

ESCAPEE: Tree farm would provide 25,000 acres of cover

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gree burglary out of Umatilla County. His earliest release date is Aug. 12, 2016. Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack said his officers met with OSP and the Department of Corrections Wednesday afternoon to determine their best course of action searching for Fox. By evening, their search had shifted to the Greenwood Resources Boardman Tree Farm, which would provide 25,000 acres of cover while sticking close enough to Interstate 84 for a

potential getaway. “If he goes to the south, it’s wide open. If he stays to the north, he stands a much better chance of catching a ride with somebody,” Matlack said. One officer from Hepner continued Wednesday evening patrolling farmland along Highway 207 that runs from Hermiston south to Lexington. Agencies have also notified neighboring jurisdictions and Union Pacific Railroad to be on the lookout for Fox. “We’re just out on the

roads, trying to get ahead of him,” Matlack said. “Of course, anybody on foot we’re interested in.” Meanwhile, the DOC is checking into all contacts Fox had at the prison. Some of those come from the Pendleton area, Matlack said, but is not certain how they might be related. OSP Pendleton Lt. Mike Turner could not immediately be reached for comment. Anyone with information regarding Fox’s whereabouts is asked to call OSP at 1-800-452-7888.

SCHOOL: Some Republicans want to raise the state school fund to as much as \$8 billion

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preference. But Brown, herself a former legislative leader, said Friday that in regard to the budget, “the governor proposes and the Legislature disposes.” “You can always adjust it if you have to, or if there’s more money,” Courtney said. “But that’s the most important thing right now. I think we’ve got to get that budget out. We need to start to move budgets.” Usually, lawmakers await the May 15 economic and revenue forecast before making final decisions on the budget, which actually comes in the form of individual agency bills rather than a single overall plan. A recent exception was in 2011, when lawmakers approved the state school fund and the governor signed it in mid-April. But it was a low point in the economic downturn, and the approved amount was all that schools got that cycle. The co-chairs’ current plan

puts more money into state aid for public schools, community colleges and universities — and less into targeted education priorities sought by Kitzhaber, such as early childhood programs, reading skills, and high school and college completion. Minority Republicans and some education groups want to raise the state school fund beyond the amount proposed by the co-chairs, to as much as \$8 billion for the next two years. Some advocates say the current legislative plan is still several millions short of allowing schools to maintain current service levels. However, according to last week’s quarterly economic and revenue forecast, the possibility of a kicker refund to taxpayers next year is likely to decrease the amount available for spending in the next two-year budget, if only by a modest amount. The projected refund, which would be in the form of a credit against 2014 taxes due next year, is \$349 million. But the kicker still could

change, because the projected threshold is just barely more than what is needed to trigger the kicker. While Oregon’s economic indicators are good, says state economist Mark McMullen, “additional economic growth does not translate into additional resources and an easier job for legislative budget writers.” Lawmakers on the House and Senate revenue committees did hear last week that property tax collections for schools will be up by \$134.6 million from what was previously projected for the next two-year cycle. For 2015-16, according to legislative revenue economist Dae Baek, collections will be up by 5 percent instead of 3 percent; for 2016-17, up by 4.7 percent. The projected two-year total of property taxes for schools, including the amounts for education service districts, is \$3.67 billion. — *The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

ECONOMY: Tourism industry made \$9.6B in 2013

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Despite his words of caution, Conerly said the international economy could be used to Eastern Oregon’s advantage. Conerly projected the global middle class would grow from 1.8 billion in 2009 to 4.9 billion in 2030. Noting that meat consumption rises when people enter the middle class, Conerly said grain prices will rise to meet the demand of livestock farmers. While Conerly understood that the majority of wheat produced in Umatilla County isn’t used for feed, he said prices should rise across the board regardless of the grain’s use.

Craig Reeder, vice president of Hale Companies, also emphasized the potential of the county’s agricultural economy in an earlier speech. While he listed assets like the Port of Morrow and the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center, Reeder said there’s no reason why the county couldn’t have businesses like a dairy processing plant or a cold storage facility with the amount of goods that travel through the region. Reeder also urged the audience to create a friendly brand for Eastern Oregon agriculture. While climate change and genetically modified organisms might be contentious issues for farmers, Reeder maintained that

those are issues consumers care about. Rounding out the speakers was Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon. Davidson said Oregon’s tourism industry is on the rise, generating \$9.6 billion in 2013. Umatilla County took \$147 million piece of that pie, raising \$6 million in tax revenue in the process. When asked how Pendleton’s tourism could be improved, Davidson said improving the city’s accessibility like increasing commercial flights or resurrecting Amtrak’s Pioneer Line could help. — *Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.*

WORLD BRIEFLY

Senate on track to fund Homeland Security without immigration limit

WASHINGTON (AP) — Three days before a partial Homeland Security shutdown, lawmakers cleared the way Wednesday for Senate passage of legislation to fund the agency without immigration-related provisions opposed by President Barack Obama. Approval in the Senate would send the issue to the House, where some conservatives derided the plan as a surrender to the White House. Other Republicans predicted it would clear, but Speaker John Boehner declined to say if he would put it to a vote.

