

Hayes criticized for 'bad faith' in bankruptcy proceedings

The Associated Press

SALEM — The Oregon Government Ethics Commission has accused former Oregon First Lady Sylvia Hayes of using her bankruptcy proceeding to drag out a resolution of her ethics case months longer than needed.

The Statesman Journal reports that Carolyn Wade, a senior assistant attorney general representing the

commission, made the claim in a Dec. 31 filing in Hayes' bankruptcy proceeding. Hayes filed for Chapter 13 bankruptcy in July 2018.

In addition to up to \$110,000 in possible civil penalties from 22 ethics violations, Hayes has a more than \$124,000 judgment against her for a public records lawsuit The Oregonian won.

Wade said the bankruptcy

proceeding is meritless.

The ethics commission ruled in January 2018 - six months before Hayes filed for bankruptcy - that she violated state ethics laws by using her position for the financial benefit of herself and her business.

Many of the violations centered around Hayes' work on environmental consulting contracts while also involved

as an unpaid adviser who did energy policy work in Gov. John Kitzhaber's office.

Kitzhaber resigned in 2015 amid allegations that Hayes used their relationship to win contracts for her consulting business. He agreed to pay a separate \$20,000 penalty from the ethics commission stemming from conflicts of interest tied to his interest in Hayes' company.

Wade said in the filing that six months after filing for bankruptcy, Hayes' bankruptcy plan still hasn't been evaluated at a confirmation hearing.

But Michael Fuller, Hayes' attorney, called the ethics commission filing a "placeholder objection" needed to preserve the commission's claim. The commission had a Dec. 31 deadline, as did The

Oregonian, to file a response or objections with the bankruptcy court.

Fuller said he expects to finalize terms of an agreement with the ethics commission within several weeks.

The agreement will "resolve all issues between my client and the commission," he said.

Officials from the ethics commission were unavailable for comment.

BMTD

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the most cost effective and provide the most benefit," McHaddad said.

Tim Wallender, president of the BMTD's board of directors, is an enthusiastic supporter of adding an emergency alert system.

"I am excited about it," Wallender said. "It will be all local."

He said the BMTD would work closely with emergency services officials in Union and Baker counties when determining how emergency alerts would be issued. Wallender said the support the proposal is receiving from city councils, fire districts and other agencies will help SB 394's chances of being approved by the Legislature.

The support will impress Bentz, who "wants to know that all of the agencies are behind it," Wallender said.

A second piece of pro-

posed legislation, SB 393, would make it easier for the Blue Mountain Translator District, which provides about 24 channels, to get more people to pay the \$100 annual fee every homeowner using over-the-air TV service is supposed to pay.

Presently, the BMTD sends a service charge letter to every household in its district outside an incorporated city. If homeowners do not respond to the service charge letter by paying the \$100 fee or indicating they do not use the BMTD's service, a lien is placed on their property by the Union or Baker county assessor's office.

McHaddad said \$45,000 of its annual revenue comes from residents who pay their annual service charge and \$40,000 from liens on the property of BTMD service users.

The BMTD cannot send service charge letters to homeowners in incorporated

cities unless they have antennas that can be seen from the street. SB 393 would allow the BMTD to send service charge letters to all households in cities in its service area. This could be done only if cities were first annexed in the Blue Mountain Translator District. Currently only property in unincorporated areas is technically part of the BMTD.

McHaddad said passage of SB 393 would boost the BMTD's efficiency by reducing the time staff spends finding homes with antennas in cities. The BMTD has just two paid positions.

McHaddad said he has counted 228 homes in Union County cities that have antennas: 122 in La Grande, 47 in Union, 22 in Elgin, 15 in Island City, 11 in Summerville and 11 in Imbler.

The third proposed piece of legislation would change the way the BMTD receives funding. The bill would make

it possible for the BMTD to levy property taxes on property owners living within its district instead of assessing service charges to users. The tax rates would have to be approved by voters living within the district area.

McHaddad said there is an increasing need to change the way the BMTD is funded in the future because of progressing technology. He explained that some people are now able to watch TV programs from BMTD signals on handheld smartphone-type devices using antennas that are only a few inches long.

Wallender said this means that it is impossible to keep track of how many people are using BMTD television signals.

"We need to be equitable and have a level playing field. Some are paying for the service and others are stealing service," said Wallender, one of three members of the

BMTD board along with April Simpson of Summerville and Christina Wood of Baker City.

The Blue Mountain Translator District, founded in 1978, has broadcast towers on Mt. Fanny and Mt. Harris in Union County and Beaver Mountain in Baker County. It carries programming from ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox from stations in Portland and Boise, Idaho.

