



The Observer, File

Eastern Oregon University volleyball players Madison Pilon (4) and Cambree Scott (12) jump to attempt a block during a November 2019 match against Southern Oregon University. EOU's volleyball team is off to a 4-0 start. The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics on Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021, named Scott its National Defensive Player of the Week.

EOU's Cambree Scott earns National Player of the Week honors

The Observer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Following an impressive weekend that saw Eastern Oregon University volleyball go 4-0 to start the season, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics tabbed Cambree Scott as the National Defensive Player of the Week.

The NAIA released its list of players of the week on Tuesday, Feb. 23.

Scott was a key contributor on both sides of the ball for No. 9 EOU, tallying 34 kills and 24 blocks in the team's 4-0 opening weekend, the university reported.

The 6-foot tall junior had a near double-double in the season opener against Multnomah University with nine kills and 10 blocks. She finished with nine kill outings in both wins against Multnomah University.

Against Oregon Institute of Technology, Scott

helped anchor a front-line defense that held OIT to a .159 hitting percentage in the first match and a .153 mark in the second match, according to EOU. For the weekend, Scott and Eastern's defense held opponents to an average .106 hitting. Scott ranks fifth in the Cascade Collegiate Conference in hitting at .338 and is second in blocks with 24.

For Scott, she earns her first national weekly honors after receiving the CCC Defensive Player of the Week. The CCC has named her its player of the week three times now. She picked up the honor twice in 2019, earning offensive and defensive player of the week honors.

Eastern Oregon University also reported for head coach Kaki McLean Morehead, this is the first player to receive NAIA Player of the Week honors in 14 years of leading the volleyball program.

CCC crowns Azure as Men's Wrestling Coach of the Year

The Observer

LA GRANDE — A jury of his peers elected Eastern Oregon University's Dustyn Azure as the 2020-21 Cascade Collegiate Conference Men's Wrestling Coach of the Year.

The conference on Tuesday, Feb. 23,

announced Azure's fellow head men's wrestling coaches voted on him to earn the honor.

CCC Commissioner Robert Cashell in a written statement congratulated Azure.

"This has indeed been a challenging season for all of our teams," Cashell stated, "and Dustyn has done a wonderful job with his team, as well as serving as our conference and national rater."

This is Azure's fifth year at the helm for EOU, and five Mountaineers qualified for the NAIA National Championship, scheduled for March 5-6 in Park City, Kansas — the second-most in the CCC. Under Azure, EOU boasts a 34-34 dual record, including an impressive 15-5 mark last season.

According to EOU, Azure in the past four seasons produced four individual All-Americans, two top-20 finishes at the

NAIA National Tournament, two top-10 NWCA Scholar All-American team awards, along with six Individual Scholar All-Americans.

EOU is Azure's first head coaching assignment at the collegiate level. He came to Eastern from the highly successful wrestling program at Montana State University-Northern, where he spent four years as the head assistant wrestling coach, along with being the strength and conditioning coach for the Lights.

In addition to his coaching duties, Azure served as the senior admissions specialist for the university, which allowed him to recruit potential MSU-Northern students.

Azure and his wife, Jennifer, who is a teacher in the La Grande School District, have four daughters — Kierstyn, Sydnee, Mackenzie, and Hallie.

The Mountaineers head to the Midwest in two weeks after having competed in one event during the strange 2020-21 regular season.

EOU competed at the Nampa Collegiate Invite in Idaho back on Feb. 6 and each of the five qualifiers — along with EOU's alternate — posted solid results, with a combined 19-0 record heading into nationals.

State tax collections buck pandemic unemployment trends

By PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — More than 150,000 Oregonians remain out of work as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, but income tax collections that support state services and public schools are likely to exceed pre-pandemic forecasts.

State economists told lawmakers on Wednesday, Feb. 25, that is good news for the current two-year state budget — but not so good for the next couple of budget cycles, including the spending plan lawmakers are putting together now.

State Economist Mark McMullen likened it to what happened in 1990, when Oregon underwent a relatively mild economic downturn, but growth in tax collections slowed for a few years afterward.

"We have a couple of years with flat growth ... without any gains in revenue, which is good for a recession, but bad for keeping up with the spending side," McMullen said at a quarterly presentation to House and Senate revenue committees.

