

BAC

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“It’s going to be a struggle,” Courtney said of his bill. “This is a Mount Everest move. It’s doable, but it isn’t going to be easy. I’m going to fight like hell to make it happen.”

Courtney also introduced the bill to decrease the legal driving limit to .08 in 1981, which he said was unpopular when he originally brought it up.

In her press conference before the beginning of the legislative session, Gov. Kate Brown said she thought decreasing the legal alcohol limit was a good idea.

State and national beverage organizations are expected to lobby against the bill. After only one week of the legislative session, it’s unclear if they’ve begun those efforts.

Rep. Greg Barreto (R-Cove), who represents the La Grande area, said he hasn’t thought much about decreasing the

limit yet — he is more worried about individuals using marijuana and driving.

“Drinking and driving is easily detected, using marijuana and driving is not,” Barreto said.

Barreto also said he needed more information before he made a decision on whether or not he would support the BAC decrease.

“I would like to see what the numbers are out there, what the facts are,” Barreto said.



Contributed photo

The proposed bill in the Oregon legislature to decrease the drunk driving limit to .05 would give Oregon the strictest drunk driving law in the country, along with Utah, which began enforcing the .05 limit in December.

BILLS

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on wolf and elk depredation. His first proposed bill would increase the fund for wolf depredation efforts to \$800,000. He would also task the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife with counting wolves and give funding commensurate with the number of wolves. He also said the elk population is growing significantly in Eastern Oregon.

“The number of (elk is) up in Union County and the La Grande area ..., and they’re starting to affect farmers and ranchers,” Barreto said.

Barreto’s bill regarding elk depredation has not been officially proposed yet.

Barreto also co-sponsored a bill that would create the crime of “threatening to commit a terroristic act.” The proposal is a result of conversations between Barreto and La Grande Chief of Police Brian Harvey. The conversations stem from the 2016 arrest of two teenagers for allegedly plotting a mass shooting at La Grande High School. One of the students was originally charged with five counts of conspiracy to

commit aggravated murder. The second individual was charged as a juvenile and therefore the details of his case are not public.

The older student ended up reaching a settlement where he pleaded guilty to a pair of first-degree disorderly conduct charges: a Class C felony and a Class A misdemeanor.

Both of the crimes proposed by the bill are Class C felonies with the maximum punishment of five years imprisonment. The crime of “threatening to commit a terrorist act” is described as “the person intentionally causes fear or terror to another person by conveying a threat to cause unlawful serious physical injury or death to two or more persons, one of whom is the other person, in a public place.” In addition, a reasonable person must believe the threat was likely to be carried out.

The details of the case of the alleged threatened school shooting and the arguments made by Harvey were disputed by the defendant’s lawyer, Wes Williams, who is now a circuit court judge. Williams said the police did not thoroughly investigate the defendant.

Williams said many of the defendant’s words, either on social media or at school, were “taken out of context” or were direct quotes from popular web series or videos.

Barreto said members of the community often come to him with ideas for bills.

“That’s the impetus for most bills — they come from constituents or they come from law enforcement, or a lot of times someone in the district who has an issue,” he said. “We certainly don’t think all these things up ourselves.”

Beyond his own bills, Barreto is paying attention to the 57 proposed bills that include revenue increases, which means tax or fee increases for taxpayers. He is opposed to bills that increase business expenses such as requiring paid family leave and increasing taxes on gross receipts.

“The end product is it raises the cost of living, it raises the cost of everything,” Barreto said. “This is an ongoing battle that we fight over here to try to keep the cost of living in Oregon down. It keeps going up every year because they keep bringing out these bills.”

DEPREDATION

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money for cattle losses because the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife hasn’t finished maps showing areas of known wolf activity.

Only depredations that happened inside those areas are eligible for compensation.

The maps should be done by mid-February.

The committee will meet as soon as possible after the maps are available to decide on compensation awards, said Mark Bennett, a Baker County Commissioner and chairman of the seven-member Wolf Depredation and Compensation Committee.

Among the applications for compensation the committee heard Wednesday are \$1,798.53 from the Pine Valley Ranch, which, in addition to the one calf killed, had

two others injured by attacks that ODFW confirmed were by wolves.

