

‘B’ corps wince at possible tax exemption

By **HILLARY BORRUD**
Capital Press

SALEM — Companies that would be exempt from a proposed corporate gross receipts tax say the exemption could undermine the reputation of a movement to encourage environmentally and socially responsible businesses.

The union-backed tax measure planned for the 2016 ballot would require certain corporations to pay a 2.5 percent tax on sales in Oregon greater than \$25 million. The measure exempts companies registered with the state as “benefit companies.”

Legislation passed in 2013

allows corporations to register with the state as “benefit companies” in order to put shareholders on notice that the company will not only seek profits, but will also pursue other goals such as sustainability. These companies are supposed to work with a third party, such as the certification nonprofit B Lab, to assess their operations, and then document positive impacts in annual reports. Registering for the corporate status currently does not affect companies’ Oregon tax bills.

The proposed tax exemption generated concern among some proponents of the benefit company model, who said it

could damage the program’s reputation if the designation becomes popular as a strategy to avoid taxes.

“The B corporation movement is about having socially responsible companies, not getting tax breaks,” said Tom Kelly, president and owner of the remodeling and custom home construction company Neil Kelly. Neil Kelly is a registered benefit company, and Kelly said the exemption could impact “the B corp brand.”

“It certainly has the potential to attract companies that will become B corporations whose only intention is to get a tax break, which will dilute

the value of the B corp movement pretty significantly,” Kelly said.

Nik Blosser, CEO of Celilo Group Media and chair of the board at Sokol Blosser winery, said he is also concerned about the exemption. Both businesses are registered benefit companies.

“We certainly didn’t become a B corp to get tax benefits, and I think that somewhat undermines the point for B corps,” said Blosser, who has not yet taken a position on the corporate sales tax proposal. “If the measure passes, I think we would want to advocate that the Legislature modify that part.”

SALMON: Basin still has 13 fish runs listed as endangered

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and wildlife at BPA.

There were 3,485 chinook counted at Three Mile Falls Dam on the Umatilla River near Hermiston. That’s slightly more than the 3,259 in 2014, and less than the 4,117 fish in 2013.

Coho counts fell back to Earth after a monster year in 2014 — 3,076 in 2015, compared to more than 14,000 a year ago at Three Mile Falls Dam. Steelhead were much lower, with just 558 fish versus 1,480 in 2014.

Kat Brigham, who has served on the Board of Trustees for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation as well as the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, said such anomalies used to be purely attributed to ocean survival — something that’s no doubt important, but was a convenient way of dismissing environmental damage and flaws in the dams’ passage systems.

“Ocean survival is an important piece, but nobody can really determine what good ocean survival is,” Brigham said. “We still have to look at what needs to be done to protect our fish as both adults and juveniles.”

Brigham said she is excited about this year’s fall returns, which is the result of hard work between the four CRITFC tribes, Northwest states and federal government.

But there are still challenges to reestablishing sustainable populations, she said. The basin still has 13 fish runs listed on the Endangered Species Act, and a changing climate won’t make things any easier.

The CTUIR and Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife began trucking spring salmon up past Three Mile Falls Dam in May this year, much earlier than normal as low flows and warm water put additional stress on the

fish.

Coming up with a plan for endangered fish require a holistic approach, Brigham said. No part of the restoration effort is more important than the other.

“If it was a real simple answer, I hope we would have found it and got it done,” Brigham said. “It’s not just the drought. You have to look at everything.”

Brigham said she understands the BPA has to consider costs, and irrigation will always be a part of the basin. They are striving to come up with a balance that will ultimately allow everyone to survive. She said the CTUIR’s Umatilla River Vision is potentially a model for other interests to consider.

“It’s an ongoing project to try and protect the habitat and fish going over dams,” she said. “We are protecting our culture, our way of life and treaty rights.”

Not all Northwest fish runs fared well in 2015. Unseasonably warm temperatures heated river water enough to all but decimate endangered Snake River sockeye, though biologists did release 600 hatchery sockeye into Idaho’s Redfish and Pettit Lakes to spawn naturally. Research shows the offspring of sockeye spawned naturally in lakes return at higher rates than those simply released from the hatchery.

Paul Lumley, CRITFC executive director, said the successes in 2015 highlight what they are capable of accomplishing as a region when everyone works together.

