

Local / Outdoor Rec

Minimum wage meeting



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

Sumpter Mayor Leland Myers, Rep. Cliff Bentz and Baker County Commission Chair Bill Harvey.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Bentz explained that bombarding the Governor with emails would raise her awareness that something was going on in eastern Oregon and she would pay attention more if she received numerous emails from the area.

Ultimately the Governor would have to sign into law any bill passed so her awareness of feelings about the bill could help in a decision of whether or not to sign such a bill.

Bentz stressed the importance of getting your voice heard quickly. He said, "These decisions are going to be made next week. On the 14th there is going to be a hearing in Salem in front of a committee I think most of these people serve on."

He referred to the names on the email list he'd provided. Bentz explained he has attempted to get his Republican colleges across the state to hold similar town hall meeting in their areas. Not all agree with Bentz's position and declined, but Bentz was still hopeful that others would. "At these meetings, if you have your phone and I hope you all have one, you will tweet, email, Facebook what you are hearing. Let these people know (again referring to the email list) the damage or value, depending on what side you're on, that this will have."

Bentz stressed the power of social media.

He then launched into a PowerPoint presentation outlining current minimum wages in surrounding states that also outlined the value of each dollar in that state.

He compared unemployment rates with Idaho counties just across the border from us in the 4-5% range verses our 7-8%.

"Could this have to do with the higher minimum wage?" Bentz asked rhetorically.

The presentation gave information that there are nearly four million workers in the United States that earn minimum wage employed in the restaurant

and food service industry, nearly one million employed in grocery stores followed by department and discount store workers, construction workers and elementary and secondary school workers.

Coincidentally, in this state Bentz pointed out, school unions were the biggest supporter of the wage increase.

Bentz noted that only 3-5% of workers in the Portland area earned minimum wage while nearly half of all workers in Malheur County earned minimum wage, therefore the impact of a wage increase from \$9.25 to \$15 would hit much harder in that county (and surrounding counties with similar statistics) than in the Portland area.

Represented on the panel were Sumpter City Mayor Leland Myers, Baker County Commission Chair Bill Harvey, Haines Mayor Jim Brown, and Halfway Mayor Sheila Farwell.

All Spoke in opposition of the proposal.

Myers said, "I am anti-legislation, anti-union and I think we should get government out of our lives. If I can get somebody to work for me for a nickel an hour and they are stupid enough to do it, we should be able to do it."

He spoke of his daughter who was a business owner and how the increase would affect her.

Brown said he felt that perhaps setting wages should be a local issue, since each community could be affected differently, noting that Haines is a largely agricultural industry and "can't raise their prices" to absorb having to pay out higher wages.

Farwell said she felt the wage unfair to skilled workers who are currently paid higher wages but would not be if all employees were paid higher wages.

Small business owners could not pay even more to those skilled employees therefore skilled and unskilled workers would earn the same wage.

Harvey said, "Whether directly or indirectly every-

body will be touched by this. If you raise the wage the cost of everything you do, groceries you buy, the services you use everything is going to go up, that is inflation. We don't need inflation.

"We are struggling to come back in eastern Oregon as it is now. We're trying to help the businesses that are in place now. Help them stay in business let alone grow. We have had to actually stop the idea of encouraging businesses to come here, our preference is to help those businesses that are here to grow or stabilize. That is our only opportunity. Just raising prices is not the answer.

"When you raise the price you lower your volume of business until you flat line. On an operating table that's death. Please, let's not go there. I'm asking each person, contact 10 people, contact these people (noting Bentz' email list) letting them know that out here it's a world of difference."

The audience agreed that this initiative if passed could be the death of small communities.

Several members of the audience spoke, adding their two-cents worth of how detrimental they felt this could be.

Kurt Hills said he was concerned that if passed the opportunity to hire "under the table" was greater costing the rest of Oregonians more in the long run.

Richard Chaves of Chaves Consulting said he would see an impact in his business because he had state contracts with other states that had already been negotiated. If the wage increases he has to abide by that wage. He couldn't make changes to the contracts previously negotiated at a lower wage, that was just a cost he had to absorb.

He also suggested Bentz support an idea that zoned Oregon into three zones each reflecting different wages consistent with economic factors in the area so that impacts would be less severe in areas like eastern Oregon in an effort to support our communities rather than

destroy them.

Robert Brady, or as most Baker City citizens know him, Burger Bob who owns Burger Bob's Drive-in said, "My family came here in 1960 and opened the first Arctic Circle Drive in the state of Oregon. Over the years we've employed close to 1,000. As of September 2014 we are the last independently owned and operated drive-in in Baker City. I calculated in August and I came to the conclusion that I would have an increase of approximately \$30,500 per year in wages at \$13.50 an hour.

"For my small work force that's at 142 hours a week. In order for me to make the profit I make right now, I'd have to increase my sales by about \$140,000. And I'm not in Portland where I could have about 75,000-100,000 people near me to come by and patronize my business I'm here and I have to farm and re farm the same acreage, the very same people.

