

School board declines to fire mask-refusing teacher

BY NICOLE BALES
The Bulletin

The Redmond School Board voted 3-2 on Sept. 22 to reject the superintendent's recommendation to fire a teacher who refused to wear a mask at school.

In a public termination hearing requested by Tori Caudell, a popular longtime teacher at Terrebonne Community School, the school board heard presentations from the school district and Caudell.

Superintendent Charan Cline presented a timeline showing that over the course of a week, the district and school's principal tried to get Caudell to comply with the mask mandate. He said that during a meeting with the district's human resources director and two union representatives, Caudell reported no medical condition or other disability that would allow her to wear

a face shield instead of a mask.

"Rather, she said, she was standing up for political and medical freedom and the district was following a tyrant," Cline told the board. "She claimed the governor and overstepped her authority and that the state of emergency had been in place for far too long."

After continuing to come to work without a mask, Cline said the district met Caudell and her union representatives on Sept. 2 and presented her with a 20-day pre-termination notice letter.

"As a district, we are painfully aware of the controversy surrounding the new Oregon rules mandating face-masks for staff and students and the required COVID-19 vaccinations for staff," Cline said. "We respect that many people have different opinions and perspectives about these rules, and that for many people the rules have touched a very deep nerve. Nev-

ertheless, school districts are subject to many federal, state and local laws and regulations. We cannot pick and choose which laws to follow based on individual, political or religious opinions. Nor can we allow our staff to do so. Nor do we allow our staff to simply disregard a law they believe is unconstitutional or otherwise illegal. It is the job of the courts to make that determination."

Cline asked the board to consider the precedent it would set if the board decided not to respond to Caudell's refusal to follow the law.

Caudell made legal and constitutional arguments to defend her stance. She also disputed facts presented by Cline, and made legal allegations against the school district.

"I feel like I'm doing something wrong every time I put a mask on my face," she said. "I feel like a traitor to

everyone who fights for our country when I cover my face and my identity. By masking up at school, I am visually teaching students that it's OK to be silenced."

"I have not broken any laws and by refusing the mask, I'm holding my constitutional rights."

Michael Summers, who was elected in May and is the school board's vice chair, said Caudell appears to be an exceptional and dedicated teacher. He said he wanted to make sure the school district thought outside of the box in coming up with a solution for Caudell.

"If there's a way for a distance teaching that would work, that would be amazing," he said. "I don't know if that's been offered. But I want to err on the side of relationship and sticking by our employees as best as possible in the district and letting them know that

they matter after they have just gotten punched and punched and punched by COVID and by everything last year."

Liz Goodrich, a board member, wanted to refocus the board's role in the hearing.

"What's being discussed is did she follow direction from her supervisor, from the district office, and she did not," Goodrich said. "And that's that's what we are deciding tonight, as far as I understand our role tonight."

"And it's not our job, I don't think, as board members to question whether or not HR and the superintendent were creative and thought outside the box. That's not our role. That's operations. That's their job."

The school board in August voted 3-2 to approve a resolution demanding local control following the governor's mask and vaccination mandates.

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Honor Flight

Continued from P1

Other visits included memorials for World War I and II, the Korean War Veterans Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall of names.

"It's pretty heavy, those days. It draws out a lot of emotion," Prevatt said.

The organization also plans events into the schedule that allow visiting veterans to be proud of their service. This year, that included a visit to the changing of the guard ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, a meeting with Bentz and an escort by Redmond Police as the party returned to Central Oregon this weekend.

While the organization has been planning flights since 2018, this year's was the first to fly out of the Redmond Airport. Previous flights have gone from Portland due to the cost of local flights.

That change allowed the group to involve local supporters closer to home, according to Prevatt.

"We had some generous donors, and we wanted to showcase this flight to Central Oregon and all the people that support us," Prevatt said.

The next flight is tentatively planned for May, depending on interest, funding and the pandemic. More information about how veterans can apply to attend an honor flight, or how community members can support them, is available on the organization's website at honorflightofcentraloregon.org.

