

BUSES

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vehicle is stationary. This makes them ideal for school buses, Greenlee said, because many operate in this speed range.

If not for the automatic chains, local schools bus drivers might sometimes face the possibility of putting on iron chains for an icy stretch and then have to stop and take them off, a long process. The automatic chains, Bolen said, can be a time saver.

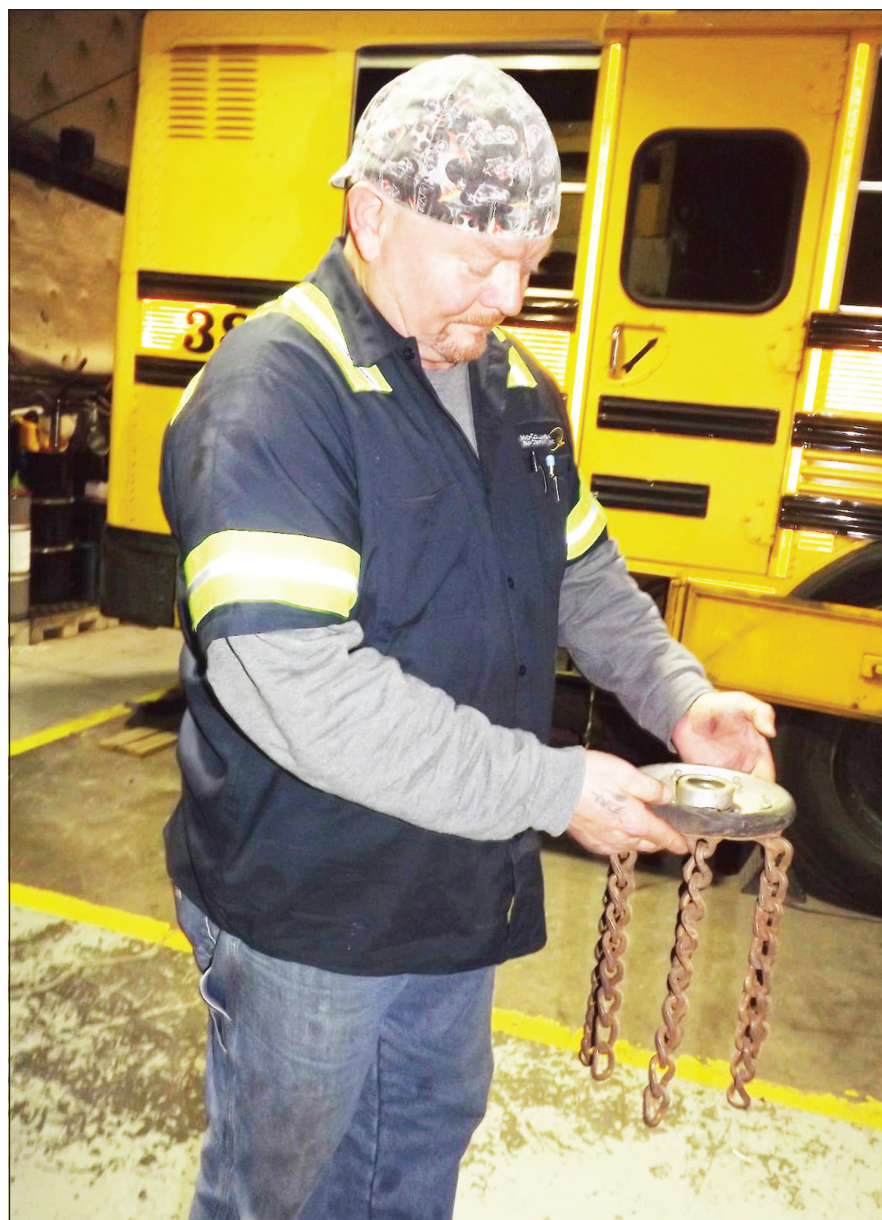
The automatic chains Bolen and other school bus drivers use are fixed to the suspension of buses. When the chain system is activated, small rubber chain wheels that run along the inside of the back tires of the bus are lowered. Then as the bus accelerates the chain wheel spins and the chain links are thrown underneath the tires to provide friction. Air brakes provide pressurized air to push the chainwheels to the tires.