"My number of customers I've had has dropped in half over the last 12 years, various reasons.

"For those that don't know, McDonalds Corporation said that they would give pay raises and benefits to their employees at the corporate restaurants. They could not force the franchisees to do that. By April 2015 they had already closed 375 of their corporate restaurants. That is the kind of effect it's going to have on us."

For more information surrounding these proposals Bentz invites the public to visit his Facebook page where he has links to information.

He also provides links to the email addresses he provided at the meeting as well as the Governor.

Bentz closed the meeting saying, "The key value of tonight's meeting is raise awareness of how quickly this is going to happen. I believe this bill or something like it will pass in February, in about a month we will have a new minimum wage law, that is my opinion. It will damage the state."

New resolutions from the ODFW reg book



THE OUTDOOR COLUMN
By Todd Arriola

I began the New Year last week wondering, in addition to exactly which resolutions, held over from the last New Year, I should at least make a mediocre attempt to follow through with, what new surprises 2016 has in

store for us all. I literally acted out a movie-worthy double-take when I noticed the new editions of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) game bird, big game hunting, and sport fishing regulations books.

This isn't to say that I generally become terribly excited and flustered in my love for the new editions of the hunting and fishing regulations. Far from it. But, one can do far worse than discover these gems, usually hidden behind some counter with their magazine-type quality and glossy covers, seemingly appealing to even the most distracted, bored young lad or lass. Hey, if it pulls them away from social media for two microseconds, it can't be all that bad.

The sport fishing (I just call it "fishing") regulations were the most exciting find, a far cry from the last edition, and I thought I might discover a pop-up page or two by chance. Hunting's more my style, but this book made me want to get out and fish more. Maybe it's because I've fallen into the same inevitable trap as some younger hunters and anglers have, mesmerized by the flash factor and the plain coolness of an object, without fully realizing what user-friendly improvements were actually made. Maybe, it's because it's a new year, and, I'm just excited to see something new, which can be a source of excitement and inspiration for others, too. Maybe, I don't care about the reasons why, because the books certainly commanded my attention.

I said to several people at the store where I acquired the three regulations books, who were nearly mildly interested in what I had to say, that, "After I'm through reading these, I should be given a Certificate of Completion, so I can frame it, and, hang it on my wall." I was half-joking because despite the length of each book, I've noticed that they seem to be easier to read, at least, in my opinion.

Granted, I don't have to use glasses or a magnifying glass yet to read, but a different style and color of printing does make a difference with consumers, and hunters and anglers are exactly that, providing over 40% of ODFW's funding.

Credit should be given for this marketing plan, in the form of colorful, glossy guidebooks, and new ways of displaying needed information, in order to showcase the inspirational excitement towards hunting and fishing, traditions practiced and loved by generations of Oregonians and non-Oregonians alike.

These books are free, of course, but, I can't help but to treat them like the hunting and fishing magazines which I read periodically, avoiding dog-eared a page or two, or, damaging them somehow. They will, no doubt, see a fate similar to a once-new vehicle, religiously cared for in the beginning, but, in the end, a sad victim of time and too much use. Ah, but, they will indeed be useful in the interim...

ODFW WEEKLY RECREATION REPORT

BAKER COUNTY HUNTING

Chukar, Hun, and California Quail - The season ends Jan. 31. Hunters should expect another season similar to last years. Chukar numbers were up from last year however.

Grouse season continues. Blue grouse can be found in the higher elevations while ruffed grouse are more common in wetter areas. Hunters should expect an average year for grouse.

Cougars can be found throughout Baker County but hunters should target areas with high concentrations of deer and elk. Setting up on a fresh kill or using distress calls can all be productive techniques. Hunters are required to check in the hide of any cougar taken, with skull and proof of sex attached. Remember to pick up a 2016 tag.

Coyote numbers are good throughout the district. Try calling in early morning and late afternoon. Remember to ask for permission before hunting on private properties.

BAKER COUNTY VIEWING

Bighorn sheep can be seen in the Burnt River Canyon west of Durkee or along the Snake River Road south of Richland. The best viewing is in the early morning and late in the evening.

Winter bird species are starting to migrate through the area.

Elkhorn Wildlife Area. Elkhorn Wildlife Area is known for the Rocky Mountain elk and mule deer herds that frequent the area during the winter. When snow covers the ground, ODFW staff feed elk and deer to encourage them to stay in the higher elevations and out of agricultural fields. There are two good viewing sites. The Anthony Creek site is located about eight miles west of I-84 on North Powder River Lane and up Old Auburn Lane. 150 elk approx.

ODFW fund task force to meet

The legislative task force on Funding for Fish, Wildlife and Related Outdoor Recreation and Education will hold its first meeting at the State Capitol on

Tuesday, Jan 12 from 8:30 a.m. -12:30 p.m.

A room location will be announced.

A list of task force members, meeting agendas

and materials can be found on the Oregon Legislative Information System at <https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/201511/Committees/JTFFFW/Overview>.

The task force's work is directly related to current and future potential conservation, outdoor recreation and education programs and partnerships.