

## BALLOT

Continued from Page A1

Volunteers and donations poured in, and the number of signatures ballooned, according to OPB. By late June, organizers said they had collected sufficient signatures to get the measure on the ballot. Yet they continued the effort to ensure there were enough, in case the Oregon Secretary of State disqualified some. State officials check and validate every signature.

The initiative would close the so-called Charleston loophole by requiring people to pass a background check before buying a gun. The Oregonian reported in May.

Under current federal law, firearms dealers can sell guns without a completed background check if it takes longer than three business days, measure proponents said. That's how the gunman in the 2015 Charleston African Methodist Episcopal Church mass shooting bought the Glock 41 .45 cal. pistol with which he killed nine parishioners.

### Critics contend measure threatens legal gun owners

The measure would enact a law requiring a permit issued by a local law enforcement agency to purchase any firearm. Applicants would have to pay a fee, be fingerprinted, complete safety training, and pass a criminal background check.

In addition, the applicant must complete a hands-on demonstration of basic firearms handling to qualify.

"In order to obtain the permit, an applicant would have to show up with a firearm to demonstrate the



Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen speaks at a medical freedom rally on Fourth Street in La Grande on Saturday, Sept. 18, 2021. Bowen is troubled by how the potential passage of Measure 114 would impact his deputies and potentially strain resources.

ability to load, fire, unload, and store the firearm," Williamson, a Salem trial attorney specializing in gun law, said. "But you can't get a firearm without the permit. And under Oregon's highly restrictive gun storage laws, no one can legally loan a firearm to another. That creates an impassable barrier."

H.K. Kahng, of Portland, served on a five-person committee to write the measure's 500-word explanatory statement that will appear in the voters' guide this fall. Kahng, an engineer and National Rifle Association firearms instructor, said the permit and training programs create an unfunded mandate with no enforcement measures.

"The measure calls upon

the Oregon State Police to come up with these (permitting and training) programs, but there's no consequence if they don't, and there's no time frame for coming up with them," Kahng said during the committee's July 26 meeting.

Williamson also expressed concerns that the permit system grants the Oregon State Police "unfettered authority" to inquire into all manner of personal information of the applicant and to deny the applicant the permit for any reason or for simply failing to cooperate.

"No information is off limits," he claimed. "The introduction of highly subjective criteria in (the measure) allows the government significant authority to intrude into the private

lives of law-abiding citizens wishing to exercise their protected rights under the Second Amendment."

Opponents also argue that language describing the magazine ban creates confusion.

The measure allows "registered owners" of magazines that hold more than 10 rounds to retain them so long as they were purchased before the ban.

"But how do you prove when you purchased a magazine?" Williamson asked. "There is no magazine 'registration.' They don't have serial numbers. There's no way for the average person to prove they had it before the law was passed. That means citizens must prove their innocence."

Lawfully owned magazines that exceed 10 rounds

may not be used for self-defense outside the home. Under the measure, possession would be restricted to the owner's property, at a gunsmith, on a private shooting range or during a firearms competition.

"The minute you leave the house, that 15-round magazine is now illegal, and you could be arrested and charged with a misdemeanor for each magazine in your possession because you're not in your home or at a gun range," Williamson explained. "And you could be charged multiple times for the same magazines since magazines do not contain identifying markings."

"So that could make an otherwise legal gun-owner a criminal overnight," Kahng said.

"But they would have time to turn those magazines in," said committee member Margaret Onley, an Oregon labor and employment attorney who supports the measure.

In the end, the committee voted 3 to 2 to adopt the explanatory language with minor changes and submitted it to the Oregon Secretary of State for final approval, leaving opponents frustrated.

"I don't think you'll find any precedent in U.S. history in which a citizen has to go through so many hoops to exercise Constitutional rights," Williamson said. "This is the first of its kind, and if it passes, it will wind up in court."

—East Oregonian reporter John Tillman contributed to this report.

## SCHOOLS

Continued from Page A1

constitutionally dedicated to the education budget, appear to be going into the state's general fund instead. The committee said that "bears investigation and correction."

The commission was created by the Legislature in 1999 to make education policy and budget recommendations. It's made up of 11 people including Colt Gill, the director of the state's Education Department, several school and education service district superintendents, the president of the state's largest teacher's union, Reed Scott-Schwalbach of the Oregon Education Association, and two education consultants.

The recommendation to increase the budget is based on years of underfunding, according to the commission, and the addition of factors that would improve the quality of education in Oregon. These include paying for more school nurses, counselors and librarians to get schools up to nationally recommended ratios of these staff to students. It also recommended

paying for more staff to work with English language learners.

The budget analysis includes an addition of \$450 for each classroom in the state for unreimbursed supplies. According to a survey from the National Center for Education Statistics, 90% of K-12 teachers spend an average of \$459 out of pocket on classroom supplies each year.

### Smaller classes, more training

If the Legislature fully funded the budget, it could pay for more teacher professional development days, teacher training and mentoring, new computers and computer education staff and allow schools to reduce class sizes.

The commission recommended that the Legislature consider a budget that would pay for universal preschool.

In addition to sounding the alarm on some corporate tax dollars meant for education that were funneled to the state's general fund, the commission criticized the Legislature for underfunding the education budget and then shifting pots of money to fill that hole. In 2021, the Legislature approved an education budget that was \$2 billion short of what the commission had rec-

ommended. The commission said lawmakers plugged that gap with Student Success Act dollars. Passed in 2019, the act is funded by a corporate tax and provides schools with \$2 billion every two years to address student mental and behavioral health, class sizes and academic disparities among students.

