

Sen. Merkley to continue to serve on ag committee

Funding for research station remains on radar

By **GEORGE PAVLEN**
East Oregonian

Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley announced Thursday he will continue to serve as the top-ranking Democrat on the Senate appropriations subcommittee for agriculture and rural development, advocating on behalf of farmers and ranchers statewide.



Merkley

As a ranking member of the subcommittee for the past two years, Merkley previously lobbied to keep full funding at the Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center in Pendleton, where scientists are conducting long-term experiments to improve farming practices for the region's dryland crops.

The Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center is part of the Agricultural Research Service, or ARS, which acts as the primary research arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is not to be confused with Oregon State University's Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center, though the two programs share a campus on

Tubbs Ranch Road. Once again, the Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center stands to lose nearly half its funding under the President's 2017 budget, which aims to shift money within the agency. A spokeswoman for Merkley said the center will remain one of the senator's priorities working on the appropriations subcommittee. Otherwise, the center may be forced to cut \$901,000 and eliminate three scientist positions.

Other priorities include funding for irrigation projects, such as canal lining, and restoring habitat for sage grouse in southeast Oregon, said spokeswoman Martina McLennan. "Oregon's farmers, ranchers and rural communities deserve a strong voice in the Senate," Merkley said in a statement. "I'm excited to keep working for Oregon in this key position."

In addition to the USDA, the agriculture subcommittee also oversees the Food and Drug Administration and related agencies. It controls funding for research, as well as programs related to timber and biomass.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-

Stolen tiny house found

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

Lawrence Thomas will soon be reunited with his home — the custom-built tiny house he thought he'd never see again when it was stolen from a Hermiston truck stop in December.

The house was found on Stable Lane, about half a mile from where it was stolen at the One Stop Mart on Westland Road off Interstate 84 in late December.

"They took the tires off and broke the door down, but it looks like I'll be able to take it home," Thomas said.

The house is now being kept at a local storage yard, and Thomas hopes to leave Las Vegas and come pick up the house this weekend.

He said he had been in contact with the Umatilla Sheriff's Office, which received a tip from a resident this morning and then found the house.

"I really wanted to thank Deputy (Calvin) Meade," Thomas said. "He's the one who was keeping me updated."

Thomas said he won't know what other damage has been done, or whether



Contributed photo

This tiny house, owned by Lawrence Thomas of Las Vegas, was reported stolen near Hermiston on Dec. 31 after he left it at a travel stop on I-84 due to bad weather.

"They took the tires off and broke the door down, but it looks like I'll be able to take it home."

— Lawrence Thomas, tiny house owner

anything is missing from the house, until he gets there.

Thomas built the house last year, and had been living in it for about four months. He had been staying in Seattle, and was in the middle of a move to Las Vegas when

he stopped in Hermiston to avoid driving in bad weather. He decided to keep driving but temporarily leave the house, which he was pulling behind his SUV through the heavy snows. He talked to the manager at the station,

who said he could leave the house at the truck stop and that there were surveillance cameras on the house.

On New Year's Eve, Thomas found out the house was gone. Someone had used bolt cutters and taken the structure, which is 95 square feet, and 17 feet long by 7.5 feet wide. The structure contained all of Thomas' possessions, including official documents like his birth certificate, and sentimental items.

Tax season begins Jan. 23

East Oregonian

Oregon residents can send in their tax returns before Jan. 23, but the Oregon Department of Revenue and the Internal Revenue Service will not begin processing returns until that date. They will be processed in the order received.

The soonest citizens can get their refund from their state income taxes is Feb. 15. According to a news release from the Oregon Department of Revenue, the delay is an anti-fraud tactic that allows the department to confirm that the amounts claimed on returns matches the amount reported by employers on W-2 and 1099 forms.

A new law means the IRS will also hold federal refunds until after Feb. 15 for taxpayers claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit or Additional Child Tax Credit. The department estimates it paid out \$3.1 billion in fraudulent tax returns to identity thieves for 2014.

Free tax preparation services for seniors, low-income and moderate-income taxpayers are available throughout the state. CASH Oregon provides assistance at the Hermiston Library and Boardman Senior Center. The AARP can be contacted at 1-888-227-7669 for times and locations that volunteers will be available in Eastern Oregon to help senior citizens with their taxes before they are due on April 17.

Once tax season begins, the Oregon Department of Revenue will also provide a list of approved vendors for free online tax preparation (usually available to filers in certain income brackets) on its website at www.oregon.gov/DOR. All Oregon taxpayers who completed their own returns can e-file them for free using the fillable forms on the website.

The state highly encourages residents to e-file their taxes online for faster processing, but paper forms and booklets can be ordered by calling 1-800-356-4222.

BRIEFLY

City council reschedules monthly meeting

BOARDMAN — The Boardman City Council will meet Tuesday, Jan. 17 for its regular monthly meeting. The meeting had been scheduled for Jan. 10, but was postponed due to weather.

The council meets at 7:30 p.m. at city hall, 200 City Center Circle. For more information, call 541-481-9252

Education feedback session coming to town

PENDLETON — The Oregon Department of Education is hosting a community feedback session on Wednesday, Jan. 18 at 6:30 p.m. at Washington Elementary School, 1205 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. The event is free and open to the public.

This event is part of a series of feedback sessions

being organized by ODE across the state for people to give input on Oregon's plan to improve student learning and determine how to best support our schools to meet the needs of every student.

The Every Student Succeeds Act will be discussed, which, according to the ODE, "provides all states and schools in the country with a chance to be innovative, and to strengthen our public education system by providing teachers with more support and districts with more flexibility to address the unique needs facing their communities."

