

**WAIT-LISTED, from page 4**

(shelter) at a couple hundred beds even through the early part of 2017” and as the Joint Office’s budget was being formulated, said Denis Theriault, the Joint Office’s spokesperson.

But demand steadily increased throughout the winter and early spring, then spiked as summer began. More than 400 people sought shelter throughout the summer. By September, that number crept close to 500 people.

Average stays in the shelter have also dramatically increased. Three years ago, the average stay was 23 days. Now it is 65 days.

“I can’t tell you why,” Miller said. “Everybody wants to know why. Our best guess is that the housing crisis is reaching an impact.”

The average length of stay and the increase in homelessness might be driven by the unavailability of affordable housing that families could live in – apartments with multiple bedrooms.

According to data compiled by Oregon Housing and Community Services, only 22 percent of rental units in Multnomah County as of 2015 were affordable to those earning up to 30 percent of the median family income, or about \$15,500 for a single person.

And while housing is being built throughout Portland, the only income bracket that can afford most of the recently built housing are those who make above 80 percent of MFI.

“We’ve watched over the last three years as the market has pushed more and more (families) out of housing and into our system,” Theriault said. “We always knew that we would have to keep looking at the no-turn-away policy. We wanted to make sure that families had a chance at a place that was safe.”

Miller also said that the funds Human Solutions has available for short-term rent assistance, which helps families pay a portion or all of their rent for a few months, has quickly dwindled. Human Solutions also has “diversion funds” to try to stop families from becoming homeless, whether that means paying overdue rent or other charges.

“We were very rapidly spending down” both pots of money, Miller said.

Ultimately, the family homeless system is struggling with how best to manage the financial resources it has.

Shelters are more expensive than housing. Miller said it costs approximately \$25 per person per night in the shelter. That includes staffing, food and so on. At \$100 to shelter a family of four each night, that equates to about \$3,000 per month – well above the monthly rent for an apartment that could house that family.

Motel rooms are more expensive, at \$50 a night, but if an entire family can stay in one motel room, it costs approximately \$1,500 per month.

“Me and many providers are torn about where to spend the dollar,” Miller said. “Do you expand the shelter system, to get more folks off the street? If you’re conscious, you know you’re taking a dollar away from the programs that move people ... into permanent housing.”

# ‘I had no choice’

*Portland’s Leonard Higgins has been convicted for his role in the nation’s biggest takeover of fossil fuel infrastructure*

**BY THACHER SCHMID**  
STAFF WRITER

**O**n Nov. 20, 350Montana.org hosted a mock trial of “Valve Turner” Leonard Higgins at the University of Montana in Missoula.

One of the witnesses was Steve Running, a Nobel Laureate scientist who gave 10 minutes of expert testimony on climate change.

At the end of the mock trial, Higgins was acquitted.

Two days later and four hours north, Higgins’ real trial in Chouteau County District Court played out differently. There, scientific evidence about climate change – the core of what activists call the “necessity” defense – was not allowed.

“Every time I talked about climate change and referenced (NASA climate change scientist) Dr. James Hansen and my feeling that I had no choice,” Higgins explained, “the prosecution would object that it was immaterial or irrelevant, and the judge would uphold the objection.”

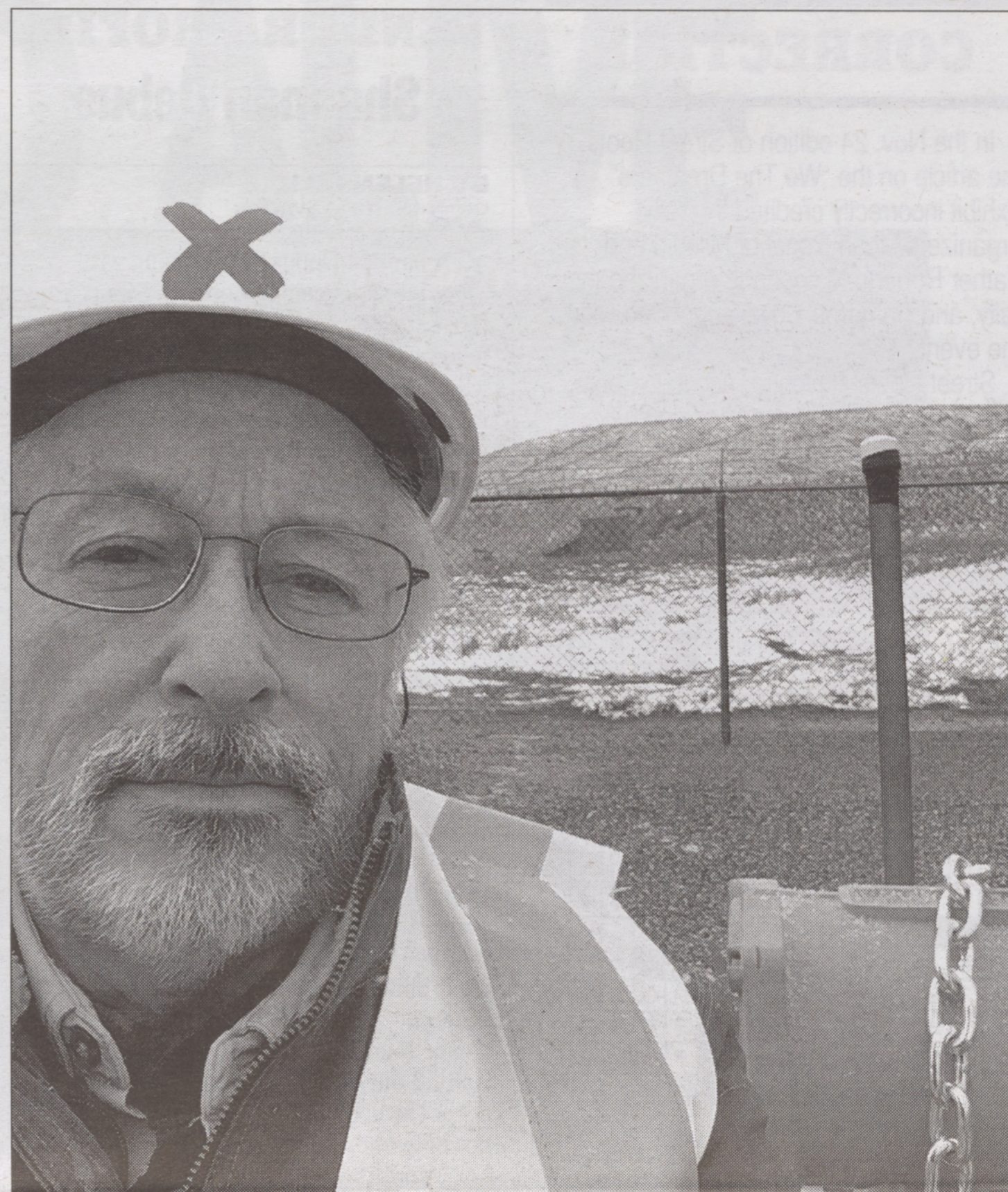
And so, a few hours before Thanksgiving, a jury convicted Higgins of felony criminal mischief and misdemeanor criminal trespass after an hour’s deliberation. The conviction stems from his role in the most expansive, coordinated takeover of fossil fuel infrastructure ever attempted in the U.S.