Increasingly, though, it appeared the only alternative to House acceptance of the Senate measure — or perhaps a short-term funding bill — was the partial shutdown of a federal department with major anti-terrorism responsibilities — and the likelihood the GOP would shoulder whatever political blame resulted. **Hostages moved to Islamic State stronghold** BEIRUT (AP) — Islamic State militants have moved a large group of Christians they abducted to one of their strongholds as fighting raged on Wednesday between the extremists and Kurdish and Christian militiamen for control of a chain of villages

along a strategic river in northeastern Syria, activists and state-run media said. The Khabur River in Hassakeh province, which borders Turkey and Iraq, has become the latest battleground in the fight against the Islamic State group in Syria. It is predominantly Kurdish but also has populations of Arabs and predominantly Christian Assyrians and Armenians. In pre-dawn attacks, the IS on Monday attacked communities nestled along the river, seizing at least 70 people, including many women and children. The fate of those kidnapped, almost all of them Assyrian Christians, remained unclear Wednesday, two days after they were seized.

MAPPING: Hasn’t been a person dedicated to updating city maps for the past decade

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layers of brightly colored lines crisscrossing the urban boundaries. Each color corresponds with the three types of utility lines the city is responsible for — water, sewer and storm drainage. A click on one of the utility lines prompts the display of a bevy of those utilities’ attributes. Utility type, pipe material, line size and the date of construction are just some of the information Jones can access with the click of a mouse. Jones said the database also allows searches for certain criteria, like all the 12-inch water lines in the city. The process of compiling a GIS database started when the city decided to update its master plan in 2013. With \$500,000 of the \$800,000 master plan allocated toward creating a model of the city’s utilities, Public Works Director Bob Patterson said GIS was the logical choice. Jones was hired last year to lead the transition and has been focused on city utilities. Master plan consulting firm Murray Smith and As-

sociates laid the groundwork by providing a basic map of the city’s utilities, and now Jones is filling in the blanks. Jones spends her days poring over the city’s paper maps and adding utility lines and attributes to Pendleton’s burgeoning GIS database. She is assisted in the field by utility worker Sean Tarter, who locates utility lines so construction projects can avoid impacting them. Using a device that resembles a metal detector, Tarter hooks the machine to the water system and scans the street for utility lines. For the construction project, Tarter uses spray paint to mark where the utility lines lie. Once he’s finished, Tarter cross-references a pile of weathered maps to see if his information matches the city records. If the old maps are inaccurate, Tarter uses a tablet to report the difference in location and attributes to Jones, who can easily make the changes to the database. Before the city hired Jones, Patterson said there hadn’t been a person dedicated to updating the city maps for the past decade.

With Jones and the GIS database in the fold, Tarter said his job will be streamlined. “Going from paper to digital will be hard for some, but in the long term it will be easier,” he said. In three to five years, Patterson expects the city will have a GIS map and database available to the public. In addition to the aforementioned utilities, Patterson said the public database would also have information about streets. With Pendleton’s infrastructure in poor condition, Patterson said the more accurate data rendered from GIS will also make cost estimates for their repair more accurate. Patterson said the GIS technician will be a permanent position within the city and will always have work updating the existing database and creating new ones. In the future, GIS could be used to map every property in Pendleton, with information about zoning, utility hookups and other data attached. — *Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.*

TRUCK STOP: Plans to employ 50 people

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shortly and we can see this project come to fruition,” she said. Love’s plans to spend \$5-\$7 million on the center and employ about 50 people, according to past news reports. Getting to this point has meant a lengthy series of zoning and legal challenges for Love’s, which initially came to the county in 2009. McLane said permits have gone before the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals four times since then, each time over objections raised by Devin Oil Co. Devin Oil, along with several other Boardman business owners, have protested the Love’s stop out of fear it would intercept customers and give the big guys an unfair advantage drawing travelers off the interstate. When the planning process began, an attorney for

Devin Oil argued Love’s did not provide enough information on its application about water and waste disposal. In 2012, Devin appealed the project’s conditional use permit to LUBA and then to the state Court of Appeals, both of which ruled in favor of the county. The Oregon Supreme Court declined to hear the case. A site plan review was also affirmed by LUBA last year, though by that time the conditional use permit had expired, McLane said. It was brought back before the planning commission Tuesday, and passed unanimously. The permit allows for two zoning-based exceptions within the property boundaries: one that approves building a retail center so close to the Port of Morrow’s airport in what is known as an “Airport Approach” zone, and another that allows for a tire repair

shop in the “Tourist Commercial” zone. Automotive centers are usually zoned separately, McLane said. The lone condition is for Love’s to build a left-turn lane on Tower Road to access another permitted road leading into the site. McLane is optimistic the center could be open before the end of the year. “I think it will be a very nice layout,” McLane said. “This is not unlike a Pilot or a Space Age. It’s a very similar type of facility.” The approval could still be appealed back to the Morrow County Court by March 11. Otherwise, the permits is valid for four years. Neither Frank Ille, Love’s project engineer, nor a representative of Devin Oil returned calls Wednesday for comment. — *Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.*

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From left: Peter Wong, Hillary Borrund, Mateusz Perkowski