

COMMUNITY

Meetings

• **IMBLER** — Imbler School District Board of Directors will meet for a regular session Wednesday at 7 p.m. in room 1 of the high school. The public is welcome to attend all open sessions of the Imbler School District Board of Directors. The meeting will include an executive session to discuss staff negotiations and the superintendent's evaluation.

• **UNION** — The Union School Board will meet Wednesday at 6 p.m. at the high school athletic complex. The Union School District's 2020-21 schedule will be one of the topics discussed at the meeting.

• **LA GRANDE** — The city of La Grande's Landmarks Commission will have a work session beginning Thursday at 6 p.m. in Council Chambers at La Grande City Hall, 1000 Adams Ave. The purpose of the session is to discuss an educational event.

Briefs

OTEC's Kids Electrical Safety Artwork Contest underway

BAKER CITY — Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative once again is holding an artwork contest for children to encourage them to be creative while learning about safety around electricity. Now until April 15, children of OTEC members can take part in the 2020 Kids Electrical Safety Artwork Contest.

Youth in kindergarten to third grade can select one of three coloring pages available on the cooperative's website. Fourth- and fifth-graders can either select one of the coloring pages or create an original poster using any of the 2020 OTEC safety themes. Children in sixth, seventh and eighth grade can choose to create an original poster, write a poem on the importance of electrical safety, make a short video or write a short play script that teaches the importance of electrical safety.

The top three winners in each age group receive prizes, including a \$100 gift certificate for first-place winners. All the winners also can attend the cooperative's annual meeting May 30 in Baker City to receive their award. For more information, specific rules, criteria, safety themes and to download artwork for the contest, visit www.otec.coop/kids-electrical-safety-artwork-contest.

EOU science journal earns recognition

LA GRANDE — The American Scholastic Press Association awarded the 25th edition of the Eastern Oregon Science Journal first place in the "special merit and outstanding theme" category. Student editorial staff at Eastern Oregon University published the 2017-19 edition of the Science Journal last spring. The publication included contributions from students in EOU's biochemistry, biology, mathematics and physics departments.

"The Eastern Oregon Science Journal and the Eastern Oregon Social Science Journal are two of the best things that EOU has to offer students," editor-in-chief Carissa Cummings said in a news release. "It is important that students' hard work is recognized and that they have a place for their research to live on in these journals."

For more information visit eou.edu/scijou.

Impassioned testimony highlights gun hearing

By Sam Stites
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — In two-minute turns on Friday, more than two dozen citizens staked out their views on legislation that would require Oregonians to keep their firearms under lock or face penalties. They appeared before the House Judiciary Committee over three hours, speaking on House Bill 4005.

Before that testimony, the bill's sponsors Rep. Janeen Sollman, D-Hillsboro, Rep. Rachel Prusak, D-West Linn, and Rep. Alissa Keny-Guyer, D-Portland, took a moment to explain their purpose.

"Unsecured firearm storage is an important contributor to access and is especially dangerous to children," Sollman told the committee. "We need protections for youth and for those in mental crisis, and we need to keep firearms out of the hands of unauthorized users."

The legislation would require gun owners to secure their firearms with a trigger or cable lock, in a locked container such as a safe or gun room. Violators could be fined up to \$500. If a minor gets their hands on a gun that was found to be unsecured, the owner could be fined up to \$2,000, and a gun owner could be held liable for an unsecured firearm that causes injury or property damage with some exceptions.

Under the legislation, gun owners would be required to report to police within 72 hours of finding their fire-



Photo by Sam Stites/Oregon Capital Bureau

Rabbi Michael Cahana of Portland's Congregation Beth Israel gives testimony Friday at the Capitol in favor of the safe gun storage bill on behalf of the interfaith nonprofit organization Life Every Voice Oregon.

arm has been lost or stolen punishable. The Oregon Health Authority would establish regulations for trigger locks and storage.

Testimony was evenly split between those for and against the bill, including impassioned presentations of their experience with gun violence, home invasion, assault, losing a loved one and fear for personal safety.

Among the first witnesses was Paul Kemp, whose brother-in-law Steve Forsyth was one of the three who lost their lives in the Clackamas Town Center shooting in 2012. The shooter in that event stole the firearm he used from an acquaintance. The bill is named for the victims. Kemp recounted notifying his nephew that his father had died in the incident and how

he hoped no one else has to shoulder that duty.

"The circumstances that allowed the Clackamas Town Center mall shooting years ago will finally be addressed by the 2020 Legislature with passage of HB 4005," Kemp said. "My sister and I learned (after the event) the owner of those guns had no obligation under Oregon law to report them as stolen. In fact, the legal gun owner did not call the police until the mall shooting was national news that afternoon."

Kemp and others cited numbers showing suicides involving firearms in the U.S. have increased 19% over the past decade, that in Oregon, 82% of gun deaths are suicides, and less than 5% of suicide attempts without a gun result in death.

According to Ben Hoffman, a pediatrician and expert on child injury at the Oregon Health and Science University, Oregon's rate of suicide for children and teens is 34% higher than the rest of the country, and in the last five years, the rate has increased 50%.

Klamath County resident Scott DeCarlo said he's saddened by statistics but that doesn't give the Legislature the right to infringe on his Second Amendment right.

"I'm definitely sorry that some children have taken their lives. That's awful, but statistically, the number is quite small," DeCarlo said.

