

GUNS

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That's why Winder teaches two courses most weekends, one going over Oregon's laws and requirements and another going over Utah's. An Oregon resident who also has a Utah CHL is able to carry in 31 other states, including Idaho and Washington.

Winder and Ward agreed many individuals who receive CHLs do so for personal safety.

"The vast majority of people just want the option," Winder said. "If I am going to a bad part of town, I want to be able to protect myself."

Ward said he has confidence in the law-abiding individuals in Union County who choose to carry firearms.

"I trust the people in our

community, I truly do," he said.

According to Ward, the sheriff's office is currently staffed at less than 50 percent of the recommended level.

"If we were at the bare-bones minimum of 1.5 per thousand, I would need 18 deputies. I'm at a fraction of that," Ward said, noting he usually has two deputies on duty. "If you live in the La Grande area, Island City or one of those other outlying areas, it could easily take (the deputies on duty) 20 minutes to get there. That's forever. So we strongly support people who are willing to accept some responsibility for the safety of themselves and their families. We do not feel threatened by the people we serve. We do not feel in opposition to the people we serve. We feel that we are in partnership with them."

However, Ward said although he believes there have been instances in the county when an individual with a concealed handgun license used a firearm to diffuse a situation, he couldn't give a specific example, nor could he say conclusively if having citizens carry firearms lessens crime.

All in all, with low staffing levels at the sheriff's office, Ward said he believes it would be a mistake for the government to abridge an individual's right to self-defense.

"If the government can't protect the person, then I don't believe the government has the moral right, let alone the moral imperative, (to prevent you from protecting) yourself," Ward said.

In 2018, the RAND corporation — which according to its website is "a research organization that

develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous" — analyzed a number of nationwide studies on the effects of concealed-carry laws.

The organization found little conclusive evidence of the overall impact of the laws and determined there are only two outcomes "that may be increased by concealed-carry laws" — violent crimes and unintentional injuries/death.

Oregon is one of 37 states in the U.S. that has a shall-issue policy for concealed handgun licenses. Shall-issue laws are described by the Federal Government Accountability Office as taking away the discretion of the authorities that issue the permits.

"Issuing authorities are required

to issue a permit to an applicant that fulfills the objective statutory criteria if no statutory reason for denial exists," a report to Congress created by the GAO states.

The RAND corporation found "evidence that shall-issue concealed-carry laws may increase" unintentional firearm injuries and violent crime, but also called the evidence "limited."

Ward said he prefers for the sheriff's office not to be required to exercise discretion when issuing concealed-carry permits. He also noted that some believe it's too easy to receive a CHL in Oregon, but he does not feel that way.

"We strongly support the Second Amendment and the right of peaceable and law-abiding citizens to be able to defend themselves," Ward said.



Cherise Kaechele/The Observer

Union County Chamber of Commerce board members met at the Chamber of Commerce office Tuesday to celebrate Suzannah Moore-Hemann, left, as the newly elected executive director with a group selfie.

CHAMBER

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are aligned with what our members are interested in."

Moore-Hemann has volunteered at various events and organizations in Union County for more than six years. She was a founding member and later the director of the annual Eastern Oregon Beer Festival, assisted chamber ambassadors and worked for the Eastern Oregon University Foundation.

Volunteerism, for Moore-Hemann, is all about challenging herself, meeting new people and contributing to a place that formed her into who she is today.

"It was an opportunity to work with a really wide, diverse group of people that I might not

encounter professionally," she said. "The people, the projects, learning new things ... I love seeing the direct tangible connection (of volunteerism) to the community."

Moore-Hemann graduated from La Grande High School and earned two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree from EOU, where she served in student government. She previously worked at Grande Ronde Hospital and was an accountant the Center for Human Development. Moore-Hemann will be leaving her current position involving outreach and education for the state of Oregon's health care marketplace program in order to serve as executive director of the chamber.

Because all of her professional and volunteer experience has dealt

with helping her hometown in one way or another, Moore-Hemann said this next step on the chamber board was "a natural choice" for her.

"I feel very honored to really give back to somewhere that has made me who I am," she said. "I'm born and raised here, so La Grande and Union County are as much a part of me as anything else."

Kavanaugh, who will remain on the chamber board, described the candidate pool for the executive director position as "refreshing" because there were several qualified individuals to choose from, but the board ultimately decided on Moore-Hemann for a number of reasons.

"We really wanted someone local, someone who had a heart for the community, someone who could

communicate effectively, someone who had a vision for Union County and someone who could move local businesses and organizations forward," he said. "She's got an excellent personality for this, and her experience with volunteerism has been outstanding."

Mollie Hulse, chamber president, said she's "very optimistic" that Moore-Hemann will be a "phenomenal" executive director.

"She has a big job ahead of her, some big shoes to fill, but I think she's more than qualified," Hulse said. "She's very organized, experienced and will serve the residents of Union County well."

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NEOPT

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said. "We try with a referral with the Angel Flight or Greyhound or find community resources to help them. We even work with churches."

