

IN BRIEF

Cannon Beach man runs for state House as unaffiliated candidate

A Cannon Beach man is running for state House District 32 as an unaffiliated candidate.

Frederick "Rick" Gray Jr., originally from Virginia, is gathering signatures to get on the November election ballot.

He said he hopes eventually to form a new centrist political party that focuses on the environment and confronting climate change.

He has taught high school, practiced law and served as secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

He has put \$3,000 toward his campaign, according to the Oregon Secretary of State's Office website.

Low-income residents eligible for water and wastewater help in Warrenton

WARRENTON — The city has signed an agreement with Clatsop Community Action and the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department that will assist low-income households with drinking water and wastewater services costs.

The City Commission unanimously approved the agreement at Tuesday's meeting.

Households at or below 60% of state median income are eligible. Clatsop Community Action will determine eligibility. The program only covers water- and wastewater-related costs.

The funding can only be received one time by an eligible household during the funding period, which will extend through September 2023 or until funding is exhausted. Additional funding may be available for a one-time crisis situation.

Coast Guard aids man in distress on cruise ship

A man who was bleeding internally while aboard the Disney Wonder about 180 miles off Grays Harbor, Washington, was flown ashore for treatment on Wednesday, the U.S. Coast Guard said.

That night, a Sector Columbia River helicopter crew airlifted the 71-year-old cruise ship passenger to Astoria, where he was then flown to Portland.

As of Thursday, the man was in stable condition, the Coast Guard said.

— The Astorian

Voters soundly reject Ocean Beach school bond

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Voters have overwhelmingly rejected a \$96.2 million bond proposed by the Ocean Beach School District on Tuesday.

With 4,421 ballots counted by the Pacific County Auditor's Office as of Wednesday, support for the bond sat at just 22.7%, with 77.3% in opposition. Support from a supermajority of voters, 60%, is needed for bonds to pass in Washington state.

The bond would have funded a number of construction projects at the school district, headlined by the construction of a new, tsunami-safe K-5 elementary school in Ilwaco that would also lead to the closure of Long Beach Elementary and Ocean Park Elementary as schools. In effect, the addition of the elementary school in Ilwaco next to Hilltop Middle School and Ilwaco High School would have created a unified K-12 campus.

Other notable projects that would have been funded include seismic retrofitting and significant operational upgrades at Ilwaco High School, the replacing of the deteriorating and earthquake-vulnerable stadium as well as making other outdoor athletic improvements, and replacing and relocating the school district's makeshift bus garage that would have also housed the maintenance and technology departments.

— Chinook Observer

MEMORIAL

Saturday, May 7

SCHULTZ, Mark Lloyd — Celebration of life at 1 p.m., Lewis and Clark Bible Church, 35082 Seppa Lane.

ON THE RECORD

Theft

• Aaron Thomas Posey, 27, of Astoria, was indicted on Tuesday for first-degree theft and second-degree theft. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in September.

• Beau Aaron Rollings, 31, of Santa Rosa, California, was indicted on Tuesday for first-degree theft and second-degree criminal mischief. The crimes are alleged to have occurred in Clatsop

County in September.

DUII

• Thomas William Niesche, 31, of Astoria, was arrested on April 23 at the intersection of Columbia Avenue and W. Marine Drive for driving under the influence of intoxicants.

• Spenser Blackwell, 34, of Astoria, was arrested on April 19 on Bond Street in Astoria for DUII and reckless driving. He allegedly struck a parked vehicle.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

MONDAY

Seaside City Council, 6 p.m., special meeting, executive session, City Hall, 989 Broadway.
Astoria City Council, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

the Astorian

Established July 1, 1873 (USPS 035-000)

Published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday by EO Media Group, 949 Exchange St., PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103. Telephone 503-325-3211, 800-781-3211 or Fax 503-325-6573. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Astorian, PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103-0210

DailyAstorian.com MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS MEMBER CERTIFIED AUDIT OF CIRCULATIONS, INC.

Circulation phone number: 800-781-3214 Periodicals postage paid at Astoria, OR

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MULTICULTURAL FAIR

Students take turns hitting a piñata at the Warrenton High School Multicultural Fair in April held in the Warrenton Grade School gym.

Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Oregon voters are pessimistic about the state's economy, despite big gains

By DIRK VANDERHART Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon voters aren't happy about much these days, so it's no surprise that a survey commissioned by Oregon Public Broadcasting showed deep misgivings about the condition of the state's economy.

Nearly two-thirds of voters rated Oregon's economic conditions as "poor" or "very poor" in the survey, and nearly as many said they expect things to get worse.

Those opinions are partly informed by voters' personal politics — Republicans were far more apt to report the economy was in bad shape than Democrats, who have largely controlled the state for decades. Even so, almost half of Democrats surveyed reported they feel the economy is lagging.

That pessimism has been picked up by candidates in this year's highly competitive governor's race, some of whom are pledging to loosen regulation on businesses and take a major swing at easing the state's rising housing costs.

