



The Baker County Press

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TheBakerCountyPress.com

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Friday, January 8, 2016 • Volume 3, Issue 2

A \$15 minimum wage?

• **REP. BENTZ HOLDS TOWN HALL IN BAKER CITY TO DISCUSS OREGON MINIMUM WAGE**

BY GINA K. SWARTZ
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\$9.25 per hour. That's the current minimum wage in Oregon. That translates to around \$20,000 per year. Tuesday evening Representative Cliff Bentz hosted a town hall meeting at the Sunridge Inn to discuss proposals to hike

Oregon's minimum wage to \$15 per hour over the next three years.

Bentz is against this proposal.

Oregon minimum wage is higher than the Federal Minimum Wage, which has held steady without increase at \$7.25 for several years with Idaho among the approximately two dozen states that have kept their minimum wage in line with that Federal wage.

The District of Columbia, and neighboring California are currently the highest at \$10 or above. In June of 2014 Seattle

City Council approved a City ordinance raising the minimum wage within the City limits to \$15 per hour while the rest of the state remained at \$9.47.

As Bentz opened to the meeting he stated that his purpose for the meeting was "not to lecture the panel of people up here," as he motioned to area City and County leaders gathered at the meeting.

"I'm going to guess that most of us all agree on the challenges an increase in the minimum wage will present. What I've been trying to do as the legislator from this area is figure

out a way of making your voices heard by those that will be making these decisions," he said.

Bentz provided a list of email addresses and strongly urged the group gathered, around 30, to send as many emails to these decision-makers as possible.

He also advised that "blanket" emails were often not regarded as priority and suggested that more personalized emails would garner better responses.

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Rep. Bentz fields comments from Burger Bob's owner, Bob Brady.

Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Hammonds imprisoned

• **RALLY, CONTROVERSIAL TAKEOVER OF PUBLIC BUILDING SPUR NATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE**

BY KERRY McQUISTEN
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On Monday, Harney County ranchers Dwight and Steven Hammond, ages 73 and 46, turned themselves in to Federal authorities and were transported to prison in California. The father and son were required to purchase their own airline tickets, but have been allowed to share the same cell.

The Hammonds' incarceration unleashed a firestorm of protests around Harney County, Oregon, and across the nation after the U.S. Department of Justice appealed the original sentence they had already served. That first conviction came in 2012 for arson charges, which fell under the Federal Anti-terrorism Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, after the Hammonds burned approximately 130 acres of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-managed grazing land adjoining their own property.

Prosecutors argued during trial that the Hammonds had set one fire to cover up poaching, and offered testimony from a hunting guide and one member of the Hammond family described as having mental issues. Deer carcasses, which do not completely incinerate in wildfires, were never found after the fire and no poaching charges were ever brought.

The 9th Circuit Court granted the appeal in October 2015, and ordered the Hammonds to fulfill a five-year minimum sentence, which had been waived by



A row of flags adorned the route of the support rally.

Submitted Photo.

the previous judge.

The penalties didn't just come with what most feel is an excessive sentence. The Hammonds, during the course of their legal battles, were also given a \$400,000 fine—they have paid half so far—and have been ordered to give the BLM the right of first refusal should their financial situation force them to sell their family ranch. To date, the family has incurred over a million dollars in legal bills, and now, after the incarceration of their husbands, the Hammond wives will carry the day-to-day operations of the family ranch alone.

Last year, the BLM was at the center of another similar controversy in Nevada, resulting in a nationally televised standoff with another ranching family—that of Cliven Bundy.

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Dwight Hammond (baseball cap, center) and wife, Susie Hammond (top right) greeted supporters.

Submitted Photo.

New Years baby born



Submitted Photo.

Amanda, Cinthia and Sophiaa Choate.

Saint Alphonsus Baker City is pleased to announce the arrival of the hospital's first New Years baby.

Sophiaa Choate was born on January 4th at 3:48 p.m. weighing 6 lbs., 10 oz. and measuring 18 1/2 inches. She was born to Amanda Choate. Sophiaa is also welcomed by her older sister Cinthia. Both mother and baby are doing well.

To commemorate the hospital's New Year's baby, Saint Alphonsus Baker City presented the family with a basket filled with baby clothes, diapers, blankets and other items parents of newborns need and enjoy.

Tribe plans to release condors

• **LIKELIHOOD OF BIRD MIGRATING FROM NORTHERN CALIFORNIA TO OREGON HIGH, LEAD AMMO DISCUSSED**

BY TODD ARRIOLA
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Research, efforts, and comments have suggested the high possibility of the migration to Oregon, courtesy of the northern California Yurok Tribe, of the largest flying land bird in North America—one not seen for over a century here: the California Condor.

SEE CONDORS PAGE 3

Friday Mostly cloudy and cool, highs near freezing. Mostly cloudy at night with a low in the mid teens.

Saturday Mostly cloudy and cooler with lows near 30. Mostly cloudy at night with lows in the mid teens.

Sunday Partly sunny and cooler, high in the mid 20s. Clear and cool at night with lows in the lower teens.

Your weekend weather forecast for Baker County.

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OREGON TRAIL ELECTRIC COOP

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