On Jan. 2, Judge Daniel Boucher will sentence Higgins, a longtime state of Oregon IT manager and lifelong Oregonian. Higgins, who was featured in Street Roots last December, faces up to 10 years and \$50,000 for the felony, and six months and \$500 for trespassing. There are no sentencing guidelines, so Higgins doesn’t know whether he’ll get the book thrown at him or a slap on the wrist.

Whatever happens, the four-state action Higgins and the other Valve Turners spearheaded on Oct. 11, 2016 may someday be seen as a turning point in the fight against climate change denial. On that date the Valve Turners essentially shut down the flow of Alberta Tar Sands oil from Canada into the United States.

By early 2018, the legal consequences – and the uneven sentences given in states with divergent politics – will come into focus. Fellow Valve Turner Michael Foster in North Dakota faces up to 23 years at his sentencing Jan. 18.

By contrast, Ken Ward got 32 days and probation in Washington state, and Emily



Leonard Higgins after he closed a block valve Oct. 11, 2016, on a pipeline in Montana.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CLIMATE DIRECT ACTION

Johnston and Annette Klapstein may also get off comparatively lightly in Minnesota.

As in Montana, Washington and North Dakota courts disallowed the “necessity” defense, cutting off all connection between climate change science and the activists’ actions.

In Minnesota’s fourth and last Valve Turner trial, however, the worm may finally turn.

In Clearwater County, Minn., Judge Robert Tiffany is allowing defendants Johnston and Klapstein to use the necessity defense. The prosecution has appealed, but Higgins believes the situation is “working towards an appropriate crescendo.”

That trial will likely begin in February or March.

In the meantime, Higgins isn’t kidding himself about what he’s facing at Fort Benton, the most inland port in the world on the Missouri River.

“I’m planning that I won’t come back and planning that I’ll be gone up to a couple years,” he said. “I’m making arrangements.”

**T**hat unemotional, plan-oriented response is pure Leonard Higgins, who admits he’s a “get-er-done” kind of guy. Higgins’ approach isn’t based in radicalism, but rather science – the stuff he relied upon during three decades of information technology project management for the state.

“I’ve lived my whole life pretty much out of responsibility and obligation,” Higgins said.

“As an IT manager on large projects, I

was the person who figured out how to get things done despite the red tape and challenges,” Higgins said.

“This (civil disobedience) just kind of continues that.”

Yet he just became a felon because of his commitment to “mitigate catastrophic climate change and its effects on public health and the natural environment,” as attorney Herman Watson IV’s “Memorandum of Necessity” explains.

“It’s not incidental to be a felon for me,” Higgins said. “It’s a label now. It’s not as harsh as it could have been if my colleagues in Washington and North Dakota were not also felons, but it’s a bit shocking.”

The Valve Turners turned off five pipelines spread across four states carrying 2.8 million barrels per day of tar sands oil, often called the “dirtiest oil on the planet.” Their action was coordinated with the Standing Rock protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

Now, as the Trump administration seeks to repeal Obama-era carbon emissions standards, push pro-coal policies and sell off public spaces like Utah’s Bears Ears National Monument, the court of public opinion is growing more receptive to environmental activism, graduating from activist media to mainstream publications.

Higgins says being locked up is less scary than doing nothing. His basic moral calculus holds that what matters most is saving life on Earth.

“We’re basically dooming our children and future generations to an earth that

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