

After a veto threat, Newport fought for dam money

The governor shifted after hearing concerns

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Newport Mayor Dean Sawyer was driving back from a conference of mayors in Medford when he got the call.

State Rep. David Gomberg, D-Central Coast, had bad news.

Gov. Kate Brown wanted to veto \$4 million in state money to help replace two critical dams in Newport.

It was Sunday night, but Sawyer and other city officials acted.

"We all kind of contacted everybody that we thought might have some input with the governor or her staff," Sawyer said. "And encouraged everybody to send letters or emails."

Encouraged by local legislators, city officials rallied key supporters, ranging from the chamber of commerce to the hospital to the manager of a radio station. The Lincoln County commissioners penned a letter in support.

Subsequently, after the governor and her staff met with city officials and legislators representing Newport, Brown changed her mind. Newport could have the \$4 million after all.

In a moment in Oregon politics where questions about how state policy impacts rural communities are constantly in the background, the Newport dam saga illustrates how a small city stood up to the governor's veto pen.

Problems at the dams

For nearly a decade, local officials had been working to tackle problems with the

Big Creek Dams.

The city discovered the issues in 2011 while making plans for a new water treatment plant. Water is seeping through the dam and an earthquake could liquefy soils underneath it.

"The long and short of it is neither one of those dams would ... survive even a very moderate earthquake," said Tim Gross, the city's public works director and city engineer. "Depending on location and depth, a 3.5 (magnitude earthquake) would do it."

The reservoirs created by the dams provide a critical water supply for the city, which has a fish processing industry, a Rogue brewery and thriving tourism.

About 7,500 people commute into the city daily and thousands more come to the area for vacations and recreation every year.

After years of analysis, officials want to build a new dam to replace the two old dams. That is expected to cost nearly \$70 million.

But the town didn't think its 7,000 property taxpayers could alone foot the bill.

"There is no way that we could go for a bond of \$70 million," Sawyer said. "It would kill the property owners here."

And so the city looked to the federal and state governments for help.

Where there is money at higher levels of government, Sawyer says, there's not enough allocated for repairing or replacing dams.

"The problem for us on a local level is, there's very little money set aside for any dam projects," Sawyer said.

The city has spent more than \$2 million on the project so far.

To round up more, the city approached Gomberg and Sen. Arnie Roblan,



Anna Reed/Statesman Journal

Residents in Newport are worried two old dams could fail.

D-Coos Bay.

Local officials were happy when, at the end of June, state lawmakers approved \$4 million to pay for design, permitting and environmental assessments for replacing the dams.

But then came word that the governor didn't want to sign that part of the bill into law.

"All of a sudden, one day, we got the rug pulled on us," Sawyer said.

Sawyer, who describes his initial reaction as "shock," wondered why the governor signaled she might veto the money.

'Most dangerous'

Late last year, Brown said she had wanted the state to study the state's "most dangerous" dams and prioritize them by condition and risk.

The state regulates about 900 dams, and 72 of them are considered "high hazard," which means that if they were to fail, people could die and property could be severely damaged.

posed veto had less to do with this particular project and more to do with her trying to prove a point to the Legislature, that they need to look at dams comprehensively, and not just one at a time," Gross said.

Gross, Roblan and Gomberg all said the first they knew the project was at risk was when the governor's staff reached out to the legislators directly just before announcing the veto publicly.

The city already received some state money to study the dam, and the governor's office did know about the project, Gross said.

"The governor's office is well aware of what we're doing and why we're doing it, and it was shocking to us to see a proposed veto," Gross said. "We didn't understand it at all, because we spent a lot of time reaching out both to the Legislature and to the governor's office through the regional task force trying to keep them apprised of what we're doing and why."

It's not clear why the governor relented.

A spokesman said in a text message that the office did not have much to add beyond an official letter last week, where Brown backtracked on the veto, saying it could compromise federal funding that the city is trying to get for a new dam.

"Did I walk out of there with a sense that I had changed her mind? No," Gomberg said of his half-hour meeting with Brown. "But I did have the clear sense that she was listening very carefully and trying to evaluate the big picture."

"Why it finally came forward, I don't know," Roblan said, "But I am convinced that conversations with people who stayed calm and didn't get all uptight, but

had real conversations with her, helped her see that this would, in fact, be encouraging her policy of trying to come up with a rational approach of doing dam safety across the state."

Sawyer, who along with city officials and consultants, met with two of the governor's policy advisers, believes Brown didn't know the extent of the problem and how long the community had been working on the issue.

"We feel that, for some reason, the governor did not have the full picture of how critical our dam is," said Sawyer.

'Small but mighty'

Sawyer stressed that he appreciated that the governor listened and was willing to change her mind.

"Sometimes, when people say 'I'm going to veto it,' they make up their mind and they're done," Sawyer said. "But we were appreciative that she listened to our concerns."

"It's a community out to save itself, really," said Gross, the city engineer. "I'm super proud of Newport and how quickly they rallied to this cause, within a matter of three, four days. That was all that we had."

For local leaders, that powerful grassroots support is nothing new.

"We're really good at that," said Kaety Jacobson, a county commissioner. "Lincoln County — we're small but mighty."

And their work with the state isn't over.

Sawyer, at the governor's request, is the first member of a new task force on dam safety.

The Oregon Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group, Pamplin Media Group and Salem Reporter.

Coast Guardsmen charged in rape case are sentenced

By **ALYSSA EVANS**
Chinook Observer

SOUTH BEND, Wash. — Two Coast Guardsmen charged with sex offenses have been sentenced.

Salvador Zamora and Guillermo Gutierrez were suspected of sex crimes after a house party in September 2017. A video from the party showed an unconscious woman being raped. The video was shared with Coast Guard members from Gutierrez' Snapchat account.

Zamora, 25, was found guilty of third-degree rape and first-degree voyeurism. Gutierrez, 27, was found guilty of first-degree voyeurism. A rape charge was dropped against Gutierrez in September.

Zamora was sentenced to 15 months in prison. Gutierrez was sentenced to 90 days in Pacific County Jail.

During court proceedings, Gutierrez asked for a shorter sentence so he could

continue providing for his 3-year-old daughter and soon-to-be baby. Gutierrez is serving his sentence in three-day increments through late April.

Both men will have to complete sex offender treatment and register as sex offenders, Pacific County Prosecutor Mark McClain said.

Zamora and Gutierrez, who were stationed at Cape Disappointment, went to a house party to celebrate a co-worker's upcoming move in 2017. The house was located on Sandridge Road in Ilwaco.

After the party, Zamora's wife found text messages between the two men where Zamora asked if "the girl" was going to say he raped her. Gutierrez told him she

wouldn't remember.

Zamora's wife reported her findings to the Coast Guard.

The woman didn't know she was being filmed and was unconscious during the assault, according to court documents.

The men were arrested in December 2017. After their arrests, Zamora was reassigned to Base Seattle, and Gutierrez to Sector Columbia River in Warrenton.

The two continued to

work for the Coast Guard during the majority of their case proceedings.

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Sensitive toothpaste works by blocking the tubules in the dentine usually containing a chemical called strontium chloride. Repeated use builds up a strong carrier by plugging the tubules more and more, leading to less-sensitive teeth.



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A: Coast Weekend plans feature stories usually a month to two weeks ahead of time, so let us know early if you have something going on you think would make a good feature.

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Email your information to jwilliams@dailyastorian.com or call 971-704-1720. Be sure to include a contact name, email and phone number.

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