

Community gives emotional response to schools budget

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

"To have education funded at this level, it feels ... like education isn't valued any longer and it breaks our heart."

— Heidi Sipe,
Umatilla School District Superintendent

In their visit to Boardman, the members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee got an unexpectedly emotional response from the local educational community.

Voices cracked and tears were shed while teachers, administrators and students appealed to the committee Saturday to increase the state's K-12 education budget.

The Oregon Legislature passed a \$7.3 billion budget earlier this month, which will cause some area school districts to cut positions and programs.

"I come from a business background and we can't treat our schools like businesses," Umatilla School Board member Jon Lorence said. "There's differences. We can't turn students away. We can't raise our price of tuition. We can't choose who our clients are."

Lorence said Umatilla has already cut 29 positions since 2009 while gaining 66 students and will have to cut more to close the \$700,000 deficit the district now faces because of the state budget.

Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe said she had to inform three employees of their layoffs last week in addition to re-assigning 15 employees.

"When we were in the recession and our staff was being asked to do more and more and more with less, it was a patriotic duty," she said. "We all understood. We had to pull together. We had to do it. But when financial times are better, to have education funded at this level, it feels ... like education isn't valued any longer and it breaks our heart."

Sipe and Lorence's impassioned speeches were matched by their daughters' pleas to the committee.

Umatilla High School student Cameron Sipe said the recent spate of budget cuts has convinced her to become an architect instead of a teacher like her mother and father.

Unlike her classmate, Megan Lorence still planned to become a teacher, but was unsure about the field's future.

"When I become an educator, what will be left for me?" she said,



Photo by Antonio Sierra

Students from Clara Brownell Middle School in Umatilla hold up signs at a Joint Ways and Means Committee meeting in Boardman Saturday. The "755" represents the \$755 million Oregon universities are asking for from the Legislature.

fighting back tears. "What will be left for the students?"

Pendleton School Board Chairman Steve Umberger said his district will run a \$750,000 deficit the next fiscal year, which will be made worse if Pendleton voters don't approve a general operations tax levy next month.

Because of the deficit, he said the district will consider staff re-

ductions, fewer school days and half-day programs for juniors and seniors.

In an interview after the meeting, Rep. Peter Buckley, D-Ashland, who co-chairs the Joint Ways and Means Committee, said the Legislature will reanalyze the K-12 education budget after the May forecast.

Forty percent of any additional

tax collections featured in the forecast will go toward education.

The Democrat said if districts like Pendleton and Umatilla still come up short, the Legislature will try to "wrestle" with the budget to find other sources of revenue to cover the difference. Besides K-12 education, representatives from Blue Mountain Community College, Eastern Oregon University and Oregon State University Extension Services also requested more money for their budgets.

Outside of education, the other frequent testimony topic was state support for increasing agricultural water supply.

Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Elfering said a study from OSU economist Bruce Sorte states increased water development could generate \$2.5 billion in economic development.

Craig Reeder, chairman of the Northeastern Oregon Water Association, said a fully funded Oregon Water Resources Department would allow his group to commence construction on multiple shovel-ready projects that would return "hundreds of millions of dollars" worth of taxable infrastructure revenue to the state.

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HERMISTON

One Book One Community author to visit April 22

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

There is only one week left to read this year's One Book One Community novel before the author comes to Hermiston.

Charles Martin, author of "A Life Intercepted," will be in town April 22.

Martin said it was a surprise to get the call notifying him that his book had been selected for this year's community-wide reading project sponsored by the Altrusa Literacy Committee.

"I'm really honored," he said. "I think it's really cool that they would do that."

The novel — Martin's 11th — tells the story of Matthew "The Rocket" Rising, a superstar college football quarterback accused of rape the morning after he signed his first contract with the NFL. Twelve years later, out of prison and registered as a sex offender, he returns to his hometown to try to convince his beloved wife Audrey that he was falsely accused.

Martin said he was interested in writing the story of a good man fighting with everything he has to keep the love of his life, despite convincing evidence she should leave him.

"I wanted the reader to think he could never prove he was innocent, to require him to really fight for her," Martin said.

For Matthew, fighting for Audrey means risking more prison time in order to train a teenage quarterback she has come to think of like a son. Martin said even though the book details those



Charles Martin

training sessions and The Rocket's insights on the game, he wouldn't classify it as a "football book."

"What I had hoped to do is write a love story in the packaging of football," he said.

Still, Martin's love for the game is evident in those passages. His own college football career consisted of one year as a walk-on at Georgia Tech before he got injured. He thought he had put that disappointment behind him until he found himself cheering on the sidelines of his son's high school football game.