She said many of the riders who utilize the services may not have cars, but that's not the only reason someone would want a ride.

"Some riders are not OK to drive after their medical appointment," she said. "Some may have just been on dialysis and can't drive back after treatment."

She noted traveling to another city can be intimidating to some, and driving the long distance to the appointment may not be worth it to them.

"Some are afraid to make the trip (for example) to Tri-Cities or Walla Walla," she said. "They're just not confident."

There are no age restrictions for those wanting to take advantage of the transport service, and as long as they give NEOPT advance notice, passengers may accompany the rider as well.

There is also no limit on time for appointments, she said.

"We do need them to be scheduled in advance," she said. "But (if there is) a last-minute call, we will definitely try to get someone scheduled. When it's a ride out of the area, we ask (riders) to give as much notice as possible. It's easier to make that happen then."

For more information, or to schedule a ride, contact NEOPT at 541-963-2877.

SCHOOLS

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the needs of students who would benefit from individualized attention. He said the money could also be used to hire counselors and specialists like art teachers.

"We want to target the needs of students at (all) levels," Mendoza said.

Dixon endorses a proposal similar to Mendoza's, noting he believes it would provide a greater benefit.

"We want to do what will have the greatest impact on kids, not just add more school days," he said.

For example, he said, if a student is struggling in a math class, extending the school year will not solve the problem.

"Twenty more days of doing the same thing is not going to help," Dixon said.

What would help in this case, he said, is targeted instruction from a math coach.

Some educators have suggested that schools could add more time to their school

day rather than actual days to reach the equivalent of a 180-day school year. A four-day-week school district could boost its school day equivalent by at least 10 days a year by adding 30 minutes a day.

Glaze said he would not endorse districts with four-day weeks adding to the length of their school day, which is already longer than the days of five-day-week school districts to allow them to meet state standards.

"They have pretty long days already," Glaze said. "They do not need to have it added to. I do not think it would be constructive, especially for the younger children."

Oregon school districts are required each school year by the state to provide 900 hours of instruction for students in kindergarten through eighth grade, 990 for students in ninth to 11th grade, and 966 for 12th-graders.

Pettit said it is important not to get too focused on hours and school days when

discussing education. He noted that there is not necessarily a correlation between hours of instruction received and academic performance. He pointed out that students in New Jersey's public schools, which are highly rated, are in class for fewer hours a year than students in Oregon's public schools.

Pettit said that, if school districts were allowed to choose, they would likely use the increased funding from a 180-day school year for different purposes depending upon their location. Pettit explained that schools in different regions face different issues. For example, class size is an issue in the Portland area but not in small rural school districts like Cove where offering students a broader range of learning opportunities is among its needs.

Mendoza said he hopes that school districts are given the option of making decisions regarding how best to boost education in their schools rather than

having no choice but to go to a 180-day school year.

"It would give more local control," he said. "People would not feel they are being told by the state what to do."

Many five-day-week school districts, such as La Grande, have school years in the 170-day range while schools with four-day weeks have at least 20 less school days. The discrepancy is why it would cost school districts with four-day weeks substantially more to move to 180 days.

"It would not be equitable economically," Mendoza said.

Glaze pointed out that teachers would be paid more if a 180-day mini-

mum school year is mandated, because teachers are salaried employees who are paid by the day. While this would cost the school district more, it could turn out to be a good thing as Oregon tries to avoid losing teachers to states like Washington, which recently provided its teachers a major pay raise.

"We want to keep our best and brightest," the former superintendent said.

Glaze said increased teacher pay is not the only reason a 180-day school year would cost more.

Many classified staff, including secretaries, cooks and teacher aides, would

also have to be paid more because they would be working more days.

Pettit believes the push for a 180-day school year will fade.

"It may morph into a school improvement plan," the Cove superintendent said.

Dixon noted that if a 180-day school year does become a reality, it will not be put in place until at least the 2021-23 biennium. He explained that steps like reopening teacher contracts so that salaries can be boosted would be a time-consuming process.

"I don't think it will be passed this biennium," he said. "There are too many major things to work out."

Introducing Orthopedic Surgeon Dr. Adam Heisinger

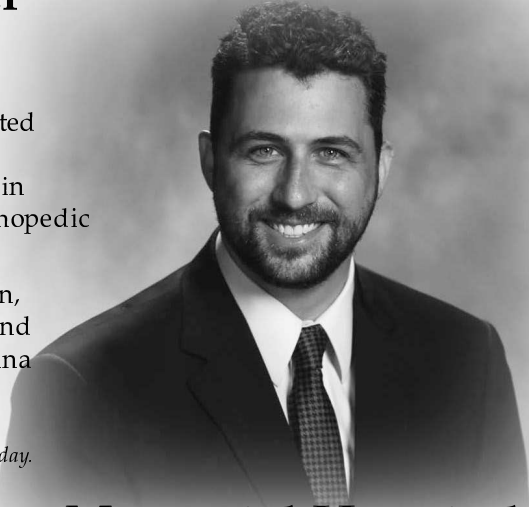
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