Oregon's school funding gaps go back to 1990, when voters capped the percentage of local property taxes dedicated to schools. This put the burden on the Legislature to make up the funding for districts; it has historically not fully funded the amount requested by the commission.

Oregon law directs the commission to identify at least two alternatives for achieving a greater level of educational quality if the budget request is not fully funded. The commission recommended that the Legislature "remain faithful to the intent of and targeted funding for the Student Success Act" and not use it to backfill the state's education budget. Secondly, it said that if the Legislature cannot approve a budget that closes the funding gap in the next biennium, to focus on closing it gradually in the next two or three biennia.

## BENTZ

Continued from Page A1

Oregon, someday I wanted to get to Congress," he said. "I also realized that would require education."

For over 30 years, Bentz practiced law, specializing in water law and ranch reorganizations. Before his time in Congress, he served in the Oregon Senate, representing the 30th district in Eastern Oregon. He also served in the Oregon House of Representatives, representing the 60th district.

The first few questions Bentz fielded came from individuals in the crowd wearing red "Health Care for All" shirts. One individual asked about inflation, and the impact of worldwide tensions, including Russia's war against Ukraine.

Bentz noted the impact Ukrainian war's impact on increased energy costs, supply chain impacts, and global access to wheat, but he posited that inflation began before the onset of the conflict. He said his vote against the March 2021 \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill was informed by economist Larry Summers' claim that adding more money into the

economy would cause more inflation.

"I think we're seeing just how hard it is to stop inflation once it starts," he said.

The congressman was asked about the \$2,000 countable resources limit for individuals — particularly those with disabilities — accessing social security income. He also received questions about his stance on Medicaid.

Bentz touted that he did not want to get rid of Social Security or Medicare, and noted that he would challenge the thought that the majority Republican party wants to do either. He outlined his roles as the ranking member on the House Natural Resources Committee and committee member on the House Judiciary Committee, noting that his work often doesn't allot time to investigate issues being tackled by other congressional committees.

"You have not heard anything about Medicare in my recitation of my committee's business, it's not there," he said in response. "But we will look into it because it is super interesting."

Bentz also received a

question about his recent vote in favor of the Respect for Marriage Act, passed in July.

In response, Bentz quoted former president Donald Trump, who, when asked about his position on same-sex marriage in 2016 said, "It's the law, it was settled in the Supreme Court. I mean, it's done."

Bentz expressed that "everybody" should know he is in favor of marriage between a man and a woman, but said he knows that's not the law. For him, the motivation for voting in favor of RFMA was to express that he had "no objection whatsoever" to interracial marriage — a recognition included in the bill.

"In my mind, I was not inclined to have the entire, huge area that I represent be accused of being against interracial marriage," he said. "I don't want all you people, all my constituents, to having to wear a vote I would've made."

During the meeting, Bentz explained the rationale behind his vote against the PACT Act, a bill set to support veterans exposed to toxic substances during military service. According

to Bentz, he and fellow Republican representatives voted against the bill to send a message to the Senate that the \$400 billion became an "accounting gimmick" when house Democrats changed the funding from discretionary to mandatory spending.

"Who had the courage to run up that bill to try to save the \$400 billion and then come in here and get blamed for voting against the back act?" Bentz said. "Me. And why? Because I know what's best for this country."

One of the final participants asked Bentz about the "continuing degradation of the rule of law" among politicians in Washington, D.C., specifically referencing the search of former president Donald Trump's Florida residence.

In response, Bentz noted that he had signed onto a letter earlier that day — written by Ohio Republican Rep. Jim Jordan — to the FBI demanding information on what he called "the Mar-a-Lago situation."

"We're still gathering more information, but Jim jumped all over it," he said. "We are addressing this at the highest level."

## MEALS

Continued from Page A1

budget director.

Glover said the federal government determined that what the school district had been charging adults for lunches was not enough to cover the actual cost of providing the meals. The federal government requires school districts to charge enough for adult meals to make that part of their lunch program self-sustaining.

The board voted to boost the cost of breakfasts for adults from \$2.45 to \$2.70 for the same reason it boosted lunch prices.

No price hikes are on the horizon for student meals for breakfasts and lunches and will continue to be served at no cost in 2022-23, Glover said. The reason, she said, is that the school district is part of the Community Eligibility Provision program and will remain so at least through the 2024-25 school year.

The Community Eligibility Provision is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications, Glover said. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula supported by the percentage of students eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, according to Glover.

### Facilities update

Construction of the new academic and athletic center La Grande School

District voters approved in May with a \$4.845 million bond may start in late May or early June 2023 and could be ready for student use by late 2023, according to Joseph Waite, the La Grande School District's facilities manager. "Our goal is to have it occupied by November 2023," he said.

However, the facilities manager said the building project will not be completely finished until summer 2024 when landscaping and other work will be done.

The new building the bond package will fund will replace the current Annex gym, next to the La Grande Middle School. The Annex building, which is about nine decades old, will be torn down. In addition, the school district's maintenance building, which is connected via a sky bridge to the Annex and was built around 1910, will also be removed.

The maintenance building facilities will be moved in early 2023 to the Adams Professional Plaza on Adams Avenue, which the school district has purchased. Half of the building space the school district has purchased there will be leased to La Grande Light Truck.

The building at Adams Professional Plaza will be renovated before the La Grande School District's maintenance building facilities are moved there. The renovation work will cost about \$550,000, with funds that will come from a school district fund and the bond voters approved.

Many items now in the Annex building will be transported to the Adams Professional Plaza site as part of the move. One of the most challenging to move, Waite said, will be a large freezer for the school district's food service program. The freezer is about 250-square feet.