



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Blake Bailey, a junior at Stanfield High School, answers questions Wednesday about the Columbia Basin Student Home Building Program for videographers Paul Ramsey (left) and John Gurney, who are making a video for the Energy Trust of Oregon.

HOUSE: Saving energy saves money

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comes back into the house through various unsealed points.

Corey Mason, a Hermiston student, said he learned a lot about how hot and cold air move around a house, and the importance of sealing up every possible route for air to escape.

"I didn't realize even a little nail hole can make such a difference," he said.

Mason said it was important to the students to build the "most efficient and best-looking house" they could, but he was also glad

he was learning about energy efficiency so he could know what to fix to lower his own energy bill when he becomes a homeowner someday.

Rodney Carey of Stanfield said he was happy for the opportunity to learn more about ways to seal up vulnerable parts of the home to keep heated or cooled air from escaping.

"Otherwise you're losing money," he said.

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HEALTH: New tax is \$1 per \$1,000 assessed value

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went back to the drawing board.

The district passed a 5-year, 50-cent tax levy in November 2014, allowing it to retake responsibility for emergency services at the end of 2015 and buy it time for a more permanent solution.

Redrawing the district was that solution.

Starting July 1, the East Umatilla County Health District will dissolve and become the East Umatilla County Ambulance Area Health District.

The new name also comes with a permanent tax rate of \$1 per assessed \$1,000, which will help boost the district's revenue from \$217,000 to an estimated \$394,183. The total cost of running the district is \$390,177.

While the district expansion will allow it to tax more of the communities it serves, the district will also cede some of its territory to the south, which is now covered by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reser-

vation Fire Department.

Grimes, the district's office manager, said the district board will soon conduct more comprehensive revenue projections with the intention of hiring one or two more paramedics if the projected budget allows it.

That would be welcome news to the agencies that provide mutual aid to the area, which includes the CTUIR, Milton-Freewater Rural Fire Department and Ambulance and the Pendleton Fire Department.

Fire Chief Mike Ciraulo said he was excited to hear the news that the district passed the ballot measures.

The district's diminished resources meant Pendleton would have to respond to more east county calls, and although he was happy to provide aid where it was needed, Ciraulo said it spread his department's resources thin, especially when it came to responding to Pendleton emergencies.

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WORLD BRIEFLY

Extensive cultural damage found in historic Iraqi city

NIMRUD, Iraq (AP) — Nearly a month into the fight to retake Mosul, government forces pushed Islamic State militants out of nearby Nimrud, home to some of Iraq's richest archaeological treasures. And when soldiers finally surveyed the extremists' destruction of the ancient sites, one said that those who carried it out "don't have a place in humanity."

Intricate reliefs that once stood at the gates to the magnificent Assyrian palace lay in pieces: stone carvings of a face, half of a claw, part of a wing, fragments of script.

In April 2015, the Islamic State extremists released a shocking video that showed how they had hammered, bulldozed and blew up parts of the 13th century B.C. Assyrian capital in the Tigris River valley south of Mosul.

Iraqi officers accompanied journalists to the site Wednesday, wandering through the piles of rubble and snapping photos of the damage that U.N. officials had once called "a war crime."

The Assyrian Ziggurat, nearly 3,000 years old and once one of the tallest surviving buildings of the ancient world, has been leveled. On palace walls, only small fragments of stone carvings remained.

Two Assyrian winged-bull statues that once marked the palace entrance have been completely destroyed. In a palace doorway, four deep cracks defaced a large carving of an Assyrian guardian spirit.

Since they seized territory in Iraq and Syria in 2014, the IS militants, also known by the Arabic acronym Daesh, have destroyed other cultural treasures that they said promoted idolatry and violated their fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law.

Bombs strike rebel-held Aleppo and northern Syria, 54 dead

BEIRUT (AP) — Bombs rained down on rebel-held eastern Aleppo for a second straight day Wednesday, pounding a district that houses several medical facilities, including the central blood bank, and forcing Syrian staff and patients in the only remaining pediatric hospital to cower in a basement as buildings collapsed around them.

At least 54 people were killed in airstrikes and artillery shelling across northern Syria, part of a long-anticipated offensive against rebel-held areas announced by Russia, a key ally of Syrian President Bashar Assad. The bombardment hit in already besieged neighborhoods.

