



Five Tigers sign with EOU in Sports

Inside
Peak loses awning, 2A
Fun in the forest, 1B

THE OBSERVER

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Good day to our valued subscriber Clyde White of La Grande

Weekend Edition

Lee trial on hold after stroke

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — Ronald Lee of La Grande suffered a stroke while awaiting trial for murder. His attorney, Dean Gushwa of Pendleton, asked the court to delay the trial.

“I’m hoping my client recovers quickly,” Gushwa said Thursday during a phone interview. “He did suffer a profound stroke.”

Gushwa learned on Jan. 23 that Lee had a stroke while in the Union County Jail, La Grande. Gushwa said District Attorney Kelsie McDaniel told him about Lee’s medical emergency immediately after the sheriff’s office notified her.

Gushwa and his investigator met with Lee on Jan. 25 at a local hospital, and Gushwa determined Lee was unable to communicate effectively. Gushwa filed a motion on Jan. 31 to postpone the trial.

“The defendant cannot communicate verbally in any intelligible manner, and is therefore unable to aid and assist in his own defense,” Gushwa wrote in the motion.

McDaniel did not object, and Circuit Judge Thomas Powers granted the motion Monday.

Union County Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen credit his staff with aiding Lee.

“There was a medical event and our corrections officer noted it immediately,” Rasmussen said.

An ambulance took Lee to a local medical facility, but Rasmussen would not reveal where Lee is, citing security concerns. Rasmussen said Lee remains in the custody of the sheriff’s office and under 24/7 supervision while he receives medical treatment. Gushwa said he is filing requests to obtain Lee’s medical records.

The state has accused Lee of killing Loretta Williams in November 2018 at her home in Cove. The two were divorcing. The local circuit court set the entire month of April for the trial. Court records show McDaniel could call as many as 93 witnesses.

The court has not re-set the trial date.



Photo contributed by Ashley O'Toole

Steady rain Wednesday and Thursday and warmer temperatures led to fast snowmelt and widespread flooding across much of the Grande Ronde Valley. Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Friday declared emergencies for Union, Wallowa and Umatilla counties due to the massive amounts of high water.

FLOODING WOES

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Steady rains Wednesday and Thursday melted the heavy snowfall that had covered Union County, resulting in a wet mess in La Grande and flooding near creeks and rivers.

The National Weather Service’s flood warning for the Grande Ronde River near Perry affecting Union County and at Troy affecting Wallowa County remains in effect until Saturday afternoon. The high water prompted school and road closures, and people prepared to protect and possibly evacuate their homes. And Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Friday declared a state of emergency in Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties due to severe flooding.

“This emergency declaration ensures state resources, emergency response personnel and equipment can be activated to complement critical local resources as this situation progresses,” Brown said in a news release.

The governor’s declaration came hours after the city of Elgin declared its own state of emergency.

“I went with public works and evaluated the situation at 6 a.m. (Friday) morning,” Elgin Mayor Allan Duffy said. “We decided to declare a state of emergency. This allows the city to take whatever action necessary to protect property and life in the city.”

That could include evacuation orders, but the city has issued none at press time. Duffy said if the water continues to rise and the evacuation is necessary, it would affect only a dozen homes. To help protect residents, volunteers filled

See **Flooding** / Page 5A



Staff photo by Phil Wright

Cars plow through several inches of water Thursday evening along Fourth Street in La Grande.



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Ray Clements, left, Chris Nay, center, and Brian Chamberlain, right, with La Grande Public Works, divert floodwater Thursday along Fourth Street in La Grande.

Students sharpen skills at FBLA competition

By Dick Mason
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Public elevators are impossible to find in Imbler but not seventh- and eighth-grade students able to make compelling presentations while riding them.

This was evident Thursday during the elevator speech competition at the Future Business Leaders of America Blue Mountain Regional Skills Conference at Eastern Oregon University. Three Imbler School District eighth-graders and one seventh-grader placed in the top six at the event in La Grande. Eighth-graders Kale Bingham took first, Henry Treat took fifth and Dallin Rasmussen placed sixth,

See **FBLA** / Page 5A



Staff photo by Dick Mason

Elgin High School students Aleiana Devin, left, and Hannah Callaham, talk Thursday at the Future Business Leaders of America Regional Skills Conference.

Capitol sees cap and trade protests

By Sierra Dawn McClain
Capital Press

SALEM — Thousands of Oregonians from across the state lined the streets and converged Thursday on the steps of the Oregon Capitol to protest legislation they say would decimate the rural economy.

Sign-waving protesters met with Gov. Kate Brown and legislators and filled hearing rooms with their testimonies.

More than 1,000 trucks, tractors and other large vehicles circled the Capitol for hours, their horns blaring. They had come to protest cap-and-trade climate legislation, Senate Bill 1530, which they say could crush their jobs and livelihoods.

The protesters, working-class Oregonians who are part of a movement called Timber Unity, were gathered to stand against SB 1530, also known as cap and trade, a bill to cut carbon emissions in an effort to slow climate change. Protesters say they fear the bill will lead to higher fuel prices, which would hurt truckers, loggers, farmers and others who live and work in rural parts of the state.

“I don’t like division between rural and urban areas,” said Rachel Abbott, 27, who works in the hospitality industry and was raised on a farm near Sheridan. “This should not be a rural-versus-urban issue. It would put my family farm out of business, but it hurts all Oregonians.”

The big turnout for the event surprised even its organizers. Lines of trucks paraded around the Capitol from 6 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Timber Unity spokesperson Angelita Sanchez said people from Sweet Home, her hometown, brought five semi-trucks to last year’s protest but brought more than 40 this morning.

Some convoys formed across the state as early as 1 a.m., said Jenny Dressler of the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Timber Unity was birthed out of the 2019 legislative session in protest of House Bill 2020, the name for last year’s cap-and-trade bill. The legislation was intended to slash carbon emissions but faced opposition from many Oregonians, who said high fuel costs would hurt their businesses.

The movement resembles the “yellow vests” in France, a grassroots citizens’ campaign that began in protest to fuel taxes and ballooned into a nationwide anti-government movement seeking economic

See **Protests** / Page 5A

INDEX

Classified3B
Comics7B
Crossword3B
Dear Abby8B
Horoscope3B
Lottery2A
Record3A
Obituaries3A
Opinion4A
Outdoors1B
Sports7A
State6A

WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section



Tonight
27 LOW
Low clouds



Sunday
38/20
Some sun

CONTACT US

541-963-3161

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



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TUESDAY

EXCLUSION LETTERS ARE OUT

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