Barry DelCurto, who had one calf injured by a confirmed wolf attack, is requesting \$1,822.96.

The committee received requests totaling \$62,560.56. Most of that is for cattle that didn’t return from summer pastures but were not found and are not confirmed wolf losses. The committee has in the past awarded money to ranchers for unconfirmed losses.

ODFW estimates about 30 wolves are living in Baker County.

The Pine Creek Pack, which killed and injured the cattle in April, consisted of 12 wolves based on an ODFW aerial survey in early December. The pack’s breeding female gave birth to seven pups in the spring of 2018.

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GRAD RATES

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graduation rate in 2013-14 to 80 percent in 2017-18.

Baxter was also heartened to see that the number of boys graduating is also growing. The rate was 75 percent in 2016-17 and 89.47 percent in 2017-18.

The ODE’s latest figures also indicate that LHS students who took multiple Career Technical Education classes — such as business, biomedical studies, welding and agriculture-natural resources — had a graduation rate of 97.4 percent. Baxter said students in CTE classes tend to have a higher graduation rates because they are involved in hands-on learning about subjects that have a real world application.

The La Grande School District boosted LHS’s CTE programs significantly in recent years with funds from a \$31.5 million bond voters approved in 2014. Funds from the bond have been used to build a new CTE building, purchase state-of-the-art equipment and more.

Among the many people Baxter cited as responsible for helping boost the LHS graduation rates is Scott Carpenter, the school district’s director of curriculum and Title I programs. Carpenter served as LHS’s assistant principal for five years before taking his present position last summer.

“Scott has had an amazing and integral part in this,” Baxter said.

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza said LHS’s improved graduation rate is a credit to teachers and staff at LHS and throughout the school district.

“When you have a lot of wonderful educators all working together, great things happen for students,” Mendoza said.

Union School District Superintendent Carter Wells expressed a similar sentiment when discussing his high school’s 100 percent mark.

“It shows that our staff

is doing a great job of getting students to the end goal, a high school diploma,” he said.

Wells noted, for example, that the staff at UHS’s office has been very diligent about making sure all high school students are meeting graduation requirements. UHS’s 100 percent mark comes after a sterling five-year stretch, during which its graduation rates ranged from 92 percent to 97.14 percent.

Imbler High School’s 100 percent mark was its fourth in the past five years. Imbler School District Superintendent Angie Lakey-Campbell credits this to teachers and staff who put in extra time to help students. She added that the local students benefit from being raised in a community that values a strong work ethic.

Lakey-Campbell said IHS’s high graduation rates has led to high expectations for the school district.

“That is okay,” she said. “You achieve excellence by expecting it.”

Wallowa High School, like IHS, has a stellar record. It too has had a 100 percent graduation rate four of the past five years.

Enterprise High School has also posted noteworthy graduation marks the past five years. It has topped the 90 percent mark four of the past five years.

“It is a tribute to our staff” said Enterprise High School Principal Blake Carlsen. “It is a wonderful achievement. We are proud and excited.”

Joseph High School also had an outstanding gradu-

ation mark at 93.33 percent for 2017-18. Joseph has topped 90 percent four of the past five years. JHS reached the 100 percent level in 2014-15 and in 2016-17.

Rounding out the list of Union and Wallowa county high schools with a graduation rate of at least 90 percent is Powder High School, which had a mark of 90.48 percent. Powder Valley has had graduation rates of at least 90 percent each of the past four years.

Elgin High School also easily topped the state average with a 2017-18 graduation rate of 86.21 percent. Elgin had a graduation rate of 94.4 percent in 2016-17.

According to the ODE report, Cove High School had a graduation rate of 68.75 percent in 2017-18. Cove School District Superintendent Earl Pettit said the low figure is due to a data reporting error.

“The true number should be 85 percent,” Pettit said.

The superintendent explained three Cove High School students who left the school district were counted as dropouts by the state. Two of them went on to graduate from Washington high schools and a third graduated from a high school in Texas.

Pettit said that the data reporting error was due to a miscue on the part of his school district and not the state.

“It is my responsibility to make sure the right data goes to the state,” said Pettit, who is completing his second year as the Cove School District’s superintendent.

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