

# U.S. Chamber of Commerce's northwest director visits Hermiston

By **JADE MCDOWELL**  
East Oregonian

Hermiston Chamber of Commerce members got an update Tuesday on federal legislation affecting businesses.

Chris Eyler, executive director of the northwest region of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, spoke about legislative victories for business at the chamber's Business to Business luncheon.

Eyler said with an upcoming presidential election and Supreme Court nomination taking up most of the political discourse this year, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is being "realistic" about how much

it can accomplish compared to 2015.

The chamber does want to build on its success in regulatory reform, however. Eyler said the federal government's regulatory system is "out of control," costing businesses \$1.75 trillion per year to comply.

Last year Congress passed legislation to help streamline the process for dealing with multiple federal agencies, designating a point agency to shepherd the applications through the process. The legislation also required the government to make a decision on projects within five years instead of leaving them hanging indefinitely.

"You may not get the answer you want but at least you know you will get an answer," Eyler said.

New legislation supported by the chamber this year would require agencies to release the data used to make regulatory decisions and require them to justify to the public any time they choose a more expensive option. A separate piece of legislation would seek to curb the practice of regulatory law being created by environmental groups suing for changes.

"It circumvents the public process," Eyler said.

Other pieces of legislation proposed for 2016 are concerned

with improving the Affordable Care Act, which Eyler said the chamber has accepted is "here to stay," but could be improved. And the chamber is fighting proposed rules for a number of agencies. One Eyler discussed was from the Department of Labor, which would require salaried employees to be paid overtime if they make more than \$50,000 per year, instead of the current \$23,000.

The chamber also has a goal of seeing the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal passed. Eyler said 90,000 jobs in Oregon are directly supported by overseas trade and 44 percent of Oregon's exports go to countries involved in the

Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Local business owners asked Eyler for his response to Oregon's new minimum wage hike that will raise wages to \$14.75 in Portland, \$13.50 in mid-sized population areas and \$12.50 in rural counties (including Umatilla County) by 2022. He said the U.S. Chamber of Commerce generally leaves it to state and local chambers to address minimum wage hikes, but the chamber has been keeping a close eye on the fight over Oregon's unprecedented increase.

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## TAX: Bill would result in \$27.4M in new tax revenue

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Bill 4146 would allow the state to spend that money on any "tourism programs," including to subsidize the costs of events such as the track championships.

The bill would require the state's tourism commission, TravelOregon, to distribute set amounts of lodging tax revenue around the state through regional allocations and competitive grants.

In the two-year budget that begins in mid-2017, the bill would result in \$27.4 million in new tax revenue, according to an estimate from the Legislative Revenue Office. The state would send \$11 million in existing and new tax revenue to regional tourism agencies around the state during that period, and award \$5.4 million in competitive grants to encourage tourism.

Lawmakers in the House were originally scheduled to hold a floor vote on the bill Feb. 19, but in response to criticism from both Portland-area tourism officials and rural legislators, Nathanson asked for it to be referred back to the House Committee on Revenue for changes.

Rural Republicans said

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— Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner

hotel and motel owners in their districts did not expect to benefit from the additional tax revenues, while tourism officials in the Portland metropolitan area worried that doubling the state lodging tax would put Portland at a competitive disadvantage to other cities with lower tax rates.

Democrats from the coast spoke and a Republican from Eastern Oregon also spoke in favor of the bill. "I'm going to support this bill because what's good for tourism is good for the coast," said Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis, although he added that "most of the people that visit dwellings on the coast are from your districts, not from out of state."

Rep. Caddy McKeown, D-Coos Bay, is a chief sponsor of the bill and had high praise for the 2021 track championship.

McKeown said the event will take place at the track center of the United States and "arguably the world," and broadcast in hundreds

of countries. "There will be people traveling here to train," McKeown said. "There will be a spotlight on this state of the magnitude that is mind boggling. I'm very proud of the opportunity that we have to bring visitors from across the state to our small state."

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, said tourism is not a major industry in his district but he expects the bill will benefit other communities around the state.

"Folks are not coming to District 57 for tourism related reasons," Smith said. "They don't stop in Rufus or Biggs for an afternoon of tourism ... We're industrial, we're agricultural." However, Smith said this bill is about the good of Oregon as a whole.

Rep. Gene Whisnant, R-Sunriver, voted against the bill and said it would make it more difficult for cities and counties to increase local lodging taxes, which Whisnant said provide a greater benefit to those communities.

## LAWSUIT: City denies negligence on Fourth Street water line

Continued from 1A

The city admitted a six-inch water line running under Southeast Fourth Street experienced an "unexpected fracture," causing "some water" to collect on the property, but denied any negligence.

"Plaintiffs failed to take measure to protect their property when they knew or should have known pipe failures could occur and had previously occurred, and they failed to create an adequate French drain or other system to divert

water around their property, thereby contributing to their damage," Warren wrote.

Neither Blanc nor Warren returned requests for comment as of press time.

While the city has specifically denied negligence on the Fourth Street water line, officials have previously acknowledged that the city's water system as a whole is in need of serious maintenance.

