

Senators introduce wildfire funding amendment

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden is once again working with Idaho Republican Mike Crapo on legislation to fix wildfire funding. Wyden and Crapo introduced an amendment to the Senate’s proposed energy bill on Tuesday that would end “fire-borrowing,” where land management agencies shift money from other programs to cover the cost of fighting large wildfires. Wyden described fire-borrowing as “budgetary quicksand” that drags down every program at the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. The amendment would establish a new Wildfire Disaster Relief Fund —

which is similar to how the federal government pays for other natural disasters. A summary of the amendment says it will free up roughly \$300 million in funding for active land management and fire prevention. “We know that disaster-scale wildfires are going to continue to be a threat,” Crapo said. “We can better prepare for the increasing costs of wildland fire suppression by providing land managers and firefighters the certainty needed to plan and allocate resources properly without robbing from other priorities during each fire season.” Congress passed a spending bill in December that increased fire funding for one year, but the senators said this amendment will

provide a long-term solution. The legislation has support from 21 co-sponsors in the Senate, 145 co-sponsors in the House and more than 250 groups representing hunters, anglers, timber companies and conservationists. The amendment also includes several provisions for forest management, including measures to fast-track thinning projects recommended by a collaborative working group. Collaboratives must include scientists, conservationists and land managers, as well as local governments, tribes and industry. Projects would still need to comply with local forest plans and federal laws, but could move forward more quickly if they meet certain criteria.

Finally, the amendment includes several environmental provisions such as permanently authorizing the Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails Sedimentation Program, which lets the agency decommission roads and replace other unnatural fish barriers. Wyden followed up Tuesday’s energy bill amendment with another on Wednesday, this time working with fellow Oregon Democrat Jeff Merkley. They proposed requiring the Energy Information Administration to publish monthly data about new flammable liquids carried by rail. The EIA already started publishing crude-by-rail data in March. This would expand the program to provide the same infor-

mation for ethanol and liquefied natural gas. “Railroads have become synonymous with shipping crude oil and ethanol, and in a few years may well become synonymous with shipping liquefied natural gas,” Wyden said. “Taxpayers deserve timely, transparent and reliable information on flammable liquids moving through different regions by rail, and the very real safety concerns that go along with it.” The senators introduced these amendments to the Energy Policy Modernization Act, which the Senate is considering this week.

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UMATILLA

Mark Ribich appointed to city council

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Mark Ribich was appointed to fill a seat on the Umatilla city council Tuesday, although council may have to do it again. Ribich, who will fill the seat recently vacated by George Fenton, was appointed illegally by secret ballot. Ribich was one of five candidates interviewed at the beginning of the meeting. After a secret ballot vote by councilors, Mayor David Trott announced that Ribich had been selected and he immediately took an oath of office and joined the council for the remainder of the meeting. But that kind of vote is not allowed in Oregon. The state attorney general’s public records and meetings manual reads: “Written ballots are not prohibited, but each ballot must identify the member voting and the vote must be announced. Secret ballots are prohibited.” Umatilla city officials could not be reached for comment on the issue before deadline. Ribich has been serving on the city’s code enforcement board and is the chairman of Blue Mountain Occupational Safety and Health Conference Planning Committee. He is retired from Boeing. When asked what he would do to increase citizen involvement with the



Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Mark Ribich participates in his first meeting as Umatilla city councilor.

city, Ribich said he thought there were opportunities to improve the city’s website, begin using social media and increase the city’s quarterly newsletter to a monthly publication. He also said he was interested in doing more to reach out to Umatilla’s younger residents. “You have to go after the youth of America and get them to these meetings,” he said. His term will run until November. He said he applied for the council

seat because he wanted to work toward positive change in Umatilla, and he was especially interested in helping the city come up with new strategies to fill empty storefronts downtown. Other applicants for the position were Graig Gunsolley, Craig Simpson, Lyle Smith and Kristie Wyant.

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PENDLETON

Retirees join Ward 3, at-large council races

East Oregonian

As Pendleton city councilors decide not to run for re-election, those hoping to take their place are beginning to step up. Don Bennett, a political novice and a retiree who said he spent 27 years in the “state service,” filed Wednesday to run in Ward 3. That seat is currently held by Tom Young, who said earlier this week he would not run for re-election. Ward 3 includes the downtown area, South Hill and Riverside. The at-large seat had already attracted two candidates and on Wednesday, it drew one more. Paul Rabitaille, a retiree who used to work in sales, filed for the at-large race, joining Rick Rohde and Jim Swearingen. While Rohde and Swearingen are vying for a term that starts in 2017, the city council is also looking to appoint a person to fill the seat for the remainder

of 2016. Candidates interested in being appointed are required to file a letter of interest with the mayor by Feb. 15 at 4 p.m. The at-large seat represents the entirety of Pendleton and anyone residing in city limits can be appointed to the seat or run for it. Despite a small surge in recent filings, no one has entered the Ward 2 and mayoral races. The incumbents for each of those seats declined to run for another term. The lone incumbent to run for re-election, Ward 1’s Becky Marks, filed for a third term Friday. Marks beat former city councilor Connie Wright to win her seat in 2008 and turned back a challenge from Joan Escudero, a former Eastern Oregon Training Center supervisor, in 2012. The filing period for all seats is open through March 8. The municipal election will be held May 17.

