



Dick Mason/Observer file photo

Members of the Eastern Oregon University chapter of SEIU Local 503, the union representing student services workers, participate in a rally Aug. 5.

STRIKE

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Employees who have reached the top of the wage schedule have “topped out” and are not eligible for step increases. Employees reach

the top of the wage schedule after 10 years of employment.

The SEIU’s last proposal before making its final offer Friday asked for a 3.75% COLA increase retroactive to July 1 of this year and a 3.5% COLA boost beginning July 1, 2021. The SEIU also

asked for step increases for each of the two years of the proposed contract and the addition of a new top step. The latter would allow employees who have “topped out” to receive a step increase, said Ben Morris, a SEIU 503 representative.

OFFICE

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upgrading and remodeling Suite 1 and Suite 3, in addition to exterior repairs.

In Suite 1, which is set up as a satellite law office for law firms to work La Grande, the funds were to be used for electrical and lighting upgrades, new windows, an ADA bathroom, improved walls and a new front door. Suite 3 was gutted and remodeled for the weight loss clinic, which included creating four new exam rooms, installing an ADA bathroom, redoing the flooring and replacing the windows and door on the Washington Avenue side. Outside called for installing a new roof system and replacing rotten boards on the building’s facade. Also, trees and fencing on Fourth Street were removed so that artwork by Brenna Tyler can be seen in the windows.

The remodel was estimated to be completed by June 1. The third suite was ready to be moved into by June 9, but the rest of the upgrades were not finished until Aug. 1, according to Baum. Now the

only work to be completed is tidying up the remaining suites for tenants to rent and move into.

The project in total has cost Baum just over \$250,000. After he submits receipts and invoices, the city will reimburse him his award of \$63,211 from the URA fund. The project was eligible for \$75,000 but did not receive the full award as it was one of the last projects to receive funding and that was all that was left, according to Baum. The remaining \$187,000 is coming from a loan from Community Bank and out of a Roth IRA owned by Baum. The largest costs of the project have been the MetTrim sign in front of the building and the remodeling of Suite 3.

Construction work was completed by Palmer Roofing, Michael’s Trees and G. L. Lequerica General Contracting. Baum said he was very happy with the work done by all companies. He also said how grateful he is for the help the city has provided in this project.

“The city has been great through all of this,” Baum said. “They have been very cooperative on everything.”

MARCUM

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many hospitals and health systems across the nation as an interim nursing executive. Prior to her time at the hospital, she owned and operated Elkhorn Furniture, a furniture store in northeast Oregon.

She heard about the opportunity at GRH from a colleague at the hospital who suggested she talk to the president and CEO of GRH, Jeremy Davis.

“After speaking with Jeremy, I felt he and I shared a common vision for health care excellence and the passion to make a difference in the community health care setting,” Marcum said.

Davis is as excited to have Marcum back as she is to be back.

“Laurie Marcum has an extensive background and executive-level experience in leading patient care services for small rural hospitals and large health systems all over the nation,” Davis said. “In addition to that exceptional skill set, Laurie has a great attitude and the passion we were looking for to thoughtfully lead our extensive patient care team. Laurie also happens to be an Eastern Oregon native with strong ties to our region. These qualities made her an ideal choice from among the many candidates we interviewed.”

Marcum received her nursing degree from Boise State University, followed by a master of science degree with a focus in nursing leadership and management from Western Governors University. She also has certification as a nurse from the American Nurses Credentialing Center and is board certified in patient safety.

“I have spent the last few years leading hospitals across the nation to move to a greater level of patient safety and effectiveness,” Marcum said.

Marcum is excited to return to her childhood hometown of La Grande, as it means she won’t need to travel as much and can spend more time with her family.

“I love to travel and see and experience new places,” Marcum said, “(but I also) love all things outdoors and enjoy gardening and spending time with family and friends.”

Marcum said she looks forward to the opportunities

her new job will give her to make a difference while helping people in the community during serious and uncertain times.

“At the end of the day, what you have done for others is what really matters,” Marcum said. “When it involves helping bring health care excellence to your community, it is a very rewarding feeling.”

On Friday, Morris told The Observer that before final offers were submitted negotiations had reached a standstill. He said the wage increases offered by the state were inadequate in terms of allowing employees to keep up with inflation.

SEIU 503 represents about 4,500 student services workers at Oregon’s public universities. EOU has about 130 classified staff who work in positions such as custodian, carpenter, plumber, information technology, office specialist and heating, air conditioning and ventilation system specialist.

Tim Seydel, vice president for university advancement at EOU, said he wants what is best for employees.

“We are committed to providing all of our employees a fair wage that allows EOU to attract and retain great people,” he said in an email to The Observer. “We know there is a lot of work going into finding an agreement and remain optimistic that a solution can be found that works for everyone.”

Saunders said on Sunday the state’s universities are facing a tough balancing act.

“We want to be fair to very valuable employees of the universities,” she said.

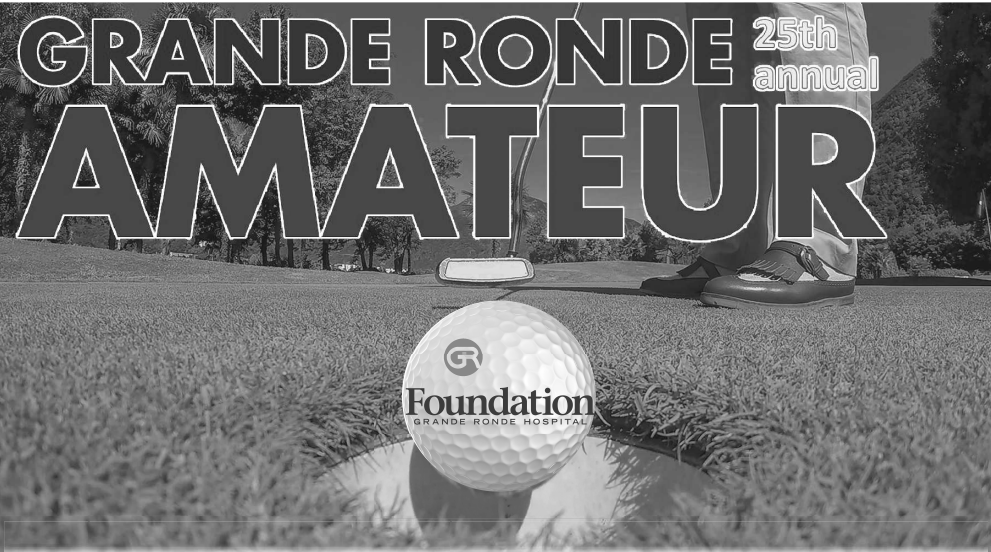
Saunders noted that before giving wage increases, universities have to be careful to gauge the impact they will have on student tuition. She explained that when

wages are raised, tuition has to be increased to garner the revenue to pay for them. Years ago, this was not the case because the universities received more state funding and were not reliant on tuition as a primary source of funding.

“We have to look at how a wage increase will impact student tuition,” said Saunders, who is vice president for communication and public affairs at Oregon Institute of Technology.

Saunders believes there is a good chance a strike can be avoided.

“I am very hopeful that a good settlement can be reached prior to a strike,” she said.



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