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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2015

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HERMISTON

Road to redemption

Committee unveils plan for safety, aesthetic upgrades

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

North Highway 395 — between Hermiston and Umatilla — was dubbed the "five ugliest miles in Oregon" in the 1970s and it hasn't gotten any prettier.

Now it seems business owners and residents who live and work in the corridor north of Hermiston are finally getting serious about improving it.

A task force of those concerned citizens has formed a technical advisory committee to Umatilla County and on Wednesday night unveiled a report that aims to tackle some of the most pressing barriers to development along the corridor.

Committee member Steve Watkinds of Columbia Court Club said he and other business owners along North Highway 395 were concerned with safety and beautification.

"We don't feel (neither is) where it needs to be," he said.

Concerns the committee listed include dangerous traffic conditions, an unsightly landscape, piles of junk, poorly maintained crossroads and a lack of fire suppression and sewer systems.

Of particular focus at the meeting was the stretch between Punkin Center Road and Bensel Road, which is outside Hermiston and

See HIGHWAY/8A

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The citizen advisory board is working with Umatilla County officials to plan improvements to Highway 395 north of Hermiston.

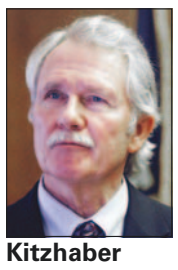
Slow rise, swift demise

Kate Brown becomes Oregon's 38th governor

By PETER WONG
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The swift fall of John Kitzhaber and the slow rise of Kate Brown to Oregon's governorship intersected Wednesday, when Brown took the oath of office to succeed Kitzhaber.

Last week, Democrat Kitzhaber became the first governor in Oregon history to resign under political pressure, amid three separate investigations of influence-peddling allegations against him and his fiancee, Cylvia Hayes.



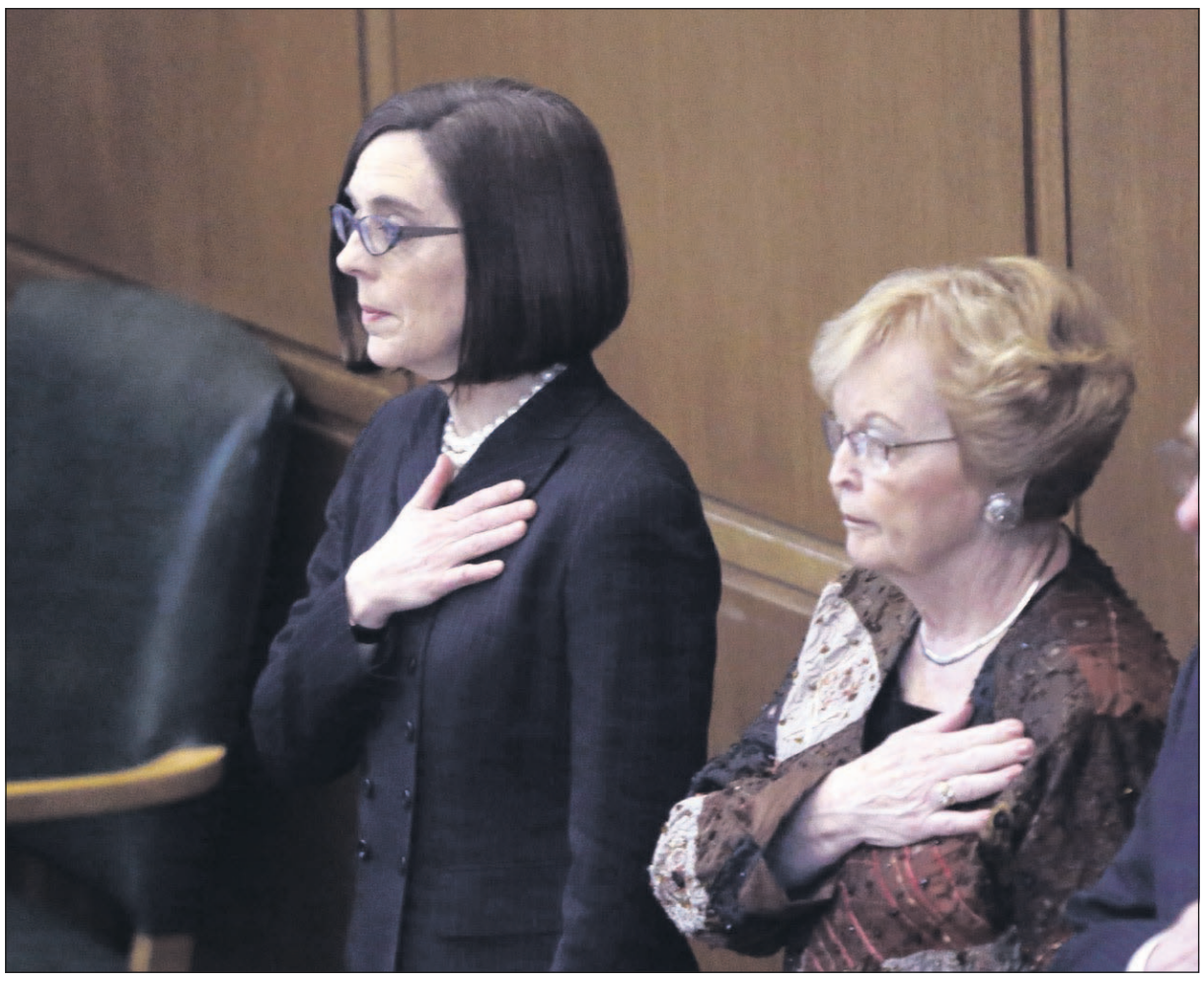
Kitzhaber

While other elected officials in Oregon have lost their jobs under pressure, the only comparable magnitude in recent times was the 1995 resignation of Republican Bob Packwood, who faced expulsion from the U.S. Senate seat he held for almost 27 years on accusations of sexual misconduct.