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Dane Prevatt, foreground, with members and volunteers of the Redmond Honor Flight that attended war memorials and ceremonies last week in Washington, D.C. | Members of the Redmond Honor Flight paused at the Vietnam War memorial during last week's trip. | The Marines memorial was one of several the Redmond Honor Flight members visited. Submitted photos

"It was tough, but those guys, they were awesome. It was exactly what the honor flight should be."

— Dane Prevatt

BasX

Continued from P1

"As we continue to grow, pushing this building to its max with multiple shifts operating allows us to more or less double what we did in 2020 going forward," said Tobolski, who grew up in Boston but moved to the West Coast to get a Ph.D. in engineering from the University of California, San Diego.

Employee growth, but land becoming scarce

All that investment has allowed the company to increase its employee roster to around 300 people. Benson, a former HVAC engineer with Intel, said more expansion in the future is possible, but there are limitations.

"We have maxed out the allow-

able building area on this site, we will never leave this site, but further expansion will be based upon affordable land and construction, along with labor force availability," said Benson, who was lured out of retirement by Tobolski to help start the company.

The business even increased during COVID as data centers expanded when workers went remote, said Tobolski. The microchip shortage also resulted in U.S. manufacturing growth of clean rooms, which meant more business for BasX.

"We refocused all our efforts on data centers and clean rooms," said Tobolski. "Ultimately that paid off because those markets have seen substantial appreciation during COVID."

Tobolski and Benson credit the city Redmond and other business leaders

in Central Oregon for helping BasX expand through business-friendly incentives.

"The city of Redmond is very pro-business so our ability to grow and develop this property and have support from the political powers as well as the city itself has been great," said Tobolski. "REDI (Redmond Economic Development Inc.) and EDCO truly sold us on the idea and that is why we are up here."

The right fit

Jon Stark, senior director at REDI, called BasX a "gazelle company," a nod to its fast development, and is pleased that it calls Redmond home.

"This is exactly the kind of company you hope to land when you work in economic development," said Stark.

"They are doing exactly what we look for in terms of their hockey stick-style growth."

Stark said the investment the BasX has made in infrastructure and facilities translates into more jobs for Redmond, plus more tax revenue for the city.

"These guys set the bar for the type of company we look for, they continue to invest here, we are proud of the talent pool they have brought to the table," said Stark.

As BasX grows, what does its future hold? Tobolski said a public offering is not likely but a buyout by a larger company is within the realm of possibility. "I would never say never," he said. "It's a natural progression, a certain way of growth to leverage additional capital." Jobs opportunities,

check. Tax revenue, check. Expansion, check. By all accounts, BasX has been great for Central Oregon. But one head-scratcher remains. What's with the name? To begin with, it's pronounced "base-x" or more to the point "basics." And the meaning is just that — back to the basics.

"BasX is an homage to our business philosophy," said Tobolski. "Going back to the basics was kind of our focus and it's really about being true to values and our partners in the industry."

"Being true to your word, meeting your commitments, and going out of your way to help your customers succeed is what we hold true to our values for our partners."

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Commission

Continued from P1

Schmidt said she wanted to expand on her ability to serve the community.

"We can only go so far with grassroots community organizing," she said.

Schmidt said she is qualified for the office because she has a track record of successfully leading grassroots efforts, as well as experience in listening and working with people who disagree with her. Listening to

all voices is important, she said, and not operating in an echo chamber.

"Leading from a party line isn't currently serving the residents of Deschutes County," she said.

Born in Southern California, Schmidt grew up mostly in a Chicago suburb before attending Gordon College in Boston to earn a degree in youth ministries and Biblical studies. During college she did an internship in Seattle and fell in love with the Pacific Northwest.

She eventually received a graduate degree from the Seattle School of Psychology & Theology before she was invited by a colleague to come be a pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Bend seven years ago, she said.

If she were to win, Schmidt said her goals as commissioner would be collaborating with cities to address the shortage of affordable housing, expanding and funding more mental health services and addressing Central Oregon's fast growing

homeless population.

In particular, Schmidt is interested in expanding a mental health crisis response team, which responds to mental health related calls in lieu of police officers.

Overall, Schmidt said she wants the county to have leadership that helps meet people where they are at in life.

"It's past time (for people) to elect leadership that will fight for them," Schmidt said.

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