Still, while the devices are a big help to drivers, Maley said, “they do not replace iron chains.”

She noted when conditions on Interstate 84 are so slick that traction devices such as traditional chains are required by state law, automatic chains do not count as acceptable traction devices. But the automatic chains are valuable when buses encounter packed snow and ice on steep roads.

“They are a huge help when going up hills,” Maley said.

Maley said her school buses have automatic chains in them year round and that they are easy to maintain if properly operated.



Staff photo by Dick Mason

Ernest Boudreau, a technician at the La Grande station of the Mid Columbia Bus Company, holds a portion of the automatic chain system the company's schools buses use to help get around in winter conditions.

CIVICS

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Conference of State Legislatures. But legislative attempts in Oregon to require students to study civics to graduate have failed in recent years

For now, there are nonprofits working to fill in the gaps.

“It is taught, but it is not taught to all of our students,” said Erin Esparza, executive director of the Classroom Law Project, a civic education nonprofit.

After being appointed earlier this year to fill out the term of the late Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, Bev Clarno has continued and expanded civic education initiatives launched by her predecessor.

During her nearly 20 years serving in the Oregon Legislature, Clarno recalled getting letters from people seeking help on federal issues. Some were struggling with a government issue and didn't know who to turn to.

She remembered the civic education she received at Redmond High School.

“I think it's something that lasts all your life,” she said.

However, both face challenges in reaching all parts of the state.

'We've got to make good citizens'

Americans are becoming increasingly unaware of the basic functions of government.

A 2016 survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that only 26% of Americans could name all three branches of government. Only 17% of Americans trust the government according to a Pew Research Center survey released in 2019.

The National Assessment

of Educational Progress's most recent report card released in 2015 found that 77% of students scored below proficient in civics and less than half of eighth graders knew the purpose of the Bill of Rights.

“What's going on in today's politics, we don't have people that understand how their government is supposed to function,” said state Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth. “Now we don't have people who understand that it's their responsibility to maintain a republic.”

Evans attributed the decline in civic education in Oregon classrooms to a series of tax measures meant to curb the increase in property taxes as well as the decline in timber revenue around the late 1970s and 1980s. With less revenue, he said schools had to get “back to basics.”

Evans has unsuccessfully introduced legislation three times to require students to study civics in order to graduate, most recently in 2019. He said that the Oregon Education Association (which didn't return a request for comment) opposed the bill over concerns of creating an unfunded mandate.

He said it makes sense that the state's educational system has given more support to reading, writing and math as standardized testing has become increasingly common. But he said schools should teach civics, which he said is just as critical.

“We have got to move away from just deciding how we're going to make good workers for the 21st century,” said Evans, who won't reintroduce the bill for February's short session. “We've got to make good citizens.”

'Roles that they need to take on as grownups'

Under Evans' bill, school districts could allow students to participate in an existing civics education program, such as the YMCA Youth in Government, to meet the requirement.

While Oregon's educational system has shifted, these programs have continued to operate. YMCA Youth in Government has operated in Oregon since the 1940s where students participate in a mock legislative process where they research and debate issues before casting votes.

Marisa Fink, the program's state director, said that YMCA Youth in Government is active in about a dozen high schools in the Salem and Portland areas. She said it costs students \$200 to attend the three-day event held in February in Salem and that raising funds to attend can be a barrier.

“We are really starting to focus on how to expand statewide in rural areas,” Fink said.

The program will be looking to foundations for funding to get more students in the program. But she said some schools are just not that interested in civic education.

Esparza said civics education should teach skills meant to help students work collaboratively. In addition to professional development for teachers, the Classroom Law Project also offers programs such as high school mock trials or simulated congressional hearings. It also offers another program where students identify a community problem and research a way to solve it.

“It requires them to try on the roles that they need to take on as grownups,”

she said. At the end of the program, she said students are amazed that an adult actually listened to them.

She pointed to the Oregon Department of Education's most recent annual report card, which shows social sciences (including civics) accounts for just 16% of course offerings in schools. But she said that there are other ways to integrate civics into the curriculum. She mentioned a 5th-grade teacher whose students put Goldilocks on trial.