"I unpacked my love of football in writing the story," he said.

As for the love story, he said he

reflected on his own 22-year-old marriage.

"Any female lead I write has some element of my wife," he said.

He found himself in an interesting position when "A Life Intercepted" came out the same week as the real-life video of Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice knocking his girlfriend unconscious in an elevator. Suddenly Martin found himself being asked on live television for insight on misbehaving star athletes, something he doesn't have any experience with beyond writing a book about it.

"It did end up having a pop culture relevance I didn't expect," he said.

However, Martin said his books has been called optimistic and redemptive. He likes to use the word hopeful. He said the world is fed a "steady diet of hopelessness" in the news and on social media and he wants to give people a reason to think things can get better.

"I would like people to finish my stories and have something bubbling up inside of them, some hope that wasn't there before," he said.

After working with students at Hermiston High School, Martin will speak at the Eastern Oregon Higher Education Center at 7 p.m. on April 22. He said the evening will include perspectives on "A Life Intercepted," questions from the audience and most likely a sneak peek at his new book "Water From My Heart," which comes out on May 19.

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Ambre changes name to Lighthouse Resources

By GEORGE PLAVEN
East Oregonian

The company working to build a coal export terminal at the Port of Morrow in Boardman has changed its name.

Ambre Energy North America is now Lighthouse Resources Inc., officials announced Monday.

President and CEO Everett King said the new name is a reflection of the company's core business strategy and values.

Ambre Energy is an Australian company that hoped to be the first to export coal from the Pacific Northwest. Last year, shareholders voted to sell all North American coal assets to a Denver-based private equity firm for \$18 million after failing to draw additional investors.

As Lighthouse Resources, the project's leadership team remains intact but faces a number of challenges moving forward. The Oregon Department of State Lands previously rejected a remove-fill permit needed to build the Boardman dock and an appeal won't be heard until December.

The Oregon Transportation Commission has also rejected a \$2 million ConnectOregon grant needed for dock improvements at Port Westward.

The project did, however, secure its fourth permit approval from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality on March 31. Lighthouse spokeswoman Liz Fuller said they still believe their proposal meets environmental standards, and are confident they will win their appeal with the Department of State Lands.

"I think we've had as many advancements with the project in recent weeks," Fuller said.

At \$242 million, Lighthouse Resources says Morrow Pacific will provide much-needed jobs and investment in rural Oregon. Environmental groups and tribes oppose the project, citing coal's negative impact on climate change and the dock's interference with tribal fisheries.

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Milton-Freewater horse with injured hoof euthanized

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

The woman who was set to take custody of an injured horse near Milton-Freewater reported a veterinarian had to euthanize the animal.

Mae, a thoroughbred, lived in a pasture on Hurst Lane north of the small city. Last year the horse suffered an injury to its left rear hoof. Nila Jackson who lives near the pasture told law enforcement and the *East Oregonian* the animal was not receiving treatment. Cindy Mader learned of the horse and offered to take it off the

hands of Chris Keeling, who was in Portland and claimed he could no longer care for the animal.

Mader said she brought a veterinarian with her Friday to check out the horse, and the news was not good.

Mae was sweaty and in a fever, Mader said, and the infection from the hoof had spread into her hip. Mader said she also talked to people who were familiar with the horse, and they claimed it was 200 to 300 pounds underweight.

Mader said the veterinarian determined Mae was too far gone to save.

"At least now she's in a better place," Mader said.

Mader, though, would not identify the veterinarian.

Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan said the death of the horse will not stymie an investigation into possible animal neglect, but the sheriff's office will need to talk to the veterinarian.

Such accounts can carry a lot of weight in neglect cases, Rowan said, because veterinarians are experts who can speak about living conditions and the health of the animal. That kind of information can negate the

need for a necropsy, Rowan said.

Keeling claimed last week in spite of what looked like an injured hoof, the horse was not in need of medical help. The *East Oregonian* left him a message Monday. He did not return the call.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

ANNUAL HERITAGE HOME TOUR

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Heritage Station Museum
Two tour sessions offered:
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Call Heritage Station Museum at 541-276-0012 for information



BRIEFLY Misaligned track caused derailment

PENDLETON — Union Pacific has determined a track out of alignment caused the March 2 derailment of a train near Meacham Creek.

A total of 10 cars jumped the tracks in a narrow, steep-sloped canyon in the Blue Mountains where the tracks run on an embankment overlooking the creek. One of the tank cars was carrying residual liquefied petroleum gas, and another was loaded with approximately 20,000 gallons of a compound used to make glues and sealants.

No hazardous materials were leaked into the environment. An EPA spokesman said last week the wreck had been cleared.

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