He and senior economist Josh Lehner had projected

a \$2 billion drop in tax collections right after the start of the pandemic last spring. But in their latest forecast, they said lawmakers will have about \$800 million more in collections available for the current budget period and the next, which starts July 1. Even with lawmakers tapping it on Dec. 21, the ending balance and two state reserves will have about \$3.1 billion at the start of the new budget period.

Largely as a result of billions in federal aid to individuals and businesses, McMullen said, Oregon's overall income levels were up 5%, not down, despite the sharpest one-month nosedive in Oregon's unemployment rate from a record-low 3.3% in March 2020 to 14.2% in April 2020. The December rate was 6.4%.

"You see employment down around 6% in Oregon over the past year, which is the same as the worst year of the Great Recession, when our income tax revenues fell by 20%. Here you see much less," McMullen said. "If you extend this for our preliminary numbers for 2021, the revenues will

be back to where they were last year."

Lehner said Oregon has benefited from \$12 billion in unemployment benefit payments that are taxable, \$11 billion in Paycheck Protection Program forgivable loans to businesses that are deductible, and \$8 billion in federal rebates. (One round paid \$1,200 to individuals, and a second round paid \$600; Congress is considering a third plan for \$1,400.)

"That is keeping income up, this far into the recession, that we have not seen before in decades — this level of income support coming from the federal government," Lehner said. "If we were to take out all the direct aid ... that underlying income would take us all the way back before the pandemic. The economy has proven more resilient than we first feared."

Predictably, Democratic legislative leaders welcomed the news, but Republicans talked about the downside of so many people still unemployed or underemployed.

Democratic Gov. Kate Brown said the cheering is premature.

"Even with this good news, it is important to move forward cautiously, as the road ahead remains unpredictable," she said in a statement. "We also know that many Oregonians are still struggling with job losses, underemployment, and making ends meet."

Lawmakers will base their decisions on Brown's \$25.6 billion budget, drawn from the tax-supported general fund and lottery proceeds, after the next economic and revenue forecast now scheduled May 19. Lawmakers and Brown herself concede it falls short of maintaining some state service and aid to public schools.

But the U.S. Congress is working on President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion pandemic recovery plan, which offers more aid for Oregon and other states.

"If passed, this bill would provide another round of much needed aid for states and direct benefits for Oregonians in the form of essential services such as unemployment assistance, nutrition assistance, housing aid, and tax credits for families and workers," Brown said.

Bill would allow more Oregon schools and public buildings to ban guns

By DIRK VANDERHART

Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — A bill that would allow local governments, school districts and universities to prohibit handguns in public buildings is on its way to the Senate floor, following a tense committee hearing Thursday, Feb. 25.

Senate Bill 554 is the first gun control bill of the 2021 legislative session to move toward a floor vote. And in normal fashion, the measure drew intense opposition from gun owners.

Currently, anyone with a concealed handgun license in Oregon can legally bring their weapon into buildings, such as city halls, public university buildings, or public schools. SB 554 would not change that, but it would allow governments, school districts, ports and other entities to create their own rules banning firearms in their buildings.

Those bans would need to be made clear with signage and online notices. Anyone violating the rules could be subject to a class C felony.

SB 554 also would increase fees for applying for a concealed handgun license from \$50 to \$100, and the fee for renewing a license from \$50 to \$75.

In committee hearings

and hundreds of pieces of written testimony, opponents of the bill argued that it amounted to an

FBI tracks active shooter incidents in the U.S., along with how those events end, and typically finds a rela-

"I'll be darned if I'm going to be a sitting duck for a person who wants to come in and start shooting. It's just not right."

— Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod, R-Lyons, who said he and his wife routinely carry guns into the state Capitol

unnecessary infringement on gun rights. Many pointed out concealed handgun licensees need to pass background checks and must meet a range of requirements, including not having misdemeanor convictions within four years and no outstanding warrants.

Those requirements, opponents say, mean CHL holders tend to be law-abiding citizens. Many people referred to claims that concealed handgun licensees are less likely to be convicted of a crime than police officers, though the data surrounding that comparison is fuzzy.

