

STATE BRIEFS

Senate confirms Sams as National Park Service director

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate in a unanimous vote late Thursday, Nov. 18, approved the nomination of Chuck Sams as National Park Service director.

Sams is a former long-time administrator for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation near Pendleton and the former area representative on the Pacific Northwest Electric Power and Conservation Planning Council.

The vote came after U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, went to the Senate floor and asked the Senate to pass the nomination by unanimous consent, according to a press release from Wyden's office.

"Chuck Sams is the right nominee to lead the National Park Service as it addresses these challenges. I know Chuck. He is hard-working. He is committed," Wyden said in the press release. "Chuck is a role model in the stewardship of American land and waters, wildlife and history. And now thanks to the Senate's unanimous decision to confirm his nomination, Congress and parkgoers will have someone steady and experienced to rely on in the years ahead."

Wrong-way driver on I-84 was man missing from Nevada

PENDLETON — A traffic stop near Pendleton led police to find a man missing from Nevada.

Oregon State Police reported a black Chevrolet Silverado at 8:12 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 16, was heading west in the east-bound lanes from Exit 209 in Pendleton. A Umatilla County sheriff's deputy was entering the freeway at milepost 207 and stopped the pickup. Ryan Sharp, senior trooper with Oregon State Police, arrived soon after.

The pickup's driver was confused, according to OSP, and a check on his identification revealed he was an 82-year-old man who was reported as a missing or endangered person from Reno.

State police took the driver to its office in Pendleton and contacted his wife. Police then checked him into a local hotel and secured his vehicle in the OSP parking lot.

Oregon State Police also reported the man's wife and a relative were leaving Reno the morning of Nov. 17 to get him in Pendleton.

Umatilla County serial offender back in jail for theft

HERMISTON — Local offender Carlos Joaquin Barragan, of Hermiston, is again in jail.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said officers arrested Barragan, 43, in relation to all-terrain vehicle thefts in October.

Police on Oct. 10 at about 7:30 a.m. responded to the 700 block of West Highland Avenue on a report of a suspicious vehicle. Officers found a pickup hauling a trailer carrying three stolen ATVs, Edmiston said.

The suspect took off from the vehicle, but police caught and arrested Mayro Guzman, 30, for vehicle theft and four counts of first-degree theft. The investigation continued, Edmiston said, and led to Barragan.

Police caught up with Barragan on Nov. 15 at his father's home in Hermiston. Edmiston said the family cooperated with officers, who found Barragan trying to hide in a crawl space.

Police arrested Barragan for four counts of first-degree theft and three counts of vehicle theft and booked him into the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton.

Edmiston said this makes the 15th time Hermiston police have arrested Barragan, who also has another 79 citations.

Wildlife rescue reports six raptors too injured to save

PENDLETON — The wild bird rescue operation Blue Mountain Wildlife in Pendleton reported another rough week for raptors.

The nonprofit organization and facility at 71046 Appaloosa Lane in its weekly newsletter reported it had only seven admissions last week, but six of those were for raptors and none could be saved.

Three great horned owls had humerus fractures, and a fourth was tangled in a fence. A sharp-shinned hawk was shot, and a red-tailed hawk likely was struck by a vehicle.

Prairie City to break ground on water project next month

PRAIRIE CITY — After more than two years of working out the details, Prairie City's Faiman Springs water project is expected to break ground next month.

An emergency procurement due to the recent drought allowed the city to bypass a formal bid process, according to Prairie City Mayor Jim Hamsher.

Hamsher said the project would move forward with Winegar Excavation, a Prairie City-based contractor, and other subcontractors starting Dec. 1, adding he expects the project will be completed by late spring or early summer.

The project will tie an existing well near the Faiman Springs site into the current city water system, Hamsher said. The project includes constructing a pump station and laying between 8,000 and 9,000 feet of piping.

Prairie City has suffered from chronic water shortages for years.