Wallender stressed it is important for Union and Baker county residents to understand that antenna television isn't "free" in this area. He said television is free

only if you live within reach of the main broadcast stations in larger cities. The process of getting antenna television to Eastern Oregon so it can be rebroadcast here, Wallender said, is costly.

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WEATHER

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surprising considering the year's high temperatures, low temperatures and average overall temperatures were all warmer than average. In 2018, the average maximum temperature was 63.4

degrees, the average minimum temperature was 37.8 degrees and the average overall temperature was 50.6 degrees. From 1981 to 2010, all of those averages were lower, with a maximum temperature of 60.5 degrees, a minimum temperature of 37.2 degrees and an average

overall temperature of 48.9 degrees.

The average temperature increase in La Grande of 1.7 degrees outpaces the global temperature increase NASA has measured from 1880 to 2014.

"According to an ongoing temperature analysis

conducted by scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, the average global temperature on Earth has increased by about 1.4 (degrees) Fahrenheit since 1880," an article published by NASA in 2014 states. "Two-thirds of the warming has occurred since 1975."

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HEALTH

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The United Health Foundation is a not-for-profit private organization dedicated to improving health and health care. It was founded in 1999 by the for-profit United Health Group, the largest health care company in the world and listed as the fifth largest company in terms of revenue by Fortune in 2018.

The company has been ranking states' health for 29 years, which, according to the foundation's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Rhonda Randall, is the longest standing report of its kind. The ranking includes 35 different measures of health, broken down into five categories: outcomes, community and environment, policy, clinical care and behaviors.

In the past few years, Oregon has hovered around 20th, ranking either 20th or 21st every year since 2015. Prior to 2015, Oregon had ranked as high as eighth (in 2011). Many of the state's strongest areas can be found in the clinical care category, ranking in the top 15 for its mental health providers, dentists and preventable hospitalizations. In the totaling of each clinical care subsection, Oregon ranks third among all states.

The worst area among the 35 measures for Oregon was the high school graduation rate. While not a typical area of measurement for well-

ness, Randall said health officials notice a relationship between education and health.

"We believe there is a correlation between high school graduation and having a higher income status through the course of the rest of your life, being more likely to have insurance because of employability," Randall said. "Also (high school graduates have) higher health literacy, being better able to understand the instructions your doctors give you about your health."

Another area ripe for improvement in the state is the vaccination rate — specifically for meningococcal immunizations, for which the state ranks 41st. According to the Center for Disease Control the meningococcal vaccines can help prevent meningococcal diseases, "which is any type of illness caused by Neisseria meningitidis bacteria." Oregonians have been known to be averse to vaccines.

In 2013, an article in The Oregonian called the state the "country's most vaccine-skeptical state." While that claim may be arguable, vaccination rates are still an issue in the Beaver state.

Carrie Brogoitti, a public health administrator at the Center for Human Development in La Grande, said CHD has been working on addressing low vaccination rates.

"I know there have been a lot of efforts in the state of

Oregon to increase the vaccination rates," Brogoitti said. "Some of the universities in the state have adopted university-specific policies that require the (meningococcal) vaccine."

Eastern Oregon University requires two doses of the measles vaccine and recommends the meningococcal vaccine, but does not require it.

While Brogoitti complimented America's Health Rankings for its inclusion of high school graduation rates, she and other officials at CHD said the rankings don't always ring true.

Aaron Grigg, the mental health director at CHD, said while Portland and other metro areas in the state may have an abundance of mental health professionals, that's not the case in Northeast Oregon.

"We do have some great mental health workers in this part of the state, but the challenge is getting people to relocate here," Grigg said, noting individuals can't receive a master's degree in social work or mental health counseling in Northeast Oregon. "We do what we can to attract people, but it's always a challenge. I would say there's a shortage of qualified behavioral health workers in Eastern Oregon."

Grigg and his colleagues agreed the rankings may be useful to see what the state can work on, but the report's findings reflect a very broad perspective.

"We're in rural Eastern Oregon and the numbers don't play out the same here," Grigg said. "They're very heavily based on the Portland metroplex area, and as we know, that's where a lot of the state's resources go."

Regardless of the rankings, CHD and other local organizations are working to improve the health of individuals and communities in Northeast Oregon. Grigg mentioned work by CHD to provide physical and mental health support in schools for students.

"We know the earlier you can identify (a problem) for anything, the better the prognosis is," Grigg said.

Even if the rankings may not represent the realities of health care in each of Oregon's regions, Randall said it's clear the state, and the nation at large, has room to improve when it comes to the health of its communities.

To view America's Health Rankings' entire annual report and see where each state ranked, you can visit www.americashealthrankings.org.

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