

Barreto asks Brown to reconsider stance on refugees

East Oregonian

Rep. Greg Barreto (R-Cove) asked Governor Kate Brown to change her position on accepting Syrian refugees in Oregon.

Brown, a Democrat, said Monday the state will continue to accept Syrian refugees while more than half the governors in the U.S. indicated they wanted to block those from the war-torn Middle

Eastern country.

Congress voted Thursday to effectively suspend admission of Syrian and Iraqi refugees into the U.S. The legislation was approved with bipartisan support, including 47 Democrats and 252 Republicans.

Barreto, who represents District 58 including eastern Umatilla County, wrote a letter to Brown on Friday asking the governor to "reevaluate her position on this

issue" and "demand a secure and foolproof vetting process" before allowing refugees from Syria into the state.

State governors don't have the authority to reject refugees from specific countries, but can seek to reduce state services provided to them.

"We are all extremely opposed to your position and are very concerned for the safety and

security of the people in the state," Barreto wrote, adding that while the refugees are in need of help and protection, "compassion does not trump prudence and common sense when calculating the risk."

He states that there are ways to help without putting Oregon at risk of terror attacks like the one last Friday in Paris that killed 129 people.

Rather than continuing to accept

Syrian refugees, Barreto said efforts should be made to create a process for vetting refugees who may be "on a mission to deceive and destroy." He claimed the refugee program is "another vehicle they are using to continue their agenda of terror."

According to the state Department of Human Services, only one Syrian refugee has settled in Oregon in the last three years.

PENDLETON

Fledgling church meets in home of congregants

Priest once worked as newscaster for Armed Services Radio

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

"For where two or three gather in my name, I am there with them."

Father Vincent Varnas, dressed in the vestments of an Anglican priest, processed to the altar, paused and bowed his head toward a wooden cross.

The two worshippers in the room joined him in a hymn.

"Oh, God of earth and altar, bow down and hear our cry."

Around them, instead of pews, were a sofa with fluffy pillows and a couple of love seats. So far, Father Vince, as he is known, shepherds a congregation of two: Merle and Linda Johnson. They will worship in the Johnson's living room until the fledgling congregation of St. Paul's Anglican Church grows. The brand-new home church at 119 S.W. Quinney Place is one of only three Anglican churches in the state, along with those in Wilsonville and Jacksonville. Merle assists Varnas by reading from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. Linda leads the hymns.

On this recent Sunday,



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Father Vincent Varnas swings a thurible to release incense during worship recently at the home of Merle and Linda Johnson in Pendleton.

they sang, knelt, prayed and praised God together. Occasionally, Linda tapped laptop keys to unleash piano accompaniment for worship songs. The music flowed from tiny speakers.

Varnas spoke in a voice worthy of a radio announcer. Indeed, the Air Force veteran once worked as a newscaster for Armed Forces Radio and Television Service at Sondrestrom Air Base in Greenland. The 72-year-old comes late to the ministry after a career as a labor relations manager with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In a backhanded sort of way, his radio voice provided a path to the priesthood.

"My wife said, 'You have a good speaking voice. Why don't you volunteer to be a lector?'" said Varnas.

Varnas, "a cradle Roman

Catholic," attended a Catholic church with his wife at the time. He decided to give lay reading a try and became a lector at their parish. Patricia later encouraged him to become a deacon and he enrolled at the Mt. Angel Seminary to earn a master's in theology.

Sadly, Patricia died of lung cancer two weeks before Vincent graduated.

Varnas said his plans to become a deacon derailed shortly thereafter. Not wanting to leave his ailing wife on weekends, he had failed to attend a weekend program required by the Archdiocese.

His bid to become a deacon was denied. An Anglican bishop encouraged him to pursue priesthood with the Anglican Church instead. Varnas prayed about

the idea and ultimately made the switch.

"I believe God was calling me to do it," he said. "How could I say no to God?"

Varnas previously served as one of the priests at St. Michael's Anglican Church in Wilsonville. That's where he met the Johnsons. Eventually, Merle and Linda moved to Pendleton to be near family and operate their business, the Johnson Insurance Agency. Though they once worshipped as Baptists, something clicked for them when they ventured inside the Anglican Church.

Varnas, who now divides his time between Wilsonville and Pendleton, agreed to help them start an Anglican Church in Pendleton, which had no church of that denomination.

"We just wanted to worship as Anglicans," Linda said.

Merle said he loves the formal book of prayer which addresses a multitude of life's concerns.

The Anglican Church, historically known as the Church of England, bears a close resemblance to the Roman Catholic Church.

They will continue to meet each Sunday at 10 a.m. in their living room until the space becomes too crowded.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

HERMISTON

EOTEC gets new chair, new project manager

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith will become the new chair of the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center authority in January. The board appointed him to the post Friday.

The project will also be under new management. Rob Dreier was introduced by Frew Development Group as the new project manager.

Todd Nelson, executive vice president of Frew Development Group, said Gary Winsand, the former on-site project manager, was no longer with the company. No further explanation was given.

Dreier, most recently of Lake Oswego, is the Frew Development Group's vice president of the Pacific Northwest division. He will oversee the company's development of EOTEC and of the Blue Mountain Community College bond project. He said after the meeting that he would hire additional help as needed.

"I'm just trying to become immersed in the project," he said.

Friday's meeting included a brief financial report by city finance director Amy Palmer, who noted that Tourism Promotion Assessment revenues were 11 percent higher than

"I'm just trying to become immersed in the project."

— Rob Dreier, new project manager

initial projections. She said EOTEC would probably receive the \$600,000 pledged by the city in March.

The month's construction update was given by Nelson, who noted things were "going well" on the site and that design for the rodeo arena was on schedule to be completed by February 2016. Construction of the event exhibitor center, currently underway, is expected to wrap up in March 2016.

Board member Dan Dorran said he wanted to take a moment to thank Frew Development Group for its help in developing documents, brochures and presentations to help the EOTEC board in its push to raise an additional \$2.1 million.

"I would just like to point out that Frew has really helped us out with the additional fundraising," he said.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

HERMISTON

City council to vote on marijuana again

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

Third time could be the charm for the Hermiston City Council on Monday as it votes on an ordinance that would send the question of marijuana dispensaries to the voters.

The ordinance would put a measure on the November 2016 ballot that would ban all marijuana dispensaries and commercial grow sites from Hermiston.

Parliamentary procedure derailed the vote the previous two meetings. An ordinance must be passed with at least five votes in favor, but it also must be rejected with at least five votes against. An absence and an abstention caused a 4-2 vote in favor of the ordinance during the council's Nov. 9 meeting. According to the city's charter, the ordinance will automatically be placed on the city council agenda each meeting until it is passed or rejected by a five-person majority.

On Monday the council will also vote on a resolution to support the Hermiston Fire District and Stanfield Fire District's effort to place a measure on the ballot asking voters for a new, combined fire district. A similar measure failed in November 2014, with 56 percent of voters in the Hermiston and Stanfield area voting against it.

The council will also consider a resolution to adopt a new employee handbook,

which was the subject of a city council work session earlier in the month. The handbook includes new policies on sick leave and other benefits, and would give a two percent pay raise to bilingual staff.

After hearing reports on finances, committees and the results of the city's branding survey, the council will meet

in executive session to discuss the negotiation of a property transaction.

Prior to the council's regular meeting, the council will discuss the municipal court at 6 p.m.

The council meets at 7 p.m. at city hall, 180 N.E. Second St., on the second and fourth Monday of every month.

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