“Yes, there is more work to be done to address things like climate change, water quality and water temperatures, but this success provides the confidence to achieve full salmon recovery,” Lumley said.

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OFFICER: Department more prepared to respond to situations

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position. Neither officer’s role is traditional, he said.

“It’s not about policing the schools,” Edmiston said. “It’s about building relationships. It’s not just relationships with the kids. It’s relationships with the staff and the parents. There is value in this.”

Sandoval said, despite initial reluctance to the idea, she loves being in the schools and the opportunity to make a difference.

“For us as officers, myself and Tim, being in the nontraditional roles we are in is going to teach these children, who will grow up to be adults, a different way of looking at the police,” she said. “I love it, because it’s proactive. It’s positive. I think it’s a win-win on both sides.”



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Erica Sandoval, of the Hermiston Police Department, eats lunch with students at Highland Hills Elementary School on Monday as part of her duties as youth services officer.

dren through the Hermiston Community Accountability Board, a program that provides juveniles the opportunity to avoid the justice system through compliance with the board’s directives.

“Any time you have an opportunity to have our kids interact in a positive manner with law enforcement at a young age is a great plus for us,” Kay said. “It allows Erica to engage with some of our youngest, potentially at-risk kids. She’s absolutely a rock star at that stuff.”

Highland Hills Elementary School counselor Elizabeth Morgan said it was great to have a visible police presence in the schools. She said Sandoval is not only a positive role model, she can also help students have a better understanding of what police officers do.

Sandoval said she occasionally eats lunch at the different schools. She is present when kids arrive and leave for the day. She visits classrooms for special events.

At a Halloween event

about a month after she started in her new role, Sandoval said students’ parents were approaching her, telling her how much the students were talking about her at home.

“That was significant for me, because I really didn’t do anything other than going to the schools and just trying to make a presence there,” she said.

Improving policing through relationships

Edmiston said when Hermiston School District Superintendent Fred Maiocco pitched the idea for an officer at the elementary schools, it immediately made sense from a law enforcement perspective.

Police and school officials have together conducted tabletop exercises annually for several years to prepare for catastrophic events, he said. Two officers with firsthand knowledge of the schools and district policies

would make the department even more prepared to respond in a chaotic situation, he said.

Through positive police-student relationships, he said many poor decisions may even be prevented.

“A lot of people may not see the extreme value in this,” Edmiston said. “We are getting into the schools and having positive interactions, making positive changes with the youth, before they really start getting into decision making on their own.”

Sandoval said many students she met through the Community Accountability Board maintained relationships with her after they completed the program. Some have returned to Hermiston with college degrees and told her they chose a new path, so as not to disappoint her.

Sandoval’s direct supervisor, Capt. Travis Eynon, who is also a member of the Umatilla School Board, said he believed adding the youth services officer was the single most significant action the department has taken all year.

“It’s an opportunity for synergism with the schools and the police department,” he said. “The two parts together are stronger than the two parts apart.”

COUNCIL: Will also discuss utility increase

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The deadline for the council to ban marijuana sales without voter approval is the last week in December. That means if the deadlock remains, the only thing standing in the way of establishing a marijuana retailer in Pendleton is language in the city business license ordinance that prohibits businesses that violate federal law. Kerns has also cautioned against continuing to lean on that defense because of an open court case between Oregon and the city of Cave Junction that could invalidate that legal maneuvering.

In addition to marijuana, another topic promising lengthy discussions is a pair of resolutions that will significantly raise water and sewer rates to pay for utility infrastructure.

Under the staff recommendation, water and sewer rates will rise by 10.5 percent every year for five years.

During that time, the average customer’s bill will increase from \$70 per month to \$116 per month by 2020.

Even with the swift increase, staff estimates the cost of water and sewer will still be significantly lower than the current rates for natural gas, power and telephone use.

The staff report also detailed the utility discount program available to low-income and fixed-income residents, which is administered through Community Action Program of East Central Oregon.

Each year, the city sets aside \$10,000 to assist program participants, who can only become eligible if

they meet the city’s poverty guidelines and have received a shut-off notice or have had their utility service terminated.

The meeting will be at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Avenue, Tuesday at 7 p.m.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

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December 10 • 6:30-8:30pm
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