Although the group's programs reach 1,300 teachers and 103,000 students each year, Esparza said her group is looking into funding to reach schools that serve communities of color or rural areas.

Secretary of state's response

In May, Clarno appointed Mary Beth Herkert, as her office's full-time director of civic education.

Herkert said previously the job had been a part-time responsibility assigned to a member of the secretary's staff. She's carried on the work of Richardson who brought the Kid Governor program to Oregon in 2018. In the program, 5th graders identify a plan to solve a community issue and run statewide for a one-year term. Herkert said more than 60 schools participated this year.

She said she's planning on starting more programs. She traveled to New York to visit a school that had implemented a program where students read about historical events and then make and defend decisions about what they would have done in that situation.

HOUSING

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landmark legislation that would allow duplex, triplexes and other denser varieties of housing on some land zoned single-family in most cities.

In a statement, House Speaker Tina Kotek also pointed to how the Legislature dedicated \$200 million to affordable housing development, \$55 million to affordable housing preservation and \$50 million for state homeless assistance programs.

“More work lies ahead to make up for lost time and the state must continue to be a partner with local communities to develop more housing,” she said.

Michael Andersen, a senior researcher with the Seattle-based sustainability think tank Sightline Institute, said in

an email that House Bill 2001 isn't a “silver-bullet” solution and expected it to gradually change the state's housing stock, noting pushback on the new law by cities.

Andersen blamed the lack of new construction on high costs. He said if Oregon wants to slow the rise in home prices, it needs to build enough housing to keep up with its rising populations. Until then, he said high prices would hurt the state's economy and throw the housing market out of wack.

“It's like a game of musical chairs where people keep arriving faster than chairs,” he said.

'A disappointment'

While the U.S. economy is currently in an unprecedented 10-year expansion, Lehner's blog post included other

unexpectedly glum takes.

“Economically, the 2010s were a disappointment,” wrote Lehner.

He wrote during the last decade the economy was running below its potential as it recovered from the Great Recession of 2008. Although Oregon's median household income has surpassed that of the U.S., growth has been uneven, he wrote.

According to Lehner, just nine of Oregon's 23 rural counties have more jobs than they did a decade ago.

“Encouragingly, rural Oregon has very few places in permanent demographic or economic declines to patterns seen throughout the country,” he wrote. “However, even with decent to solid growth in rural Oregon overall, the state's urban-rural divide increased in the past decade.”

CENSUS

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By April 1, 2020, everyone across the country will have received an invitation to take part in Census 2020. Census takers then will start visiting people who have not responded to the invitation, either by phone, mail or online. According to the Census Bureau, the data from the census provides the basis to distribute more the \$675 billion in federal funds each year to support housing, transportation and other vital programs in state, counties and communities.

Census data also helps reapportion congressional seats. The 2020 Census could mean Oregon gains a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Neighboring Umatilla County started a complete count committee in 2018 to get the jump on outreach and obtaining an accurate count. The committee consists of local government officials, public employees, members of nonprofits and more. Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock is one of six commissioners nationwide to serve on the National Association of Counties Census 2020 Working Group. He said collecting population data

relies on census takers and informed citizens, and everyone the county finds is worth \$4,000 in program funding.

Murdock said the trend statewide is 70% of people self-report, but 30% of Oregonians are considered hard to count.

“The people who are the hard to count,” he said, “are

often those who use or need the most services that are funded through census data measurements.”

Murdock said Umatilla County's complete count committee has helped set up computers at the Pendleton Public Library and with the recruiting of local residents to be census takers. Umatilla County has a large Hispanic population and is seeking Spanish-speaking census takers to help with the language barrier and to make those filling out the census more comfortable.

“We want the people who go door-to-door to be local and look like those whose information they are taking,” Murdock said.

Murdock said the county wants everyone to be involved and understand the importance of the census and having the information come from the local level is the most effective.

“If the federal government says the census is important, we don't know how seriously people will take it,” Murdock said. “At the state level we know it will be a little better. If the county is encouraging participation, even better. But when it is the local communities saying it, people just respond better the closer the information comes from home.”

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