Talk to Oregon economists, though, and the dour mood is harder to find. After a calamitous plunge at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many key indicators of the state economy are surging back.

"In our lifetimes — in our parents' lifetimes — we never saw an economy as bad as 2020," said Christian Kaylor, an economist with the Oregon Employment Department. "And the good news is: In our lifetimes we've never seen an economy as good as 2021."

Kaylor rattled off facts that have helped him reach that conclusion. The state's unemployment rate sits at 3.8%, not too far off the 3.5% level of just before the pandemic, and a far cry from the devastating 13.3% unemployment rate in April 2020. After getting a slower start than some other states, Oregon added jobs at a faster clip than nearly any other state last year. The Portland region, which accounts for more than half of the state's economy, also outperformed most other large metro areas in jobs added.

Economists now expect the state's economy will have made a full recovery by the end of this year. And at the end of that recovery, the wages of many Oregonians will be well higher than they were at the pandemic's outset.



John Notarianni/Oregon Public Broadcasting After spiking in 2020, Oregon's unemployment rate is now nearly back to pre-pandemic levels.

'The economy is overheating'

But those indicators don't account for the pain people are feeling. Kaylor and other economists say the super-fast rebound from the pit of recession amounts to an "overheating" economy. Many Oregonians — and Americans in general — have ample discretionary money to spend and an appetite to buy, they say. That ready cash, combined with supply chain snarls and old-fashioned corporate greed, has helped lead to a nearly 8% increase in prices in the last year, the biggest jump in four decades.

"There's just a lot of people with a lot of capacity to spend money right now," said Tim Duy, an economics professor at the University of Oregon and director of the Oregon Economic Forum. "The economy is overheating. We're seeing that in the rate of strong wage growth, but overall we're seeing it in inflation as well."

Price increases brought on by inflation have begun to outstrip higher wages, meaning the average worker effectively took a pay cut last year despite making more. The hospitality industry, severely hurt by the pandemic, is still lagging. A tight housing market has led to higher rents and bidding wars for limited homes on the market. Portland has trailed peer cities in its recovery. The price for filling up at the pump has become more and more painful — and the Russian invasion of Ukraine has not helped.

Despite the good things happening in Oregon's economy, voters like Penny McCarthy are more often feeling the bad. "Gas prices are up, food prices are up, real estate is totally out of control," said McCarthy, a 68-year-old Lebanon resident who labels herself a progressive Democrat. "It's unreal."

McCarthy lives off of Social Security benefits, and her husband, a disabled veteran, also receives payments. With their rising rent threat-

ening to eat up more of their checks, the couple struggled to find a manufactured home that would offer more stability. They finally got lucky, McCarthy said.

"We live in a 1985 manufactured home that we fought to purchase," she said. "We had to work for a year to find a house we could afford because rent is just horrible. I don't know how people can afford that, and it's only going to get worse unless something happens to rein it in."

McCarthy has plenty of company. More than 60% of voters in Oregon Public Broadcasting's survey deemed the cost of living in the state a "very serious" issue, putting it in the realm of violent crime, homelessness and addiction as a leading concern. And while early on in the pandemic younger Oregonians were most likely to express worry about their personal finances, polling shows that older Oregonians like McCarthy now lead the way in worrying about money.

"That dynamic is changing in a way that I think will be electorally powerful," said John Horvick, of DHM Research, which conducted the poll, noting that older voters are more likely than younger ones to participate in the May primary.

Voters, of course, are well known for weighing their pocketbooks while casting ballots. But as the state prepares to elect a new governor this year, economists suggest that the forces at play in Oregon are often the result of larger trends that even the state's top executive has little power to sway.

"The standard economic data look pretty darn good aside from inflation," said Josh Lehner, an economist with the state's Office of Economic Analysis. "There's not a lot you can do at the state level about inflation."

Duy, at the University of Oregon, agreed, saying that many forces battering Oregonians are driven by business cycles that play out on the national level. "You often have limited capacity around them," he said.

'Boom-bust' scenario

Curing inflation is a job left largely up to the Federal Reserve, which has begun raising interest rates in order to cool the economy but risks sending the country into a recession if it moves too strongly.

State economists now say such a "boom-bust" scenario is a plausible alternative to their baseline assumptions that steady, but slower, economic expansion will most likely continue in coming years. Under such a scenario, laid out in the state's most recent economic forecast, rising interest rates would result in a "relatively long-lasting recession" beginning early next year, costing the state roughly 100,000 jobs.

Lehner cautioned that such a scenario is far from certain.

"Our advisers think that is the most likely alternative scenario," he said. "Does that mean we need to be worried today? No."

In fact, Lehner's predictions have more frequently been sunnier, as when he wrote at length in December about how fully Portland is likely to recover from a downturn brought on by the pandemic, political violence and growing homelessness.

"The outlook is bright," Lehner wrote. "Already the region has caught up economically to other large metro areas despite local social challenges and public perception. However, the key question is whether or not Portland will reclaim its perch among the highest fliers around the country, which remains to be seen."

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