

# THE OBSERVER

SERVING UNION AND WALLOWA COUNTIES SINCE 1896

March 12, 2022

WEEKEND EDITION

\$1.50

### DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

SUNDAY, MARCH 13



Don't forget to turn clocks ahead one hour.

## 'I'm thankful for what we received'

County leaders generally pleased with results from short session

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Members of the Union County Board of Commissioners are generally pleased with how the recently completed legislative session went, but all admit some aspects of it left them frustrated.

More than \$10 million in one-time funding for Union County projects was contained in House Bill 5202, which provided funding throughout the state.

"It is always a battle for rural areas but I'm thankful for what we received," Commissioner Donna Beverage said.



**Beverage**

Commissioner Paul Anderes also feels good overall about the short session, which concluded Friday, March 4.



**Anderes**

"It was a bit of a whirlwind but I think it went well overall," he said.



**Scarfo**

Among the things he was excited to see was \$1 million being provided to the Union County Fairgrounds to help fund

See, [County/Page A7](#)



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

A personal vehicle fills up at a Chevron gas station on Island Avenue, La Grande, on Thursday, March 10, 2022. Gas and diesel prices have risen to record highs following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

# Driving up gas prices

### Gas prices soar as Russian invasion in Ukraine continues

By **ALEX WITTWER**  
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Gas prices are soaring to record highs amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, sparked by fears that NATO countries may begin enacting additional sanctions against Russian crude oil.

In the United States, President Joe Biden announced a ban on Russian oil on Tuesday, March 8.

Crude oil prices briefly skyrocketed to more than \$130 on March 8, the highest it's been since 2008, and nearly doubling since December.

Oregon has seen gas prices rise to more than \$4.50 a gallon, while some areas of Portland have sold gas as high as \$6 a gallon. Diesel prices have risen above \$5 a gallon.

"I just came from Arizona, and this is the highest price I've seen for diesel," said Diane Miller, a competitive barrel racer who was traveling home to Moses Lake, Washington, after a three-week trip to Arizona.



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

A sticker at a Sinclair gas station in Union makes light of the increasing gas prices on Thursday, March 10, 2022. Gas and diesel prices have risen to record highs following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Miller paid more than \$140 to fill up half a tank of diesel at the Chevron station in Island City on March 10. She said that she's able to afford the increased costs at the pump, but she knows several people who aren't. Miller said she will have to pay for more expensive diesel prices all summer as she competes in barrel racing competitions.

"It's definitely hard on America," Miller said. "It's a bad deal, and I don't think it would be this way if Trump would have stayed in."

### Geopolitical risk

According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, the geopolitical risk related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has contributed to higher and more volatile crude oil prices. But Russia's oil footprint on the U.S. market is minimal; less than 10% of the U.S. demand for oil is filled by Russian suppliers, or approximately 600,000-800,000 barrels per day, according to J.P. Morgan. In comparison, the U.S. produces nearly 12 million barrels per day domestically,

according to the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers trade association. Still, the U.S. is a net importer of oil.

It has left many at the pump wondering why exactly gas prices have risen so dramatically.

"The U.S. does not get a lot of oil from Russia," said Marie Dodds, director of government and public affairs at AAA Oregon/Idaho. "Only about 3% of our imported oil (8% of our imported oil and refined products) last year came from Russia, but Europe gets a lot of oil from Russia, roughly 25%, so any time you take a big chunk of supplies away, it sends prices higher. It's basically supply and demand, as we learned back in economics 101. When you have a major global producer of oil, Russia, and its product is taken off the global markets, all of the sudden you have to look around and figure out where that oil is going to come from."

### Two records, two years

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, oil prices fell to their lowest price in history, reaching negative values in April 2020. That spurred producers to cut output as oil tankers sat outside ports, unable

See, [Gas/Page A7](#)

# Conservationists hail \$5M investment in preserving farmland

### Move will fund program that was set up in 2017 but never received any funding

By **LYNNE TERRY**  
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — Oregon was among the first states to develop land use laws but that's not stopped the conversion of farmland into hundreds of thousands of acres of housing and industrial sites over a decade.

But an investment just approved by the Legislature could stem that trend by putting money into the pockets of farmers and ranchers to support their operations and allow them to keep the land in their family.

As part of the supplemental budget approved in the short session, lawmakers invested \$5 million in the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, which is tasked with preserving farmland. But since it was set up in 2017 under the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, a state agency that offers grants to preserve waterways, wetlands and

natural areas, the heritage program has never been funded.

Now the program has money to do its job — and at an opportune time.

"Many of our farmers and ranchers are approaching retirement and looking to pass on their operations to the next generation," said Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane. "This fund will help ensure Oregon's farmlands stay in production, supporting clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, rural economies and our Oregon way of life."

The heritage program will buy conservation easements or devel-

opment rights from landowners, according to Kelley Beamer, executive director of the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts. She said that, in turn, will make it easier for the watershed board to preserve waterways.

"It's really easy for them to work with one landowner to manage that riparian area," Beamer said. "But when a ranch is subdivided and broken into pieces and you're dealing with 10 different owners, it's a lot harder to achieve that contiguous success. So this program

See, [Farmland/Page A7](#)

### INDEX

Classified.....B2	Horoscope.....B4	Opinion.....A4
Comics.....B5	Local.....A2	Outdoors.....B1
Crossword.....B2	Lottery.....A2	Sports.....A9
Dear Abby.....B6	Obituaries.....A5	Sudoku.....B5

### WEATHER

Full forecast on the back of B section

	<b>Tonight</b> 36 LOW A few showers		<b>Sunday</b> 45/33 Rain and drizzle
--	---	--	--

### CONTACT US

541-963-3161  
 Issue 31  
 2 sections, 16 pages  
 La Grande, Oregon

Email story ideas to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).  
 More contact info on Page A4.



TUESDAY

STUDENTS COMPETE IN WEIGHT LIFTING PROGRAM

Online at [lagrandeobserver.com](http://lagrandeobserver.com)