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INSIDE



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Court decision resonates locally

Many Union County leaders support U.S. Supreme Court decision on abortion

By **ANDREW CUTLER** and **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Local elected leaders offered broad support for the Friday, June 24, decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn Roe v. Wade and allow the states to regulate abortion.

The 6-3 ruling paves the way for each state to set its own abortion laws.

“We hold that Roe and Casey must be overruled,” Justice Samuel Alito wrote in his opinion, referring to the Supreme Court’s previous decisions of Roe v. Wade in 1973 and Planned Parenthood of South-eastern PA v. Casey in 1992.

Alito was joined by Justices Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett in reversing a case settled nearly 50 years ago.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, said the Supreme Court’s decision falls in line with his own personal beliefs.

“My position on abortion has never changed, and it has not with (the June 24) Supreme Court decision. My position is based on my Christian faith.

I am pro-life. My position hinges on the answer, what is to me a simple question, when does human life begin?” he said.

Hansell said he believes life begins at conception.

“Then ending it is wrong. If anyone can show me life does not begin at conception, I would be more than willing to reconsider my position. So far no one has.”

Allan Duffy, chairman of the Union County Republican Party, said he supports the Supreme Court decision.

“I am a pro-life Republican, and it sounds like a great decision made by the Supreme Court to leave things up to the individual states,” he said.

Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage said she feels good about the decision because it puts the issue into the hands of individual states and their voters.

“It brought it from a federal decision to a state decision, which I’m fine with,” she said.

The commissioner said she prefers it when states are provided more freedom to make their own decisions.

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Hansell



The Observer, File

Pallets of food sit within Community Connection of Northeast Oregon’s storage facility in Island City on Thursday, Nov. 4, 2021. The regional food bank, which services Grant, Union, Baker and Wallowa counties, has seen a 28% increase in demand for fresh food services in April and May, compared to the average for the first three months of 2022.

Rising food prices

Increasingly high cost of food and fuel are driving more people across Eastern Oregon to seek food assistance

By **ISABELLA CROWLEY**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — More people have been relying on the regional food bank this spring in Union County, mirroring the trend seen across the state, according to the Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank — a service of Community Connection — and the Oregon Food Bank.

Two types of food assistance boxes are offered by the regional food bank: fresh food boxes and traditional food boxes. Fresh food boxes — produce boxes, harvest share boxes or fresh alliance boxes — can be picked up daily or weekly depending on the location. Traditional food boxes, which include shelf-stable items, are offered only once a month.

In Union County, the average number of people accessing fresh food ser-

vices increased by 28% in April and May compared to the average across January, February and March. In comparison, traditional food boxes increased by only 10% in the same time frame.

“What this tells me is that people are needing to access the food bank more frequently,” said Audrey Smith, regional food bank manager for Community Connection of Northeast Oregon.

Susannah Morgan, chief executive officer of the Oregon Food Bank, told Oregon Public Broadcasting the trend is due to two factors. First, federal benefits provided during the pandemic — stimulus checks, expanded unemployment, additional money for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and more — have been ending across the county. The second factor is inflation, with rising food costs and gas prices leading more people to need assistance.



Isabella Crowley/The Observer

The sign posted on the front of Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank’s distribution center in Island City on Tuesday, June 28, 2022, welcomes donations from the community.

The regional food bank has seen this trend in all of the counties it supports — Baker, Grant, Union and Wallowa. Across all four counties, there has been a 23% increase in fresh food boxes and a 7% increase in traditional food boxes.

Smith said more people accessing food assistance programs in the spring is a flip from the usual trend. Typically, more people access food banks in December, January and February when utility costs are high, and the number of

recipients decreases at the start of spring.

Numbers for June will be available in early July, but the trend is expected to hold, said Smith.

The regional food bank receives weekly shipments from the Oregon Food Bank, which is supplemented by fresh produce donated by local stores and farmers. Smith said that the regional food bank has a good stock of shelf-stable and frozen foods at its new

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Cascadia earthquake: What if?

Regional agencies gather in La Grande for emergency response exercise

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The simulated news was not nearly as alarming as it first sounded.

Elaine LaRochelle, facilities manager at Grande Ronde Hospital, told the Union County participants in a regional Cascadia earthquake exercise

on Monday, June 27, that the hospital had just lost its water pressure due to the hypothetical earthquake.

She then said that if water pressure was not restored within 12 to 24 hours, Grande Ronde Hospital would have to begin evacuating its patients. LaRochelle explained that water pressure was needed not for

drinking water but for sanitation purposes.

LaRochelle was not worried, though, for city of La Grande Public Works Department representatives at the simulation informed her that the broken pipes causing the pressure drop would be fixed in two hours.

“The La Grande Public Works Department always comes through,” LaRochelle said, referring

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Dick Mason/The Observer

La Grande Rural Department Fire Chief Craig Kretschmer, right, and Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative’s Jeff Pillow talk about regional responses to the Cascadia earthquake at a multi-county exercise at Union County’s law enforcement building, La Grande, on Monday, June 27, 2022.



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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight 55 LOW Clear

Friday 85/52 Mostly sunny

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