

Appeal Tribune

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Silverton teachers, district still split on terms

Natalie Pate and Bill Poehler

Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

After their latest round of mediation, Silverton teachers and Silver Falls School District officials still have not reached an agreement on contract negotiations, putting educators one step closer to striking.

Union leaders argue working conditions — not money — is the largest issue, pointing to major concerns around teacher evaluations and involuntary transfers.

District officials would not comment to the Statesman Journal on these issues, but said they hope to release more information in the coming days.

District leadership would like another day of mediation. Union leaders said they are considering the request.

Silver Falls Education Association representatives and the district's bargaining team have been in mediation since Jan. 13, and in contract negotiations since

last spring.

Teachers in the Silverton-based district have been working under an expired contract since June.

Wednesday was the final scheduled day for talks between the two sides.

More than 200 members of the association have signed pledge-to-strike forms, indicating their intention to strike over better working conditions for educators across the district.

By state law, if an agreement is not reached in the 15 days of mediation — by Monday, Jan. 27 — the two parties will enter a seven-day final offer and coasting period, followed by a 30-day cooling off period, before they can formally strike, meaning they could potentially strike in about 40 days.

Association officials argue Wednesday's meeting ended with "the district failing to move on issues around teacher evaluation and appropriate teacher transfer protections."

"We cannot in good faith continue to allow for the mistreatment of teachers, and we continue to demand

a contract that will hold the district accountable," said association president Michelle Stadel.

"What felt like a productive day blew up in the 11th hour because of issues affecting teachers and students — not money," she said. "We stand in our commitment to our students and the basic protection of the educators who serve them."

Concerns: evaluations, transfers

Among their concerns, association members have asked that a minimum 15-minute formal, annual evaluation be written into the contract.

This would align with current Oregon law, and association leaders said it would require collaboration between the district, teachers, administrators and collective bargaining representatives to "create a sound system of evaluation for teachers."

As the contract currently stands, association lead-

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A 30-unit apartment complex is under construction in Jefferson on Jan. 22, 2020.

ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Rural cities struggle with housing prices

Bill Poehler

Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Living in Jefferson is becoming less of an option for many people who work in the city.

Like many rural cities in Oregon, new home construction in Jefferson lags far behind the expanding population. While the city added nearly 600 residents from 2010 to 2019 — 22 percent growth — few new residences were built.

Only three or four new homes have been built each year over the past decade, according to Jefferson Mayor Michael Myers, which has led to soaring prices for existing properties and a lack of affordable housing in the rural city.

"There's only a handful of teachers that actually live in Jefferson," Myers said. "When a teacher can't afford to live in the community, that doesn't speak well for it."

A long-needed, 30-unit apartment complex is under construction in the heart of the city of 3,200 in south Marion County on the banks of the Santiam River, but it won't make a dent its need for housing.

Jefferson isn't an isolated case. To solve the shortfall of affordable housing in Marion County an estimated 7,215 new affordable units would need to be built, according to a 2018 Oregon Housing Alliance report.

Jefferson would seem to be the model for a city primed for rapid expansion.

Jefferson has plenty of developable land since it annexed 15 acres in the southeast part of the city in 2017, a low tax rate, capacity in its infrastructure including new sewer and water treatment plants, a school district which is building new elementary and middle schools and easy access to Interstate 5 with a 15-minute drive from larger cities like Salem and Albany.

Myers said Jefferson is starting to look at its policies to see if it can encourage construction of affordable housing, following the lead of nearby cities like Turner, Lyons, Sublimity and Donald.

"The bottom line is if we have more housing than people, we would have lower prices for houses," Marion County Commissioner Colm Willis said.

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Corban wrestling continues building culture in first year

Pete Martini

Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Keegan Davis has had tremendous success in his wrestling career.

A two-time OSAA state champion at Sprague High School, Davis went on in college to qualify for the NCAA National Tournament twice while competing at Oregon State.

But in the fall of 2018, Davis took on what might be his biggest challenge yet in sport — build a college wrestling program from the ground up at Corban University.

"It did seem like a big undertaking, so I was a little reluctant at first, but I thought about it, and I thought about the impact I could have on the guys in that context," said Davis, who previously had coached at the high school level. "The more I thought about it, the more I realized that it was something I needed. The impact that I'm having here, and the relationships I'm building, are super rewarding."

Corban's wrestling program is 5-7 in its first season, and Davis, his coaching staff and his wrestlers are working to establish a culture that will carry on for years to come.

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Sex, lies and cellphones

Reports of misconduct at Coffee Creek women's prison persist despite promises of a crackdown

Whitney Woodworth

Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

An inmate at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility says that for months a corrections officer brought drugs into the prison for her to sell, smuggled her a cell phone and had sex with her and another female inmate on two occasions.

The accusations are the latest among dozens of staff misconduct cases to surface in recent years at Oregon's only women's prison.

The man at the center of the most recent accusations — 31-year-old Richard S. Alberts II — faces trial in February on federal drug trafficking charges for allegedly smuggling meth and heroin into Coffee Creek.

An investigation began last spring when prison staff reported Alberts might be having sexual relations with inmates. That investigation was reportedly dropped, and the inmates were later placed in isolation for refusing to cooperate.

But it led to a drug trafficking investigation by the FBI.

Sex abuse and misconduct cases, including about 10 active lawsuits against the state, have plagued the Wilsonville prison since it opened in 2001 and through seven superintendent changes.

The allegations and convictions have ranged from rape and sexual assault to drug smuggling and sexual contact — contact that an inmate can't legally consent to because of the power dynamics of being incarcerated.

The accusations run counter to promises made by Oregon Department of Corrections officials to crack down on staff misconduct, adhere to standards to stop sexual contact and eliminate gaps in surveillance.

In the latest case, the woman reached out to the Statesman Journal about the alleged misconduct at Coffee Creek.

She said Alberts seemed to smuggle in drugs and cell phones with ease and found locations out of range of prison cameras to engage in sexual contact.

The woman is not being identified because she fears retaliation, saying she was one of the inmates placed in months-long isolation in June after police began investigating Alberts.

The Statesman Journal spoke with multiple relatives and inmates at Coffee Creek about her account. They confirmed the lockdown that ensued after Alberts was investigated, the contact that occurred on the cell phone and that she disclosed having sexual contact with Alberts.

The inmate also was able to provide photographs taken inside the prison and text messages sent on the smuggled phone.

She said during a sexual encounter in a prison closet, Alberts allegedly asked another female inmate keeping lookout to join them in a threesome

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A corrections officer puts ankle cuffs on inmates at Oregon Women's Correctional Center as they get ready to load a bus to their new home at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville in 2004.

STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

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