HERMISTON

Children’s Theater sends Dorothy to Wonderland

East Oregonian

The worlds of Oz and Wonderland collide in a stage production presented by Hermiston Parks & Recreation. Youth in third through 12th grade are invited to improve their acting skills while participating in classes that will lead to a pair of performances of “Dorothy in Wonderland.” Everyone who registers for the class will be included in the spring production as Dorothy Gale makes her way down the Yellow Brick Road. Rehearsals for the Children’s Community Theater, which begin Feb. 17, are



EO file photo

Participants in a past Hermiston Parks & Recreation drama class rehearse a scene. The spring class will stage “Dorothy in Wonderland.” Participants must register by Friday, Feb. 12.

Mondays and Wednesdays from 5:15-7:15 p.m. at Armand Larive Middle School, 1497 S.W. Ninth St.,

Hermiston. The registration fee, which is due by Friday, Feb. 12, is \$50 for Hermiston residents and \$63 for

non-residents. Auditions will be held to determine the cast for performances. No acting experience is necessary to participate. Sponsored by Desert Arts Council, the performances are Thursday, April 21 and Friday, April 22, also at Armand Larive. Each participant will receive two free tickets to share with family or friends. Regular ticket prices are \$3 at the door or \$2 for those ordered in advance. For more information, visit www.hermistonrecreation.com. To register for the acting class, call 541-667-5018 or stop by the recreation office, 180 N.E. Second St., Hermiston.

Forum highlights Oregon agriculture

PENDLETON — Gary Neal, general manager of the Port of Morrow, and Greg Juul, who has farming and packing operations in four states, will discuss Agriculture in Oregon Today during the upcoming Eastern Oregon Forum. The event is Tuesday, Feb. 9 at 7 p.m. in Science & Technology Room ST-200 at Blue Mountain Community College, 2411 N.W. Carden Ave., Pendleton. Neal, who majored in political science at Washington State University, has been with the Port of Morrow — Oregon’s second largest port — since 1989. He serves on the board of the Bank of Eastern Oregon, Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, is past president of Oregon Public Ports Association, serves on the Infrastructure Finance Authority Board for the State of Oregon

and is an active committee member with several other groups. Juul, who has a degree in agricultural business management and crop and soil science from Oregon State University, previously worked for Columbia Grain International in Portland. He returned to Umatilla County in 1995, starting a succession plan for his uncle Walt McDevitt, an owner of Royale Columbia Farms, Inc. and Bud Rich Potato, Inc. He then partnered with Troy Betz to form an operating company for irrigated agricultural production called G-2 Farming, LLC. The Eastern Oregon Forum is a collaborative effort among leaders from BMCC, IMESD, the *East Oregonian*, AAUW and Harriet Isom, former United States ambassador. For more information, call Karen Parker at 541-966-3177.

BRIEFLY

Highway 395 project begins Monday

HERMISTON — Upgrades to the Highway 395 corridor through Hermiston are set to begin Monday. The Oregon Department of Transportation announced the first step will install new traffic control signals at Jennie Avenue and upgrade the control systems at six other intersections. On Feb. 12, work will begin to upgrade 86 sidewalk ramps along the highway to meet updated ADA and safety standards. The department plans to begin the repaving part of the project, which will stretch from Southeast Fourth Street to Highway 730, in May. The majority of the work requiring lane closures will take place between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. to minimize disruption. Updates on the project will be posted at www.tinyurl.com/ODOT-Region5.

Grange plans craft sale, breakfast

HERMISTON — A flea market, craft sale and breakfast is planned at the Columbia Grange. The all-you-can-eat

breakfast is \$6. The flea market and craft sale runs Saturday from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 32339 Diagonal Blvd., Hermiston. Vendor space is available for \$8. For more information or for vendor space, call Doris at 541-567-8663 or Pat at 541-567-5706.

Oldies Night features Canadian hits, eh?

MILTON-FREEWATER — Canada had its own crop of rock ‘n’ rollers — some of their songs made it big in the United States, but others failed to catch on. Oldies Night in Milton-Freewater will look at Maple Leaf Rock. BJ the DJ will spin tunes that hit number one in both countries, like “Heart of Gold” by Neil Young. In addition, there will be songs which hit the top of the Canadian charts, but failed to chart at all south of the border, like “Cornflakes and Ice Cream” by the Lords

of London. Then there are songs which charted in both countries, but did better one place or the other, like Frank Mills’ “Music Box Dancer,” which was No. 3 on Billboard, but only No. 17 in Toronto. Nearly four dozen oldies of the Great White North from 1961-84 will be played Saturday at 7 p.m. at Wesley United Methodist Church, 816 S. Main St., Milton-Freewater. There is no admission charge. For more information, contact Bob Jones at 541-938-7028 or dubuquer@charter.net.

M-F reschedules council meeting

MILTON-FREEWATER — The Feb. 8 Milton-Freewater City Council meeting has been rescheduled. The next meeting will be Monday, Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. in the Albee Room at the Milton-Freewater Public

Library, 8 S.W. Eighth St. For more information, call 541-938-5531.



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