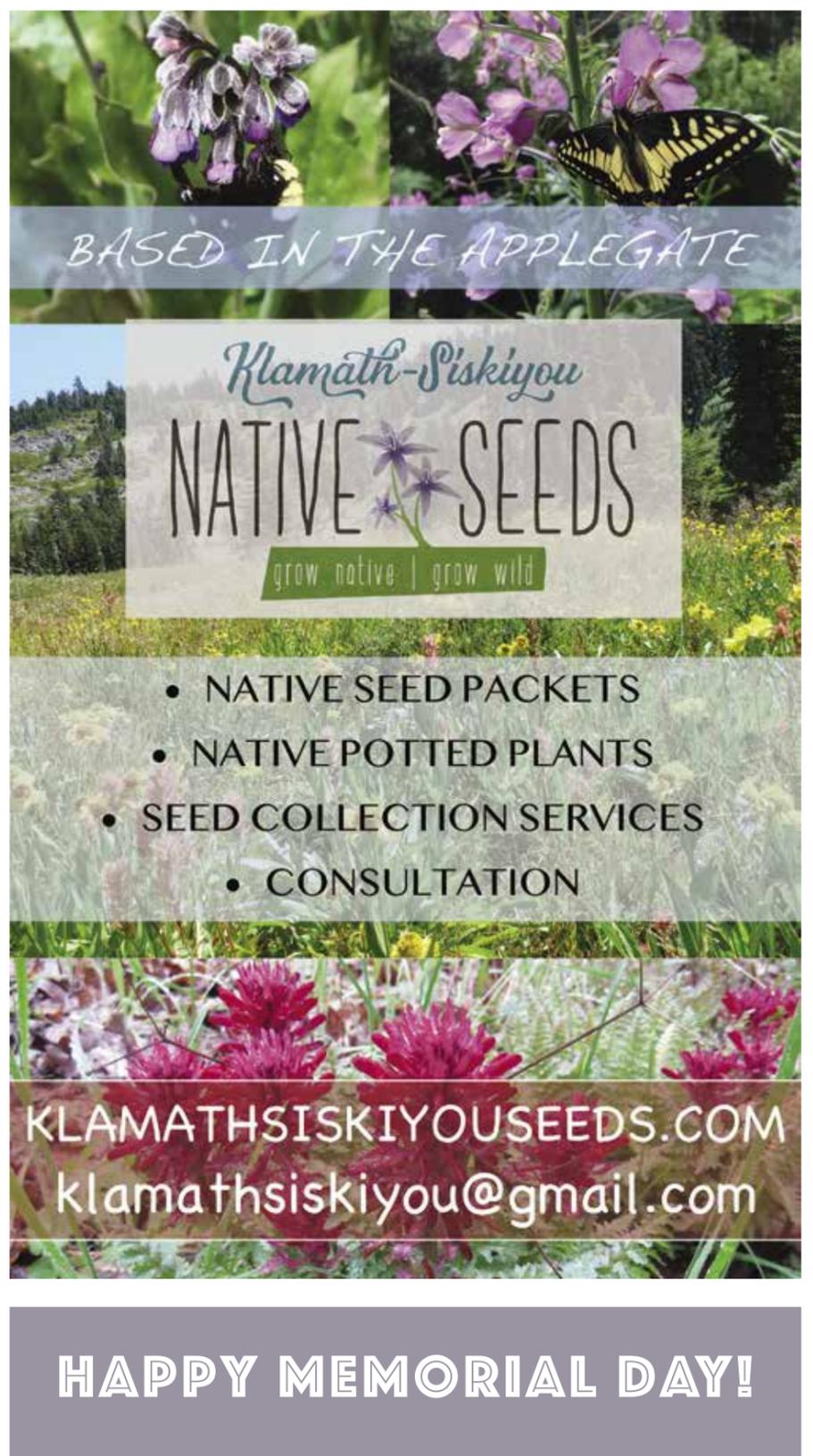
PUMP SERVICE, INC.

WATER WELL

PUMP SALES, SERVICE & REPAIR
HAND PUMPS-FLOW TESTING
FILTRATION SYSTEMS
HOLDING TANK SYSTEMS
SOLAR PUMP SYSTEMS and MORE...

lehipump@gmail.com

(541) 846-6662



BASED IN THE APPLGATE

Klamath-Siskiyou

NATIVE SEEDS

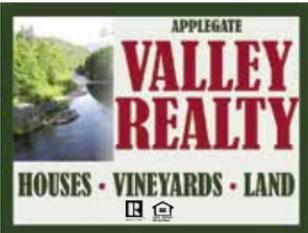
grow native | grow wild

- NATIVE SEED PACKETS
- NATIVE POTTED PLANTS
- SEED COLLECTION SERVICES
- CONSULTATION

KLAMATHSISKIYOUSEEDS.COM

klamathsiskiy@gmail.com

HAPPY MEMORIAL DAY!



APPLGATE VALLEY REALTY
HOUSES • VINEYARDS • LAND



Debbie Tollefson
Principal Broker
Owner
541-973-9184



Don Tollefson
Principal Broker
Owner
541-973-9185

Why choose us over other realtors?

- 1. Custom personalized service**
We adjust our service to your needs.
- 2. Consistent continuous communication**
- 3. Newest marketing system**
Manaport tours and drone shots.
- 4. Extensive internet presence**
We syndicate to over 50 websites.
- 5. We focus on quality, not volume**
Our clients say they really appreciate our professionalism.