— EO Media Group

Oregon's fuel tax rises again

The 2-cent increase comes as more drivers buy less gas

By ZANE SPARLING
Oregon Capital Bureau

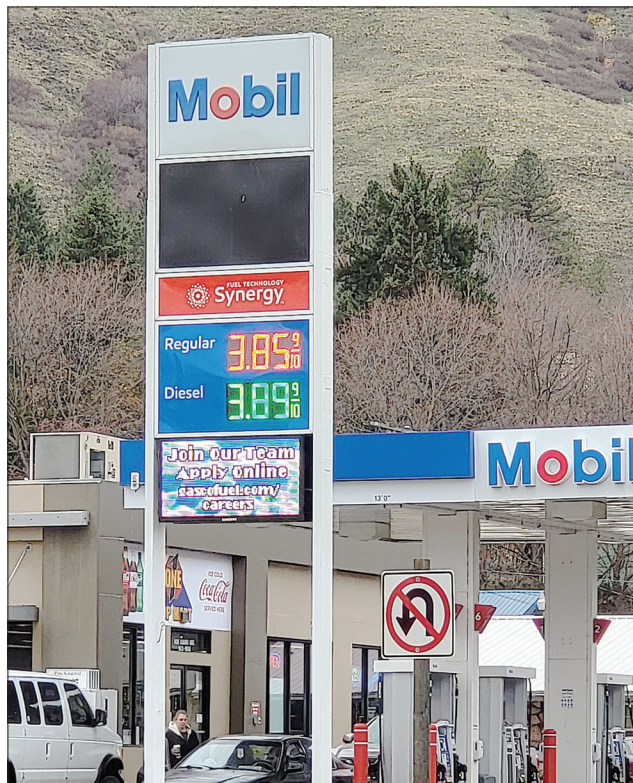
SALEM — Gas prices are up. They're about to get even higher.

Oregon drivers will pay 2 cents more on every gallon of gasoline beginning on Jan. 1, 2022, as the state's fuel tax rises to \$0.38 per gallon.

The pump price jump was baked into House Bill 2017 — the omnibus \$5.3 billion transportation package passed by state lawmakers that year — which included three previous price hikes and a final two-cent increase set for 2024, at which point drivers will be paying 10 cents more per gallon in tax.

There's also a separate 10-cent per gallon fuel tax collected by the city of Portland, plus an \$0.184 federal gas tax, meaning Rose City consumers are currently paying roughly \$0.64 in taxes on every gallon of gas.

Oregon Department of Transportation data shows that state fuel tax revenue has recovered somewhat from the COVID-19



Andrew Cutler/The Observer

A readerboard at One Stop Mart, 408 Adams Ave., La Grande, shows gas prices on Thursday, Nov. 18, 2021. Oregon drivers will pay 2 cents more on every gallon of gasoline beginning on Jan. 1, 2022, as the state's fuel tax rises to \$0.38 per gallon.

slump, even though drivers still are buying less gas.

As virus restrictions emptied public spaces and converted most white-collar commuters into home workers, gross tax revenue dropped from \$620 million in calendar year 2019 to \$589 million in 2020.

According to ODOT Budget Manager Daniel Porter, the state has collected \$486 million in fuel tax revenue through September 2021, about \$20 million more than this time in 2019, with the final quarter of revenue yet to be tabulated. But the number of gallons of gasoline sold is lag-

ging previous years, with 1.357 billion gallons sold through September of this year compared with 1.38 billion in September 2019.

All told, some 1.829 billion gallons of gas passed through the pump in 2019, compared with just 1.645 billion last year.

"Annual comparisons on revenue wouldn't quite be apples to apples," said ODOT spokesperson Shelley M. Snow. "If you look at gallons sold we're still about 2% off of where we were in 2019."

Lawmakers have considered proposals to ditch Oregon's fuel tax in favor of a tax on every mile traveled, which would return electric vehicle users to the tax base, but so far it's just an idea.

Statewide, the average price for regular unleaded gas is \$3.78 per gallon, according to the American Automobile Association. That's nearly a buck and a quarter more than the average unleaded gas cost of \$2.59 a gallon from this time last year, though still less than the price peak recorded in 2008, per AAA.

The DMV fees charged when drivers renew their vehicle tags or apply for a trip permit or vehicle title will also be rising about 3% next year.

Higher wages drive state revenue

Oregonians expected to receive \$1.9 billion next year in 'kicker' tax credits

By JULIA SHUMWAY
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — Higher wages are driving up Oregon's projected tax revenue, but most middle-class workers won't feel the benefits of larger paychecks over the next year because of inflation, state economists said Wednesday, Nov. 17.