Others have argued people with concealed-carry licenses are a last defense against criminals and mass shooters. The

tively small percentage are stopped by armed citizens and unarmed citizens alike. The numbers behind the FBI reports are sometimes disputed by gun rights advocates.

"There's confusion about CHL holders and violent crime," Senate Minority Leader Fred Girod, R-Lyons, testified in a hearing Feb. 22. "There's a huge difference between the two."

Though SB 554 did not contemplate the state Capitol, Girod said he and his wife routinely carry guns in the building, and would not stop. "I'll be darned if I'm going to be a sitting duck for a person who wants to come in and start shooting," he said. "It's just not right."

More generally, opponents of the bill have

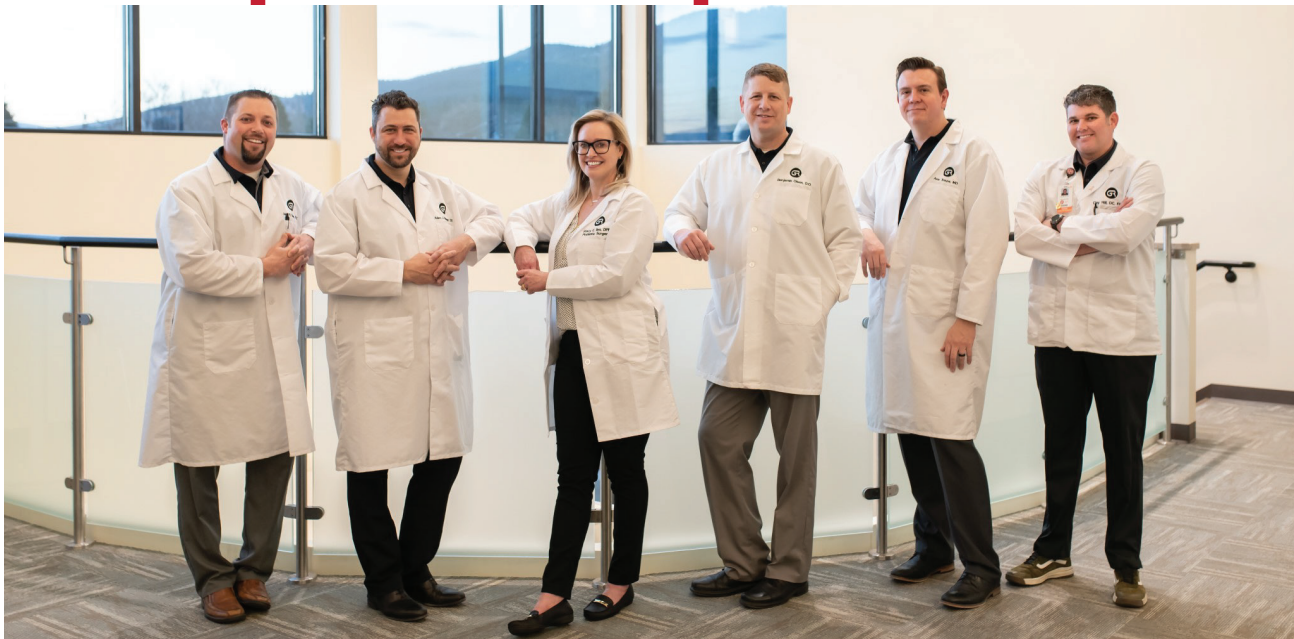
argued it will not make public buildings any safer, because people planning to commit violence would disregard any weapons ban. Gun rights advocates say the proposal instead will needlessly put law-abiding gun owners at risk of committing felonies as they encounter a patchwork of varying restrictions on where they can carry.

"This law will have the effect of inviting an emboldened criminal element," said state Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer. "It will make our communities less safe."

Proponents of SB 554 say it should be up to local governments and school districts to decide if guns are acceptable in their buildings. They point to a Supreme Court decision penned by late conservative Justice Antonin Scalia in 2008 that suggested such limitations were permissible under the Second Amendment.

"As an elected official, I believe it's incumbent on me and my colleagues to welcome the public," Multnomah County Commissioner Sharon Meieran said. "Our sense of safety is increasingly threatened as our public buildings have become focal points for anti-democratic extremists."

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