In Packwood's case, the pressures took nearly three years to result in his resignation.

In Kitzhaber's case, the pressures took less than five months — and culminated only a month after he was

See KITZHABER/8A



AP photo by Don Ryan

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, left, is joined by former Oregon Gov. Barbara Roberts as the colors are presented after Brown was sworn in Wednesday in Salem. John Kitzhaber, elected to an unprecedented fourth term last year, announced last week that he would step down.

Brown pledges to restore trust

By PETER WONG
Capital Bureau

SALEM — As she became Oregon's 38th governor Wednesday, Kate Brown pledged that neither she nor her staff would accept outside compensation.

In remarks after she took her oath from Chief Justice Thomas Balmer in the House chamber at the Capitol, Brown also said she will work for changes to strengthen the independence of the Oregon Government Ethics Commission and the release of public documents.

"We must seize the moment to work across party lines to restore the public's trust," Brown said just 38 days after John Kitzhaber took his oath for a fourth term in the same chamber. "We should not leave here until we get this done."

Brown, as secretary of state, succeeds Kitzhaber, the first Oregon governor to resign under pressure amid influence-peddling allegations against him and fiancée Cylvia Hayes. The allegations involve Hayes using her position as first lady to boost her private consulting business.

Brown addressed the issue directly in her remarks:

"I pledge to you today that for long as I am your governor, I will not seek or accept any outside compensation, from any source. And I pledge further that while I am governor, the members of my household and the members of my staff will not seek or accept any outside compensation, from any source, for work related to the business of the state of Oregon. That simply won't happen."

Brown took the oath at 10 a.m., when Kitzhaber's resignation took effect.

Brown and Kitzhaber met privately earlier this week, but no details of what they might have discussed were disclosed.

"It's been a tough few months," Brown said. "The people of Oregon have had reason to question their trust in state government. Oregon has been in the national news for all the wrong reasons ... That changes

See BROWN/8A

Bill Hansell (R-Athena) State Senate

"I am confident she is familiar with Eastern Oregon and I am looking forward to helping her get up to speed with our issues."

Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) U.S. Senator

"She brings vast experience to the challenge and I know she will hit the ground running."

George Murdock Umatilla County commissioner

"I'm glad we are now able to move forward. In my mind, Kate Brown has been an island of integrity in a sea of embarrassment. "

Val Hoyle, (D-Eugene) majority leader

"We share (her) commitment to restoring the public's trust and confidence in state government."

Mike McLane (R-Powell Butte) minority leader

I'm hopeful (she) will guide our state in a bipartisan manner and I look forward to working with her to serve all Oregonians."

Wyoming bill would finance coal ports

By BEN NEARY
Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. — Wyoming lawmakers are pushing a bill that would allow the state to issue $1 billion in bonds to support possible construction of a Northwest port for shipping Wyoming coal to Asia.

Wyoming, the nation's leading coal-producing state, has been stymied so far in its fight to get access to Asian markets. State officials are facing slumping domestic demand for coal because of tough federal rules for power plant emissions and cheaper natural gas.

The bill pending in Wyoming's ongoing legislative session would expand the authority of the Wyoming Infrastructure Authority, a state agency.

Under the bill, the infrastructure authority would gain power to issue bonds to support projects that are entirely outside Wyoming. The bill originally would have allowed the authority to issue up to $3 billion in bonds but currently has been amended down to $1 billion. The Legislature last year directed the authority to pursue coal ports.

Loyd Drain, executive director of the authority, said Wednesday the authority doesn't have any particular project in mind that it wants to fund, but wants to be ready to act.

Jonathan Downing, director of the Wyoming Mining Association, said Wednesday he views the pending legislation as, "another tool in the toolbox for trying to develop these ports and get access to some of these foreign markets."

Wyoming and Montana are appealing last year's decision by Oregon regulators to reject a proposal from a subsidiary of Ambre Energy, an Australian company, to build a coal ter-

See COAL/8A

Oregon drivers to take road tax for a test spin

PORTLAND (AP) — A tax that would have Oregon drivers paying by the mile instead of by the gallon now has a name: OReGO.

Next, the state government plans to see whether it has a future.

The Department of Transportation said Wednesday it would begin a test July 1, signing up 5,000 volunteers to keep track of the miles they drive.

They'd pay a tax of 1.5 cents a mile and get a rebate for the 30-cent-a-gallon Oregon tax they'd pay to drive those miles, *The Oregonian* reported Wednesday.

For years, the agency has been considering how to replace the gas-

See TAX/8A

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