A quarterly economic forecast from the state Department of Administrative Services predicted that Oregon will recover from a pandemic-induced recession much more quickly than it did from the Great Recession. Higher wages, especially for low-income workers, are making up for expiring federal aid, according to the forecast.

But labor shortages and supply chain disruptions are driving prices up and eating into families' budgets. And the Portland area, which contains roughly half the state's population and jobs, is lagging behind the rest of Oregon in recovering from the pandemic.

With Oregonians earning more money, the state is collecting more income tax revenue than expected when the current budget cycle started in July. Oregonians who filed

taxes in 2020 and 2021 are already expected to receive \$1.9 billion next year in "kicker" tax credits triggered when the state collects more in taxes than it budgeted, with a credit of \$420 for the median taxpayer. Forecasters now predict the state will refund \$558 million in 2024 as well.

A rosy forecast for state government revenue presented to Oregon's House and Senate finance committees came as other legislative committees heard dire warnings about a coming wave of evictions as tenants struggle to afford rent.

"It's still really quite something to grasp that we're in a situation with a revenue forecast where we're seeing additional revenue over what had been forecast; things look really rosy that way," said Rep. Nancy Nathanson, a Eugene Democrat who chairs the House committee. "There are other legislative committees hearing very troubled information about people who are in danger of losing their homes and other types of challenges for some of Oregon's businesses and individuals. How can this be true at the same time?"

Wage gap narrows

Across the board, wages adjusted for inflation are up about 8% since the start of the pandemic in Oregon in March 2020.

Workers making less than \$20 an hour saw the most significant increases, while those making more still saw raises but they didn't keep pace with inflation.

Normally, inflation would hit low-income workers the hardest, state economist Josh Lehner said.

If you're living paycheck to paycheck, higher prices mean those paychecks don't go as far, he said. Workers who earn more and don't routinely spend everything they earn might need to decrease the amount they save, but they also stand to benefit from rising returns on their investments.

On average, low-income workers in Oregon are increasing their standard of living, while middle-income workers are beginning to struggle with the erosive effects of inflation.

"Basically, if you're more than \$20 an hour you're seeing wage gains, but not as fast as inflation, so you're seeing some real wage declines," Lehner said. "From a broader societal economic perspective, maybe some reduction in wage inequality

would have some broader benefits, even in a high inflation environment, but of course, when the typical worker seeing real wage declines, and you're paying more at the pump, more at the store, that really starts to hit your budget."

For the most part, economists expect higher prices to begin to subside as supply catches up to demand for products that were manufactured at much slower rates than normal during the pandemic.

For instance, used car prices are up roughly 40% since the start of the pandemic because of a shortage of semiconductor chips needed for new cars, but those prices are expected to decrease as manufacturing ramps up.

Other areas, including rising costs to buy or rent homes, are more concerning, state economist Mark McMullen said.

"We're seeing a tremendous amount of inflation there, but unlike what we're seeing in terms of a lot of the other durable goods, we can't expect a huge supply response that's going to come and save the day and bring down house prices and bring down rents going forward," he said. "So that's something where there may be a role for policymakers."

Northeast Oregon Directory of Churches

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1708 Jasper St., Cove, OR

NORTH POWDER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
390 E. St., North Powder, OR

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Worship: 10:00 a.m. N. Powder

First Christian Church
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lgdisciples@gmail.com

Worship 10:00 a.m.

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grace.lutherancove@gmail.com

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www.imblerce@gmail.com

Sunday Services
9:00 a.m. Sunday School
10:00 a.m. Worship Service

CHURCH Service DIRECTORY

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Sunday Services:
Sunday School & Adult Bible Classes 9:45AM
Children's Church & Worship Service 11:00AM
Family Worship Service 6:00PM

Wednesday:
Prayer Mtg, Children's Bible Club, Youth Group 7:00PM

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Sunday School 9:15 a.m.
Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m.

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A Place where hope is found in Jesus

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lagrandeor.adventistchurch.org

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Little Friends
Christian Preschool/Childcare 963-6390
La Grande Adventist Christian School K-8th Grade 963-6203

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1812 1st St. La Grande
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Sunday Evening Bible Study - 3:00 pm (Effective June 10)
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Services This Week