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THE OBSERVER

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SATURDAY • February 29-March 2, 2020 • \$1.50 Good day to our valued subscriber Stanley Grove of La Grande

Oregon Legislature

Smith, Hansell question stance

■ Local lawmakers question Dems' hard-line position

By Phil Wright
The Observer

SALEM — Eastern Oregon lawmakers remain perplexed over the Democrats' refusal to allow the voters to decide the fate of controversial climate legislation. The majority party's political calculus, they said, does not pencil out.



Smith

Republican legislators remain absent from the Oregon Capitol heading into the weekend over a proposal to reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions, while Democrats in the House and Senate say they are determined to stand against demands to refer the proposal to voters.



Hansell

Republican Rep. Greg Smith of Hepper said emotions are running high and leadership on the two sides are talking. To Smith and his fellow Republicans, the solution to the stalemate is clear.

"In the end, Oregonians need to have a say on this issue," Smith said. "They need to be able to vote yes or no on it."

Republican Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena said he has heard from constituents of his district, which includes Umatilla, Union and Wallowa counties, and they oppose cap and trade for good reasons. Oregon emits 65 million metric tons of carbon each year, he said, while the United States as a whole contributes 6.5 billion tons.

"We have 1% of the total U.S. emissions," he said, and on the global scale, Oregon is a tenth of 1%. On that front, he said, the Democrats don't have the argument to support the need for the policy.

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Northeast Oregon

'SHE WAS OUR ROCK'

■ Weston Mayor Jennifer Spurgeon passes away after fight with cancer



Contributed photo

Weston Mayor Jennifer McClure Spurgeon poses with Rep. Greg Walden in his Washington, D.C., office on Jan. 29, 2019, along with Scott Rogers, left, who chairs the Athena-Weston School Board, and Baker School Board members Kevin Cassidy and Andrew Bryan. The four school board members, representing the Oregon School Board Association, met with Oregon legislators about educational issues.

By Kathy Aney, EO Media Group & Trish Yerges, for The Observer

WESTON — Weston Mayor Jennifer Spurgeon died Tuesday morning from cancer, but not before completing a huge bucket list item — bringing broadband internet to her community.

Spurgeon got the ear of Eastern Oregon Telecom President Joe Franell during a Hermiston Chamber event in 2018. Franell remembers immediately coming under her spell as she compelled him to bring broadband to tiny Weston.

"She was so passionate and so informed," Franell said. "I couldn't say no to her."

Now, he said, Weston is slowly getting "lit up" house by house. Across the highway, Athena is a couple weeks away. Adams is next.

"She was our first customer," Franell said. "We were able to get her hooked up a month ago and

she was able to use it. With everything going on, it seemed right."

"Everything" refers to Spurgeon's cancer struggles. Diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2013, she endured treatments while serving as a Weston city councilor and working with her husband, Dave, in their appraisal business. The mother of three recovered, but cancer returned in late 2018, ebbed and then flared again.

Those who knew her well can't quite believe she is gone.

"She did not dwell on the possibility that this would get her," said friend Elizabeth McIntyre. "She had already beaten it back twice.

She just refused to let it control her as much as possible."

McIntyre and another friend, Jessica Aldrich, sat in an office at Weston-McEwen High School where they both work, reflecting on Spurgeon's impact on Weston and Athena. They said Spurgeon, whose 47th birthday was last Friday, also served on the Athena-Weston School Board, the League of Oregon Cities Board and the Oregon School Board Association, and she was pondering a run for Umatilla County commissioner. She served as a motivational speaker and executive director for

See **Spurgeon** / Page 2A



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

The Observer has a new home

The newspaper wrapped up operations Friday at 1406 Fifth St. and has moved to the renovated Commercial Tire building at 911 Jefferson Ave. Beginning Monday, you can find us at the new office.

Blue Mountain Translator District

District explores channel options

By Samantha O'Conner
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — The Blue Mountain Translator District wants to start a local channel available by antenna and through online streaming and cable TV.

The La Grande-based district, which supplies TV signals to parts of Baker and Union counties, issued a request for proposals to operate a low-power local channel and set up the streaming and cable options. The new channel, which could air such events as local government meetings and high school sports, could launch later this year.

The channel would be available to anyone who pays the district's \$100 annual subscription fee, said Alex McHaddad, the BMTD executive director.

McHaddad said the district has been working on the project since the spring of 2019. It distributed community surveys last fall to learn what people want to see on a local TV channel, and the district's board of directors has been forming a strategic plan.

In 2019 the Oregon Legislature passed Senate Bill 394 that authorized the district to start a low-power station.

"Ideally we would want to be able to broadcast all local government meetings — city council, county commissioners, school board," McHaddad said. "Of course each entity is going to be allowed to say yes or no."

McHaddad also has other shows in development to offer on the streaming service.

"I've got like 120 television shows in development all together," he said. "We're looking at some local programming created in the Pacific Northwest, things like travel shows that we think a lot of people in the area are really going to enjoy watching."

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Snake River Hydropower

Feds reject removal of four dams

■ Report says removal of Snake River dams would do more harm than good

By Gillian Flaccus
The Associated Press

PORTLAND — A long-awaited federal report out Friday rejected the idea of removing four hydroelectric dams on a major Pacific Northwest river in a last-ditch effort to save more than a dozen species of threatened or endan-

gered salmon, saying such a dramatic approach would destabilize the power grid, increase overall greenhouse emissions and more than double the risk of regional power outages.

The four dams on the lower Snake River in Eastern Washington are part of a vast and complex

hydroelectric power system operated by the federal government in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

Environmental groups who have pushed for years for the dams to come down immediately blasted the report. The three agencies in charge of overseeing

the sprawling hydropower system recommended an alternative that includes a variety of strategies, including fine-tuning the amount of water that spills over the dams for fish.

"Rather than seizing this opportunity to heed the public's call for working together

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WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 26 LOW Mostly cloudy Sunday 41/24 Mostly sunny

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TUESDAY HOW DID THE TIGER WRESTLERS DO?

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