

Umatilla fifth grader pleads for more school funding

By PETER WONG
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A fifth grader at McNary Heights Elementary School in Umatilla told lawmakers Tuesday how recent cuts in state aid to public schools have affected him.

Alfonso Bernal said that compared to the experience of his older sister, who has graduated from high school, he has larger class sizes and fewer electives and school staff.

"I get only one chance at an education, one chance to be a kid, one chance to be a student," Bernal said at a legislative hearing on the state school fund.

"This is my chance. I need more help to become what I want to be in life. I need more teachers, I need more activities. I promise I will give you more when I am an adult."

Bernal, who said he wants to be an engineer, got a round of applause as he concluded

his testimony to the Legislature's budget subcommittee on education.

He was the youngest to speak so far during two scheduled days of public testimony. He is the son of Delma Bernal, a special ed secretary for the district.

The framework by the Legislature's chief budget writers proposes \$7.23 billion for the state school fund — which provides the lion's share of operating costs for Oregon's 197 school districts — for the next two-year budget cycle.

But education advocates say that the fund ought to be boosted to at least \$7.5 billion — \$267 million more — or even \$7.85 billion.

At the lower figure, Umatilla Superintendent Heidi Sipe said she faces an estimated \$500,000 in reductions, "and I honestly cannot even wrap my brain on how to start with that process."

For students in her com-

munity, she said, education "is the only way for us to guarantee their future is not like their present."

Doug Gall, a fifth-grade teacher at McNary Heights, said he has 32 students in his class this year and expects that number to rise to 34 or 35 next school year.

Gall came to Oregon from Washington state, where he had administrative jobs. Gall had been a fourth-grade teacher until he was laid off in 2008; he returned to the classroom a couple of years ago, after doing more administrative work.

While "I cannot do as much as I would like to do," Gall said, "we are hoping we can get consistent and adequate funding. Those of us in the trenches are looking to you."

— The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

HERMISTON

City votes to renew tax breaks

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The city of Hermiston plans to continue extending tax breaks to companies that choose to build or expand in Hermiston.

The city council gave staff the go-ahead Monday night to apply for a 10-year extension of its enterprise zone, which gives a three-year property tax exemption to companies that create jobs in Hermiston through capital projects.

City manager Byron Smith called the enterprise zone a valuable tool when

it comes to recruiting new businesses. He said DuPont Pioneer Seed and Shearer's Foods are both currently using the exemption, but DuPont's expansion project is poised to enter the tax rolls to the tune of \$150,000 a year in new property taxes.

He said once the Port of Umatilla and Umatilla County sign off on the application, the city can ask the state to renew the enterprise zone designation and continue offering those tax breaks as an incentive.

Mayor David Drotzmann called the tax break "an enticement a lot of

large, major companies demand."

At Monday's meeting the council also agreed with Smith's recommendation to streamline meetings by creating a consent agenda and changing the order of topics discussed. The council will also attempt to improve the public feedback process by taking public feedback on agenda items throughout the meeting instead of taking comments on all subjects at once.

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UMATILLA

Ag producers agree to lease port's unused water right

By GEORGE PLAVEN
East Oregonian

After nearly three years of negotiations, a group of local farmers reached an agreement with the Port of Umatilla to lease an unused portion of the port's Columbia River water right.

Led in part by Craig Reeder, vice president of Hale Farms and board chairman for the Northeast Oregon Water Association, the group wanted to secure the water — about 100 cubic feet per second — to boost irrigated agriculture. On Tuesday, the port approved and signed the lease for approximately \$5,000 per unit. "This hopefully will be the beginning of a material change in our area," Reeder said.

While an important step in the process, Reeder emphasized there is still much work left to do. He and other users will continue to work with the port to certify the right through the Oregon Water Resources Department. The biggest hurdle, Reeder said, will be public

comment periods for conservation and management.

J.R. Cook, founder and director of NOWA, said the agreement also shows state legislators in Salem they are ready for whatever water project funding might come out of the governor's proposed budget.

"That's the biggest key, is preparedness," Cook said. "What this ensures is the basin is ready to move forward."

The process of leasing the Port of Umatilla's water right began on Aug. 12, 2012. That's when the water resources department first indicated a municipal and industrial water right could, in fact, be used for irrigation.

The water right was designated in 1979 for 155 cfs, said port General Manager Kim B. Puzey. Since then, about a third is allocated to the regional water system that bolsters municipal supply to the city of Hermiston.

Puzey said the right is a \$40 million asset, and the port wanted to make sure it set a price on the water that would not only benefit agri-

culture along the Columbia River, but also provide income for the port.

"It's a great thing for the region," Puzey said. "I'm pleased with the work the (port) commission was able to do to get this accomplished."

While the water right would ideally allow for about 100 cfs, it is curtailed by regulations that require enough flows for endangered fish during the summer months. Cook said those details still need to be worked out.

"We are committed to incremental gains and patience," Cook said.

If a deal can be negotiated between water users and environmental interests statewide, Reeder said they believe everyone in the region stands to benefit from an increase in economic development.

"We have a lot more work to do," Reeder said. "It's just not over until it's signed."

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PENDLETON



Contributed photo

Jean Wells' starting quilt, in foreground, is on display in an exhibit that features the work of members of the Central Oregon Studio Art Quilt Associates at Pendleton Center for the Arts. The exhibit includes a sewing bee table for visitors to try their hand at stitching techniques.

Quilt guild shows creative work

Exhibit includes public sewing bee

East Oregonian

Many people have played the whispers game, also referred to as the telephone game — one person whispers into another player's ear, then the message is passed from person to person, often getting wildly distorted in the process.

A group of artists in central Oregon have applied the idea to a new body of work that is on exhibit through Saturday, March 28 at Pendleton Center for the Arts.

Members of the Central Oregon Studio Art Quilt Associates, which is affiliated with an international organization of art quilters, divided into small groups, with the first member of the group cre-

ating a small quilt. That piece was passed on to the second member with no discussion whatsoever. The artist had to respond to the work and use their interpretation as a departure point for their own work. That piece was then passed to the next member, and so on.

Quilting as an art form uses both modern and traditional quilting techniques to create art objects. The works have more in common with the fine arts than they do with traditional quilting. The works are generally either wall hung or mounted as sculpture.


The exhibit includes a sewing bee table that is open in the gallery. Visitors are invited to engage in the activity, trying out simple stitching techniques.

Pendleton Center for the Arts is located at 214 N. Main St. Admission is free and the gallery hours are Tuesday

through Fridays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m.

For more information, call 541-278-9201 or visit www.pendletonarts.org.

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