

LHS boys, girls sweep Mac-Hi

Walmart employee utilizes program, 2A
Hospital treating coronavirus patients, 8B



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THE OBSERVER

Weekend Edition

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Good day to our valued subscriber Lonnie Lester of La Grande

Volunteering



Photo contributed by Imbler Christian Church

Members of the Imbler Christian Church and other volunteers Monday remove mud from beneath a modular home in Umatilla County.

Locals continue to assist flood victims

Union County residents volunteer to help Umatilla County residents

By Dick Mason, The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County volunteers who want to assist flood victims in Umatilla County can join emergency relief agencies already working on the ground there.

This will maximize the volunteers' effectiveness and ensure their safety, said Tom Roberts, Umatilla County's emergency manager.

Roberts said volunteers "are exposed to danger" at flood sites.

Hazards include structures now fragile after being hit by floodwaters.

"The integrity (of some) See Volunteer / Page 5A

Education

Charter school working to get

BACK TO NORMAL

Cleanup from January fire well underway at Wallowa County school



Bill Bradshaw/EO Media Group

Students disembark their bus while teachers and staff give directions Monday, Feb. 10, at Joseph Charter School.

By Ronald Bond, The Observer

JOSEPH — A sense of normalcy is beginning to return at Joseph Charter School after a fire in January damaged the school and burned much of its gymnasium.

The blaze displaced kindergarten through fourth-grade students, who were able to return to their own classrooms last week as cleanup crews made their way through damaged rooms.

"By the end of this week we're hoping the high school hallways are open," Joseph Superintendent Lance Homan said Tuesday.

The return of the K-4 put about half of the school's students back in their classrooms. Seventh through 12th grades remain in temporary classrooms in the school's career and technical education building, which was finished in 2019, and, Homan said, "we have a modular north of the gym that was cleaned up."

Homan said the bathrooms are the last places that need coats of fresh paint before the school reopens the hallway from the main office to the gym. After that work,

he said, "we'll have three high school classrooms opened up. It'll get us a little bit closer to being normal."

The cleanup crews have repainted any surfaces exposed to smoke or soot from the fire, Homan said.

"As you get closer to the fire, everything has to be stripped down, repainted," he said. "Every surface, everything that was exposed."

Items such as desks and chairs, though, are in good shape. Technology equipment, such as computers, as well as band instruments are being cleaned, he said.

Homan said a crew has recently moved into the cafeteria, which he expects will take about four weeks to clean. Without an on-site place to eat, buses transport roughly 270 students daily to the Joseph Community Center for lunch.

Ahead are assessments of the school's library and the See Normal / Page 5A

Town Hall

Merkley visits Union County

U.S. senator weighs in on immigration, administration

By Sabrina Thompson, The Observer

ELGIN — U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley told Union County residents he supports limiting the number of bullets in guns, and he believes U.S. immigration policies are faulty.

Merkley marked his 414th town hall meeting Friday morning at the community center in Elgin, where roughly 70-80 gathered for the event. He told the crowd he is waiting on funding estimates for disaster relief for Eastern Oregonians who suffered property damage and losses in the recent flooding.

Merkley also fielded questions ranging from immigration and President Donald Trump's policies to the Democrats seeking to oust Trump in the 2020 election. Often he asked the question back to the audience to get a sense of how the crowd felt.

When asked, the senator said he supported and encouraged young people to volunteer their time in public service and giving back to the community.

On immigration, Merkley spoke about his visit to the U.S.-Mexico border, where he saw firsthand Central American refugees fleeing oppression and seeking a better life in the United States.

"We broke the refugee convention by not offering safe haven," he said.

He related a story about a young woman who made it across the border by washing windshields of the vehicles waiting to cross the checkpoint. He said this highlights his desire to see a better system for immigration and asylum seekers.

After this election, he said, See Merkley / Page 5A

Oregon Legislature

Brown tries to bargain with state Republicans

With Oregon Republicans ready to walk out of the session, governor seeks negotiations

By Lauren Dake and Dirk VanderHart, Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — On Valentine's Day, Gov. Kate Brown and Republican state Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena surveyed flood damage in Eastern Oregon from a Black Hawk

helicopter.

The following Monday, the governor stopped by Hansell's office in the state Capitol.

She wanted to discuss how the state might give financial help to flood victims in Hansell's district. Perhaps not coincidentally,

Brown also had a request — one tied to a bill the Democrats want to pass this session, but which Hansell and his party vow to block.

"I had begun to hear that maybe there was going to be a quid pro quo," Hansell recalled Wednesday. "The governor was going to hold up relief work in order to try and extract a commitment from me on some of the

bills or something."

That's not what happened. According to Hansell, Brown even told him: "I'm sure you heard rumors I'm here to do a quid pro quo. I am not."

But the governor did ask Hansell for something: that he call Shaun Jillions, an industry lobbyist who is among the most forceful opponents to Senate Bill

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Brown



Hansell

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Table with 3 columns: Classified, Comics, Crossword, Dear Abby, Horoscope, Lottery, Obituaries, Opinion, Outdoors, Sports, Sudoku, Weather.

WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Weather forecast for tonight (31 Low, Turning cloudy) and Sunday (47/29, Showers around).

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