BACKLOG: Local inspector nearly caught up

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300 facilities in Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam, Wheeler, Grant, Union and Wallowa counties. Another inspector covers Ontario and southeast Oregon.

Ney, who used to work as an inspector for the Umatilla County Public Health Department, was hired by ODA in December 2015 after her predecessor, Rusty Rock, was promoted to Salem. While Rock is still with the program, the audit found that 28 inspectors have either quit or retired since 2006.

Over the course of the year, Ney said she has gone through intense training to learn the different rules and regulations for all the different businesses she now oversees. Her final training next April will cover "acidified foods," such as pickles and salsa.

"It's anything you want to put in a package, anything you want to make," Ney said.

Stephanie Page, Food Safety Program director, said the learning curve is especially steep for inspectors in rural Oregon.

"Our rural staff are especially on information overload," Page said.

ODA uses a risk matrix to determine how frequently businesses should be inspected. High-risk companies, such as large grocery stores or producers of acidified foods, are inspected annually. Medium-risk companies are inspected once every two years, and low-risk companies once every three years.

Since joining the program, Ney said she is more than 90 percent caught up on her inspections. Approximately 20 are still overdue. The only "high-risk" facilities on that list are the Lamb Weston plant in Hermiston, and Blue Mountain Cider in Milton-Freewater.

Ney said she is working to get to those as soon as possible.

"I've worked really hard in the last year to get caught up," Ney said.



EO file photo

In 2013, Umatilla County health inspector Melissa Ney takes a temperature reading from some vegetables on ice as Sharon Harey, owner of Sharon's Dutch Oven BBQ, looks on in Hermiston.

"We're just trying to do the best we can, with the resources we have, in the time we're allotted."

The list of overdue inspections also includes two companies that are inspected by ODA through a contract with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration — one at the Pendleton Flour Mills, and the other at Newly Weds Foods in Pendleton.

Forty-three states are under contract to do inspections with the FDA, but few match the workload in Oregon. The ODA conducts 500 FDA inspections per year, which the audit says can be time-consuming and take away from other routine inspections.

If the Food Safety Program scaled back its FDA contracts by 100, the department would regain a whopping 700 inspection hours to help address the backlog.

The audit also recommends implementing a process to better track how inspectors are spending their time, and

having managers spend more time supervising inspectors in the field. The agency also needs to develop a formal succession plan to deal with high staff turnover.

Page said the audit was constructive, and contained few surprises. The program is already working to address some of the findings, she said.

"The public should know their food is safe," Page said.

Ney said new businesses continue to pop up on a near daily basis. Just recently, she heard from a company that plans to can pickles in Lostine, and the new Oregon Grain Growers distillery is scheduled to open Saturday in Pendleton.

"I get many calls a day from people who want to make new things," Ney said. "It's my job to help them succeed."

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BUDGET: Shortfall of \$1.7 billion this biennium

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That shortfall was approximately \$1.3 billion before the election but with the fiscal impact of ballot measures that passed, it is now closer to \$1.7 billion, Grainger said in an email.

That budget shortfall comes from increased health care costs, including the state's share of the cost to implement the Affordable Care Act after federal funds for start-up vanish; the fiscal impact of 2016 ballot measures that specify and redirect state spending; and Oregon's Public Employee Retirement System unfunded liability, Grainger said.

A remedy to the shortfall that Brown had backed — Measure 97, that would have brought in billions in corporate sales taxes — was rejected in the Nov. 8 election.

The forecast said new employment data and state income tax withholdings from paychecks of Oregonians show the economic slowdown is already here. While Oregon's labor market growth is slowing somewhat, the state is at or near full employment.

"Going forward, slower, more sustainable growth rates are expected to be the norm," said the forecast compiled by the Office of Economic Analysis of the Department of Administrative Services.

Currently, revenues are expected to land within \$8 million of the estimate from the close of the last legislative session. The slowdown had been

expected and was built into the baseline forecast.

Rep. Greg Smith (R-Heppner), who was appointed this week as head of the House GOP Caucus Budget Committee, released a statement about revenue forecast and what it means for the upcoming legislative session.

