

Gov. Brown reflects on first year, future goals

PORTLAND (AP) — Delivering her second state of the state address, Gov. Kate Brown on Friday reflected on her “unexpected” first year in office by touting achievements on minimum wage and affordable housing. She also acknowledged darker times like the Umpqua Community College shooting and the Malheur Wildlife Refuge armed occupation. Looking ahead, Brown — who faces two other Democrats in Oregon’s May



Brown

17 primary to finish the remaining two years of John Kitzhaber’s term — laid out a wide range of issues she’d like to tackle in the 2017 legislative session. She said she’s “determined” to improve Oregon’s high school graduation rate, among the lowest in the country, and also wants to revive a gun control bill that died this year that would’ve closed the so-called “Charleston loophole” by requiring that background checks clear before guns can be purchased.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A group of international tour operators react as the Happy Canyon oxen crew is paraded through the Happy Canyon Arena on Thursday in Pendleton.

PENDLETON: Impressed with friendliness, hospitality

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Travel Pendleton was helping out with the Eastern Oregon leg of the trip, which included the Painted Hills and Dayville. The tour arrived in Pendleton Thursday night, where participants were treated to cowboy hat fittings at Hamley & Co., roping lessons at Happy Canyon and a chuck wagon dinner. “I didn’t know the Wild West was in Oregon,” Corine den Hartog of Utrecht, Netherlands, said. She had always associated states like Texas and Wyoming with Western culture, but was impressed with Pendleton’s offerings. Jane Mackay of Adelaide, Australia, had fantasized about the American West as little girl, imagining herself as Annie Oakley during games with her brother. When it came time to live out her Oakley fantasy during the roping lesson, she ended up wrangling herself

instead of the target. Regardless, Mackay said she’d love to return to Eastern Oregon on vacation and expand upon their brief trip with visits to Hells Canyon and Oregon Trail historical sites. Nora Saar of Hamburg, Germany, enjoyed all those aspects but was especially impressed with Pendleton’s friendliness and hospitality. Travel Oregon is hoping that the tour operators’ positive impressions will help increase the state’s international tourism, which has been trending upward in recent years. Travel Oregon reports 1.6 million visitors and \$400 million in economic impact from Road Rally-participating countries in 2014. Beard said the event was a chance to bolster the local tourism industry. He said tourism in Umatilla County generates \$140 million, with Pendleton the most tourist-friendly city in the county.

EOTEC: Holding off on demolition of old rodeo arena

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threw superstition to the wind. On Friday the board also awarded a bid for audio visual equipment to KlassTech Audio Visual Services of Beaverton. The company came in at the lowest of two bidders with a package of \$89,397. The bid included the installation of a variety of projectors, podiums, speakers, screens, microphones and other tech needed to run everything from meetings to concerts in the building. No one from the fund-raising committee was present, but Smith said they had raised between \$1.8 and \$1.9 million at last count. “They’re very hopeful

about some commitments they need to finalize so they’re going to continue working past the April 1 deadline,” he said. The money raised by the committee will allow EOTEC to build a third barn, permanent seats in the rodeo arena and utility hookups to the extended stay area, plus purchase its own animal pens. Smith also said that he talked with Hermiston School District about holding off on demolition of the rodeo arena at the current fairgrounds until after May 2017, so that the high school and college rodeos would not have to leave Hermiston for a year. They wanted a formal request to consider, he said, but they were “very open” to the idea.

MARTIN: Judge called his actions ghastly and despicable

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bring the child back. But hopefully people will heal, life will go on. We miss her every day.” Martin stared straight ahead through most of the court proceedings. He addressed Circuit Court Judge Christopher Brauer when given the opportunity to speak. “My family and friends are behind me in this,” Martin said. “They know what happened. That’s all I have to say, your honor.” Brauer sentenced Martin to 10 years incarceration for the manslaughter charge, 14 months for the assault charge and 30 months for the criminal

mistreatment charge, as well as three years of post-prison supervision, anger management and parenting classes. The charges will be served concurrently, and Martin will receive credit for time served. Brauer called the incident ghastly and despicable. “You will have a good long time to think about what you’ve done, but no amount of thought ... no amount of rehabilitation can correct what you chose to do and the result of your choices,” Brauer said, adding he thought Harris’ words were worth repeating: “‘This will never make sense, no matter what happens today in this courtroom.’ It just won’t.”

IRRIGATION: Cold Springs about 70 percent full

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farms should be able to make their stored water last longer into the season. Right now, Kopacz said growers are focused on watering their wheat and cattle pastures, while getting a head start on vegetables like potatoes and onions. Corn should be planted in the next week or so, he said. The SID covers about 10,800 acres of high-value farmland. It is something of a special case, since the district has 34,700 acre-feet of water guaranteed through the Umatilla Basin Project — an acre-foot being the amount of water it takes to cover 1 acre of land with 1 foot of water. Once the Umatilla River drops below a certain point, the district switches over to pumping irrigation water from the Columbia River. In exchange, the SID leaves its water right from McKay Reservoir in stream to protect native salmon and steelhead runs during periods of low flow. Kopacz said the program, which was passed by Congress in 1988, has been valuable not only to protect fish, but it has also removed a lot of the guess-work for irrigators. “Before we had the exchange, growers had to ask whether McKay was going to fill or not,” Kopacz said. “Now, they already know we’re going to have water for next year.” Not everyone has that luxury. The Westland Irrigation District, which has about 14,750 acres within its boundaries, isn’t on the exchange and still depends entirely on Mother Nature for their water supply. Once it runs out, they’re forced to shut off. District Manager Mike Wick said this year looks much better than last, with the basin’s snowpack at 98 percent as of Thursday. Mountain snow is critical because it acts as a natural storage system for water, gradually replenishing streams and rivers into the summer. The longer they can pull live flows from the Umatilla River, the longer



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A center-pivot irrigation system operates over a field of alfalfa and grass mix on Thursday east of Stanfield.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Both the Westland Irrigation District and the Stanfield Irrigation District rely on water rights from the McKay Reservoir.

McKay Reservoir has to fill and the later into the season they can irrigate, Wick said. “At this point, we should have an average to maybe above-average year,” he said. “If we run to the end of September, that’s a pretty good year.” Last year, Westland was forced to shut off its irrigation by mid-August. The district began irrigating this year in early March, and as of Friday, McKay was 86 percent full. Wick said he’d be disappointed if the reservoir doesn’t fill, but he has learned not to try and predict the weather. District Watermaster Greg Silbernagel said April and May rainfall will go a long way toward determining how the rest of the

water year goes. The state allows irrigation on most of the Umatilla River from March through October, though Silbernagel’s office must continue to meet target flows for fish. The cutoff point for SID on the exchange program is 250 cubic feet per second. The Hermiston and West Extension irrigation districts are also part of the Columbia exchange program, with HID using its flows out of the Umatilla River to store at Cold Springs Reservoir. The 9,600 acre district is then eligible for credits to draw out of the Columbia, if necessary. HID Manager Annette Kirkpatrick said Cold Springs is about 70 percent full, which combined with

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the district’s exchange credits should bring them close to a full water year. Irrigation out of the reservoir started Thursday morning. “This year is going to be better than last year,” Kirkpatrick said. “We’re not filled to capacity, but this year is definitely looking like an improvement.” Beverly Bridgewater, manager of the West Extension Irrigation District, said they began diverting their irrigation water March 18. She agreed last year was difficult, but said the one positive was it got farmers thinking more about conservation. “I think we’re going to have a really good season, because we’re all experienced paying attention to our water,” Bridgewater said.

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