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## COUNCIL: Changes in jail policies have increased inmates from 135 to 187

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The department now has matching uniforms and vehicle decals. Before, he said, vehicles were breaking down on the way to respond to emergencies but now he has implemented a rotation for replacing them before that happens.

Rowan said one of the most frequent compliments he gets is on upgrades in the efficiency of the civil division. Rowan said the office used to need more than 45 days to process concealed carry permits, but now they're processed in only a couple of days.

He also noted changes in jail policies, which have increased the number of inmates from 135 to 187. Before he took office, Rowan said there were times when he would bring someone to jail and complete the paperwork, only to have the inmate ask him for a ride home on his way out the door because they had already been released. That doesn't happen anymore, he said.

Councilor John Kirwan said he was happy to see

**"I would say overall our satisfaction with the dispatch center is not where it needs to be."**

— John Kirwan, Hermiston city councilor

Rowan at a city council meeting after not seeing him there for a couple of years. He said the changes to jail policy had made a noticeable difference in keeping offenders off the streets, but he was less pleased with how things had gone with the city's decision to combine dispatch services with the county.

"I would say overall our satisfaction with the dispatch center is not where it needs to be," Kirwan said. "To be a collaborative effort you have to have collaboration."

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## OBAMA: Proposal would transfer 35 of the 91 detainees to other countries

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the U.S. a new facility would be located and whether it could be completed by the end of Obama's term. Moving detainees to U.S. soil is currently prohibited under U.S. law and lawmakers have shown little interest in removing the restrictions.

"We will review President Obama's plan but since it includes bringing dangerous terrorists to facilities in U.S. communities, he knows that the bipartisan will of Congress has already been expressed against that proposal," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said Obama had yet to convince Americans that moving detainees to U.S. soil is "smart or safe."

"It is against the law — and it will stay against the law," Ryan said.

Even Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a former prisoner of war and an advocate of closing the prison, called Obama's report a "vague menu of options," which does not include a policy for dealing with future terrorist detainees.

Obama has "missed a major chance to convince the Congress and the American people that he has a responsible plan to close the Guantanamo Bay detention facility," he said.

It's not clear whether that chance ever existed. Momentum to close the facility has slowed dramatically under Obama's tenure. Congress remains deadlocked on far less contentious matters, and the issue has little resonance on the presidential campaign trail.

Still, for Obama, the facility stands as a major unfulfilled promise and a painful reminder of the limits on his power: His first executive order sketched out a timeline for closing the prison, but was ultimately derailed by Congress.

The White House has not ruled out the possibility that the president may again attempt to close the prison through executive

action — a move that would directly challenge Congress' authority. The plan submitted Tuesday does not address that option.

The proposal underscores the administration's strategy of shrinking the population, hoping the massive cost for housing the diminished population would ultimately make closure inevitable.

Under the plan, roughly 35 of the 91 current detainees will be transferred to other countries in the coming months, leaving up to 60 detainees who are either facing trial by military commission or have been determined to be too dangerous to release but are not facing charges.

Those detainees would be relocated to a U.S. facility that could cost up to \$475 million to build, but would ultimately be offset by as much as \$180 million per year in operating cost savings. The annual operating cost for Guantanamo is \$445 million. The U.S. facilities would cost between \$265 million and \$305 million to operate each year,

according to the proposal.

The plan considers 13 different locations in the U.S., including seven existing prison facilities in Colorado, South Carolina and Kansas, as well as six other locations at current correctional facilities on state, federal or military sites in several states. It also notes that there could be all new construction on existing military bases. The plan doesn't recommend a preferred site and the cost estimates are meant to provide a starting point for a conversation with Congress.

More detailed spending figures, which are considered classified, will be provided to Congress. Lawmakers have been demanding the Guantanamo plan for months, and those representing South Carolina, Kansas and Colorado have voiced opposition to housing the detainees in their states.

"We must safeguard the missions on Fort Leavenworth, the nearly 14,000 military and civilian personnel and their family members, and the thousands

of Kansans who live in the Leavenworth community," Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., said in a statement Tuesday.

Advocates of closing Guantanamo say the prison has long been a recruiting tool for militant groups and that holding extremists suspected of violent acts indefinitely without charges or trial sparks anger and dismay among U.S. allies.

Opponents, however, say changing the detention center's ZIP code won't eliminate that problem.

Obama's proposal faced criticism even from those who endorse closing the detention center. His initial campaign pledge was widely viewed as a promise to end the practice of detaining prisoners indefinitely without charge, not to bring that practice to the U.S., said Naureen Shah, director of Amnesty International USA's Security and Human Rights Program.

"Whatever the president proposes, even if it doesn't come to fruition, the administration is changing the goal posts on this issue," she said.

### STUDENT OF THE WEEK

**Megan Glynn**  
PILOT ROCK HIGH SCHOOL

Pilot Rock High School student of the week is senior Megan Glynn. Megan has many outstanding qualities, but foremost is her positive attitude in all situations. Her infectious smile makes anyone she meets in the hallway feel better immediately. Megan is the senior class president, National Honor Society president, and a member of Key club and leadership class. She is also involved in athletics and can be seen after school sprinting around town in preparation for the upcoming track season. Megan likes to set goals and is looking forward to attending college in the fall.

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