"While our economy appears stable for now, today's forecast should serve as a reminder that future growth is anything but guaranteed," he said in the statement. "We are beginning to see signs of a slowing economy and a decrease in tax revenues on top of an already projected revenue shortfall in the next biennium."

The revenue forecast shows personal income tax collections in the third quarter about \$57.4 million above the September 2016 forecast, but overall \$35.1 million below what was expected since the end of the last legislative session. Corporate tax revenue is about \$3.7 million higher than what was expected since the end of the last session.

Employment was down 10,357 jobs from the September 2016 forecast.

While rates of job growth are slowing, that's not necessarily bad news, said state economist Mark McMullen, noting that high growth rates measured in previous recent assessments of Oregon's economy were not sustainable.

Oregon still outpaces most other states in terms of employment growth.

As employment improves, poverty rates may also start to improve, and caseloads for state services may also decrease, though such changes are only starting to take root.

State economists have noted in the past that economic improvements also take longer to manifest in the state's rural communities.

Income for Oregonians with the lowest 20 percent of incomes and middle 20 percent of incomes are improving, although they've not reached pre-recession levels.

McMullen noted that last week's election of Donald J. Trump as president presented a "wild card": the economist said it is too early to tell how the president-elect's specific policies could impact the national and state economies.

Trump promised tax cuts as well as major infrastructure investments during the campaign.

Brown said the 2017-19 budget that she will propose "will reflect my top priority — investing in kids and lifting families out of poverty — but will necessarily include a level of program cuts I find unacceptable."

She said she has started discussions with legislative leaders about how "to better align state resources with our aspirations for a stronger, better Oregon."

The Capital Bureau and East Oregonian contributed to this story.

Obama urges against isolationist impulses

ATHENS, Greece (AP)

— Standing in democracy's birthplace, President Barack Obama on Wednesday issued a parting plea to world leaders not to let the fear of globalization tugging at Europe and the U.S. pull them away from their core democratic values. He argued it wasn't too late for a course correction.

On his last foreign trip as president, Obama has repeatedly tried to draw lessons from Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. presidential election, hoping it can serve as wake-up call in the U.S. and abroad. Conceding that many feel left behind by globalization, Obama said there was an understandable impulse toward isolationism and that if people feel their futures are at risk, "they'll push back."

"People have to know that they're being heard," Obama said in a speech to the Greek people in Athens. But, he added, "We can't look backward for answers. We have to look forward."

While fewer people in the U.S. are looking to Obama for direction now that his successor has been chosen, Obama has retained significant clout abroad. His message



AP Photo/Thanassis Stavrakis

U.S. President Barack Obama delivers a speech in Athens on Wednesday.

Wednesday appeared aimed at other world leaders facing pressures of nationalist movements and economic anxiety, exemplified by Britain's recent vote to leave the European Union.

From Greece, Obama took a short flight to Germany, which has emerged as one of the strongest voices for preserving a unified, inclusive Europe. Yet even German Chancellor Angela Merkel faces her own threat from a nationalist right-wing movement, fueled in part by anger over her generous policy toward resettling Syrian migrants pouring into Europe.

"We cannot sever the connections that have enabled so much progress,"

Obama said.

Obama's argument centered on the notion that economic inequality, while a growing problem, can be addressed without a full rejection of globalization. Rather, he said it demanded a "course correction."

"In the years and decades ahead, our countries have to make sure that the benefits of an integrated global economy are more broadly shared by more people and that the negative impacts are squarely addressed."

Obama argued nations must strengthen alliances and expressed his confidence that the U.S. would remain loyal to NATO despite Trump's suggestions to the contrary during the

2016 presidential campaign.

He elicited nervous chuckles as he acknowledged that he and the president-elect "could not be more different." But in a message of reassurance, Obama argued that democracy is bigger than any one person.

"As long as we retain our faith in democracy, as long as we retain our faith in the people, as long as we don't waver from those central principles that ensure a lively, open debate, then our future will be ok," Obama said.

And to listeners at home fearful about Trump, he offered a path out of the wilderness, albeit a long and winding one.

"Any action by a president, or any result of an election, or any legislation that is proven flawed can be corrected through the process of democracy," Obama said.

Though Obama's trip to Greece was planned before the election results were known, the White House hoped the setting would form a powerful reminder of the basic tenets of democracy: fair elections, a free press and tolerance for ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.