



In Go!

# 'Much Ado About Nothing'

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Good day to our valued subscriber Karen Smith of La Grande

## District 2 hopeful visits La Grande

By Dick Mason  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Former state legislator Jason Atkinson of Central Point has never voted for a tax increase and he has no plans to start if voters send him to Congress later this year.

The 2nd Congressional District candidate said he has been committed to holding the line on taxes throughout his 14-year stint in the Oregon Legislature.

"I am the only candidate in this race (who has served in elective office) who has never voted for a tax or fee increase," Atkinson said Wednesday morning during a campaign stop at Cook Memorial Library, La Grande.

Atkinson was on a swing through Eastern Oregon, which included stops in Hermiston and Pendleton. He is one of eight Republicans seeking the nomination in the May 19 primary. Five Democrats are vying to earn the crown from their party. He said as a congressman he would maintain his strong position against tax increases.

"I would continue to be like this as a congressman," he said. "Congress needs more quality people. It does not need more money."

Based on the most recent Federal Election Commission campaign finance data, Atkinson has raised about \$96,000. Fellow Republicans Jimmy Crumpacker of Bend has raised almost \$594,000 including \$200,000 he loaned his campaign, while Knute Buehler, also of Bend, has amassed nearly \$386,000, none of it in a loan.

Atkinson noted he attempted to get Oregon's death and capital gains taxes repealed or reduced while serving in the Legislature. Atkinson, who was in the state House from 1999-2001 and the state Senate from 2001-13, said he faced enormous pressure to vote for gas tax increases but always resisted. He was ready for the firestorms that followed.

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Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

La Grande's Greenwood Elementary kindergarten teacher Kendra Carman teaches a small group of students mathematics through learning about money during Wednesday's class.

# On the right track

By Sabrina Thompson  
The Observer

UNION COUNTY — Kindergarten students in Union County school districts are on track or slightly above the state average, according to the Oregon Department of Education 2019-2020 Kindergarten Assessment.

The assessment during the first six weeks of school measured students' math, reading, writing and social skills. In most assessments, the schools of Union County scored at or above the state average. However, the Union School District was behind in math, and Imbler and Elgin were behind in social skills.

"The assessment is a quick snapshot," La Grande's Greenwood Elementary School principal Ryan Westenskow said. "It is only so useful. What this data tells me is we are right in the mix. We don't want to toot our horn, but we don't want to freak out about those numbers either."

In math, which tested students on 16 simple questions, La Grande kindergartners scored 12.1, compared to the state's average of 11. In social skills, such as self-regulation and interpersonal skills, La Grande is right along the state average of 3.6 rating



Staff photo by Sabrina Thompson

Kindergarten students at Greenwood Elementary School, La Grande, learn about math Wednesday through a variety of techniques, including videos and hands-on instruction.

out of five. And in early literacy, which tests understanding of upper and lowercase letters and sound recognition, La Grande students were above the state average in all elements.

"The skills assessed on the Kindergarten Assessment align with early learning and Oregon state standards," said Holly Dalton, an early learning

specialist at the state education department. "They are predictive of later success in school. For instance, the results of the Kindergarten Assessment are largely correlated with our third grade outcomes."

Union Elementary School principal Chris Dunlap said the goals for

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# 'Monologues' share women's stories

By Sabrina Thompson  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eve Ensler premiered her play "The Vagina Monologues" in 1996, and since then the cultural phenomenon has been translated into nearly 50 languages, giving voice to women's stories across the world.

Eastern Oregon University groups are bringing the play back for the first time since 2004 with showings at 7 p.m. Feb. 28 in Hoke Union Building room 339, and again at 7 p.m. Feb. 29 at hq, 112 Depot St., both in La Grande. Proceeds from the show will go to Shelter From the Storm, the local safe haven for survivors of domestic violence, sexual

assault and stalking.

"It is really about raising awareness and stopping violence against women and girls," said Beckie Juarez, the production's director. "The show talks about what it is like to be a woman, and our bodies, which unfortunately is not very talked about still in society. It is still fairly taboo in 2020, which is ridiculous."

Three student groups are coming together to present the play: the Student Association for Gender Equality, Mountainqueers and Sexual Health Advocacy Group. But the roles were open to all community members, students, faculty and alumni. The cast is composed of 15 women and non-binary

actors performing 17 monologues.

"It is people's experiences that you don't know about and you don't hear about a lot because they are not amplified," EOU student and performer Julia Huyg said of the play. "Anything that we can do to amplify the voices of people who have stories to tell is what we want to do."

The show consists of individual and group monologues that cover topics of consensual and nonconsensual sexual experiences, body image, sex work and more. Ensler interviewed more than 200 women to create the monologues, and the number of monologues and topics change from year

to year, all written by Ensler.

"Some of them are really funny. Some deal with the word 'vagina' itself, talking about your body, being comfortable with your body, coming to terms with appreciating your body and the beauty of it. Some of them talk about sex," Juarez said.

EOU alumnus Candi Nielsen is doing a monologue called "The Flood," which she said reminds her of her grandmother.

"The monologue is about an older woman rediscovering her body and what that is. I think back to my grandmother and everything was quiet and hush-hush, and (sex) was just for baby making. You didn't talk about

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### WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 30 LOW A bit of snow  
Friday 40/30 A snow shower

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