

Cost overruns hit Treasure Valley Reload Center

By BRAD CARLSON

Capital Press

NYSSA — Building the Treasure Valley Reload Center to original design specifications would cost almost one-third more than originally estimated, prompting proponents to scale back the project.

The truck-to-train loading facility to be built north of Nyssa would ship onions and other commodities east to major markets. Southeast Oregon and southwest Idaho produce about a quarter of the country's fall storage onions.

The 2017 Legislature approved a \$26 million ConnectOregon grant from lottery-backed bonds. Legislators this year approved a \$3 million grant, from federal coronavirus recovery funds, to the city of Nyssa, for a water line extension for the reload center and future industrial development.

Greg Smith, Malheur County Economic Development director

and officer of the separate Malheur County Development Corp., said the project is about \$9.8 million over the original \$35 million budget. The original plan called for opening nearly 290 acres of industrially zoned ground for development.

He said an overarching solution is to reduce the budget and features "from a Cadillac to a Chevrolet" including eliminating "unnecessary wants."

Cost overruns include about \$5 million in unexpected necessary excavation to deal with excess groundwater, a price from lone building-construction bidder TCG Construction, Meridian, Idaho, that was about \$2.9 million above expectations, and steel and asphalt costs driven by high inflation.

Smith, the state representative for District 57, said construction bidding interest has dropped due to development in southwest Idaho and high transportation

costs. The corporation will solicit new bids.

About \$3 million could be saved by delaying construction of one of the three rail spurs for three years, he said. And \$1 million could be saved by using a septic waste system instead of a lagoon system serving several companies.



Smith

Smith said \$2 million could be saved by eliminating all access roads except the one to the reload center. Industrial park roads could be added later as funding becomes available.

Substantial excess groundwater lies in the path of planned rail spurs. An engineering solution that uses riprap rock to displace water and add support strength is expected to reduce remediation cost by about \$1 million, he said.

Another \$300,000 could be saved by reducing office square footage.

"We don't need \$10 million, we need \$3 million," Smith said.

The development corporation is inquiring with legislators and state economic development unit Business Oregon about potential solutions.

Smith, who is also the project manager for the Columbia Development Authority in Boardman and the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center in La Grande, said potential funding sources are the Legislative Emergency Board, which meets between sessions, and the state Special Public Works Fund that provides low-cost financing to municipalities.

A Special Public Works loan would be repaid by Malheur County or the city of Nyssa, depending on which applies. He said it would be backed by the development corporation, either through the 65 acres it has acquired or future sales of industrial park lots.

Malheur County Judge Dan Joyce, who heads the commis-

sion-like county court, said commissioners likely would be hesitant to borrow. The county at the outset did not plan to spend money on the project but ended up doing so to help the corporation purchase the site.

But the county supports the economic development project "and would like to see it come to fruition," he said.

Nyssa City Manager Jim Maret could not be reached immediately.

Site work started in October, triggering state funding. Steel for the building is on-site. Smith said rail will be placed starting by late this month or in early May.

"Our goal is to ship onions by Oct. 1, and as of right now we are within that schedule," he said.

A less expensive building is an option, though capacity to place and briefly store onions is important to handling efficiency, Smith said.

Reload center features would be added as funding becomes available, he said.

Wyden reports strong fundraising as Dems' Senate majority wobbles

By GARY A. WARNER

Oregon Capital Bureau

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, has raised \$11 million over the past two years, solidifying his spot among the "solid Democrat" seats on the 2022 electoral map.

The five Republicans running in the GOP primary have raised less than \$500,000 all together.

Wyden's latest Federal Elections Commission report lists over \$7.87 million still in his campaign fund.

Since winning a special election for the seat in 1996, Wyden has been reelected four times to full six-year terms, never receiving less than 57% of votes cast.

Despite a slump in President Joe Biden's approval rating, Wyden's reelection is rated as "strong" or



The Associated Press, File

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, has raised \$11 million over the past two years in his bid to win a fifth term in 2022.

"solid" among major political forecasters, including the Cook Political Report, FiveThirtyEight and the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia.

While impressive by Oregon standards, Wyden's political bankroll is small when compared to some other Senate races.

The Federal Election

Commission reported that, as of Saturday, April 23, candidates running for the 35 U.S. Senate seats on the ballot this year had raised \$797.8 million.

Republicans totaled \$405.4 million while Democrats had raised \$389.3 million.

Sen. Raphael Warnock, D-Georgia, had raised over

\$67 million to defend the seat he won in a 2020 special election. Sen. Tim Scott, R-SC, has raised \$41.9 million.

Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Arizona, was third at \$38.9 million. He also won a 2020 special election and now must run for a full six-year term.

The Senate fundraising is part of the flood of money reported to the FEC.

During 2021, candidates for the U.S. Senate and U.S. House raised \$1.3 billion and spent \$720 million. Political parties raised \$862.6 million and spent \$668.3 million.

Political action committees supporting a specific cause or group raised \$3.2 billion and spent \$2.5 billion.

Wyden is chair of the Senate Finance Committee. While the odds-on favorite to win reelection, Wyden's

role in the Congress that convenes in January could change for the second time in two years.

Republicans were a majority in the Senate through 2020 but lost control to Democrats when the election gave Democrats 48 seats, along with two independents who caucus with the party. The total of 50 seats matched the number of Republican senators.

The 50-50 tie was broken by the election of President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. The vice president also holds the largely symbolic position of president of the Senate. Harris can break some tie votes but, more important, she gives Democrats and their allies an official majority, which include the chairmanship of committees.

History shows that holding on to the majority

will be tough. Over the past 100 years, the party of a newly elected president has lost seats in the U.S. House at the first midterm all but twice — in 1934 amid the Great Depression and 2002 in the first voting after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Because all House seats are up for election every two years, it is a barometer of the nation's political mood.

Tying the election of senators to the popularity of a president is more difficult. The 100 senators are elected in three staggered "classes." The party of the president typically loses Senate seats in the first midterm.

There are 35 Senate seats up for election in 2022 — 21 held by Republicans and 14 held by Democrats.

The majority of seats up for election are considered safe for the current party incumbent — including Wyden.

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