"We should not be having this hearing," he continued. "We have no right to do this. It's ludicrous to think that

when I fall asleep, technically, that gun is no longer under my control, so I have to lock it. So, somebody kicks in my door in the middle of the night, I'm supposed to lock my firearm up when I'm supposed to be safe in my home?"

Rabbi Michael Cahana, representing the interfaith nonprofit Lift Every Voice Oregon, pointed out there are no more safe spaces with the proliferation of firearms in America today.

"There are no safe spaces in malls, in schools, as we've heard, and religious institutions as well, are under threat," Cahana said. "The safe storage of owned weapons is something we should all be able to unite behind. We stand strongly behind this bill and urge it's moving forward."

The testimony went on, back and forth, for the better part of the afternoon Friday. As contentious as the bill is, both sides contained their emotions to the tables sitting before the committee's dais, except for a witness identified as Manuel Martinez, whose testimony against the bill included mentions of "Marxism," "Communism," "impeachment" and "Trump" and continued in spurting shouts as he exited.

A work session is scheduled for the bill on Wednesday at 1 p.m. at the Capitol. It's expected that amendments to the bill, including clarifications on situations in which the owner of a firearm may or may not be held liable, will subject to public testimony.

Youth actors take home Performance award

Observer staff

ELGIN — The Elgin Opera House Youth Actors took home an Outstanding Performance award from the iTheater Junior Theater Festival for the second year in a row.

The group traveled to Sacramento, California, during the weekend to compete against other youth theater groups from around the world.

The competition consisted of groups condensing their entire musical into a 15-minute perfor-

mance in front of judges who work at television networks, Disney and on Broadway. Winning the Outstanding Performance award meant the Elgin youth actors had the opportunity to perform in front of more than 20,000 people at the awards ceremony.

The weekend also included workshops with industry professionals and a "tech olympics" where youth could compete and test their technical theater skills.

Organizing census assistance

Observer staff

LA GRANDE — Community Connection of Northeast Oregon Inc., has received a \$65,000 grant from United Way of the Columbia-Willamette to operate census assistance centers in Baker, Grant, Union, and Wallowa counties during the 2020 census to maximize the number of responses.

These centers are primarily designed to assist senior citizens, low-income persons, households with children younger than 5, persons with disabilities, homeless populations and those without internet access.

From April 1 to July 24, the centers will be at the senior centers in Baker City, John Day, La Grande and Enterprise during regular business hours.

The census is a constitutionally mandated count of all residents of the United States. The results will allocate billions of dollars in federal funding to local communities over the next decade. According to the Census Bureau, Oregon's population has grown by 8.1% since 2010. If the state is able to achieve an accurate count, Oregon may gain increased federal assistance and an additional congressional seat.

PUBLIC SAFETY REPORT

Friday

A caller at 8:46 a.m. reported a disturbance with a truck driver at the west end of Adams Avenue, La Grande. Police responded, and the truck driver left.

Aggressive dogs on the loose on the 61300 block of Deal Canyon Road, La Grande, prompted a complaint to police at 11:16 a.m. The animal enforcement officer responded but the dogs were no longer out.

A La Grande caller at 12:15 p.m. reported telephonic harassment.

The Union County Sheriff's Office arrested Nicolas Steven Martin, 34, of La Grande, for

driving while suspended, reckless endangering and felony driving under the influence of intoxicants.

La Grande police at 10:25 p.m. received a complaint about vandalism on the 2100 block of Second Street. An officer took a report.

Sunday

A caller at 7:29 a.m. reported a tree blocked the road at Owlesley Canyon and Mount Emily roads, La Grande.

Local law enforcement at 12:29 p.m. received a report to be on the lookout for a vehicle stolen out of Bend.

A Union resident at 3:05 p.m. reported receiving harassing phone calls. A Union County

sheriff's deputy responded and warned the harasser.

An Elgin caller at 4:12 p.m. asked for a Union County sheriff's deputy to deal with an unruly teenager. The deputy talked with the teen.

La Grande police at 7:56 p.m. dealt with a disturbance on the 2300 block of Q Avenue. Police warned both parties for disorderly conduct.

A caller at 9:17 p.m. reported vandalism on the 100 block of Fir Street, La Grande. Police took a report for criminal mischief.

And firefighters responded to three calls on Friday, 10 on Saturday and 4 on Sunday.

OBITUARIES

LaVaughn A. Browning

Formerly of La Grande
LaVaughn A. Browning, 96, of Hermiston and formerly of La Grande, died Feb. 5. A celebration of his life will be held at 5 p.m. Feb. 15 at Burns Mortuary Chapel, Hermiston. A private family burial will be held later at the Island

City Cemetery. Share memories with the family at burnsmortuaryhermiston.com.

Dock W. Baker

La Grande
Dock W. Baker, 94, of La Grande, died Feb. 7 at Grande Ronde Hospital. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

Justin R. Bowling

Island City
Justin Robert Bowling, 44, of Island City, died Feb. 7 at OHSU in Portland. Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory will be handling the arrangements.

UPCOMING FUNERALS AND VISITATIONS
Sponsored by



Feb. 14 Stanley Morrison:
10 a.m. celebration of life, Loveland Funeral Chapel, La Grande; casual dress preferred.

April 3 Loren Fihn:
5 p.m. burial of cremains, Island City Cemetery; followed by reception dinner.

TEN DEPOT STREET

This Week:
Mon-Fri Blue Plate \$12:
Roast Pork with Mashed potatoes and gravy, and veggies

Valentine's Day
Matt Cooper and Sharon Porter
7pm-9pm
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