The public is encouraged to attend to learn more about ESSA, contribute to a discussion on the factors supporting student success and get questions answered by state education leaders.

Briefs are compiled from staff and wire reports, and press releases. Email press_releases_to_news@eastoregonian.com

MISSION

Derailed train was carrying hazardous materials

By **GEORGE PAVLEN**
East Oregonian

A Union Pacific train that derailed Monday night on the Umatilla Indian Reservation was carrying containers of hazardous materials, though none spilled and no one was hurt, according to a railroad spokesman.

UP initially reported no hazardous materials were involved in the 12-car derailment near Bingham Road, about 20 miles east of Mission. However, the company later confirmed there was adhesive inside shipping containers aboard at least one of the derailed cars.

The *Confederated Umatilla Journal* first reported there was hazardous material on the train.

Don Pettit, emergency response planner for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, said there was also sulfuric acid, methanol and formaldehyde



Photo by Wil Phinney/Confederated Umatilla Journal

A dozen Union Pacific railcars derailed Monday night on Umatilla Indian Reservation land. No injuries or spills were reported.

solution on the train. He did not know how many of the cars may have contained hazardous materials, but reiterated there was no spill.

"The train was pretty quickly put back on track," Pettit said. "We won't have any follow-up at this point."

UP spokesman Justin Jacobs said the cause of the derailment is still under investigation. Cold and snowy weather remains a possibility, Jacobs said.

This is the second time a UP train has derailed in Eastern Oregon within the

past two years. On March 2, 2015, 10 rail cars jumped the tracks along Meacham Creek in the Blue Mountains, due to a misaligned track.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

COMING EVENTS

- FRIDAY, JAN. 13**
ADULT OPEN GYM, 6-7 a.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Half-court basketball. Adults only. (541-276-8100)
- WALKING FOR WELLNESS**, 8:30-9:30 a.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. (541-276-8100)
- STORY TIME**, 10:15 a.m., Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston. (541-567-2882)
- TODDLER STORY TIME**, 10:15-11 a.m., Pendleton Public Library, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. (541-966-0380)
- STORY AND CRAFT TIME**, 2 p.m., Echo Public Library, 20 S. Bonanza, Echo. (541-376-8411)
- VFW BINGO**, 6 p.m., Hermiston VFW, 45 W. Cherry St., Hermiston. Doors open at 6 p.m., games begin at 7 p.m. Everyone welcome. (541-567-6219)
- GAMER'S NIGHT**, 7-10:30 p.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Tournament gaming and activities for teens. (541-276-8100)

- SATURDAY, JAN. 14**
AARP SMART DRIVER COURSE, 8:45 a.m.-4 p.m., St. Anthony Hospital, 2801 St. Anthony Way, Pendleton. Brush up on driving skills, learn the newest safety and advanced vehicle features, learn how aging, medications, alcohol and other health-related issues affect driving and how to adjust for these changes, and more. Cost is \$15 for AARP members (bring card) or \$20 for non-members. Geared for ages 55+, but all licensed drivers are welcome. Pre-registration suggested; class size limited. Lunch is on your own. (Nikki Murtaugh 541-861-0024)
- FREE FOR ALL**, 9:30-10:15 a.m., Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St., Pendleton. Free art classes for children up to age 12. Children under 8 should be accompanied by an adult. (Roberta Lavadour 541-278-9201)
- SATURDAY CRAFT TIME**, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston. Free craft projects for children in 5th grade and younger. (541-567-2882)
- "SCALING PARNASSUS: THE SEQUENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF PIANO MASTERY" WORKSHOP**, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., First Presbyterian Church, 201 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Dr. Michael Seregow will offer guidance in designing a curriculum for the intermediate student who is beyond method books in two parts. Free



EO Media Group file photo

Kristi Smalley performs with her dance partner Seth Ward during the 2015 Dancing with the Hermiston Stars. This year's event is Saturday, 7 p.m. at the Hermiston High School performing arts auditorium.

and open to music teachers and the general public. (Sue Nelson 541-276-0346)

SAGE SATURDAY, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., SAGE Center, 101 Olson Road, Boardman. Free admission and activities for children and parents. This month: make a sock snowman. (541-481-7243)

HIP & HANDMADE, 11 a.m.-12 p.m., Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St., Pendleton. Free drop-in project class for adults. (Roberta Lavadour 541-278-9201)

COUNTRY HOEDOWN, 1-4 p.m., Milton-Freewater Neighborhood Senior Center, 311 N. Main St., Milton-Freewater. Live music, dancing and singing. Admission \$2, refreshments available for purchase. (541-938-3311)

DANCING WITH THE HERMISTON STARS, 7 p.m., Hermiston High School performing arts auditorium, 600 S. First St., Hermiston. Local community members pair up with professional dancers from the Utah Ballroom Dance Company to vie for bragging rights and raise funds for local charities. Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$10 for students in advance, \$5 more at the door, available at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, Hermiston Parks office or online at www.desertartsCouncil.com (Larry Fetter or Phyllis Shoveliski 541-667-5007 or 541-699-9292)

SUNDAY, JAN. 15
FAMILY BREAKFAST, 8:30-9:15 a.m., First Christian Church,

516 S. Main St., Milton-Freewater. Cost is by donation. Everyone welcome. (541-938-3854)

SPECIAL NEEDS OPEN GYM, 12-1:30 p.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Free for special needs children and families. (541-276-8100)

KBLU CITIZENS ADVISORY GROUP, 3 p.m., Bowman Building Suite 352, 17 S.W. Frazer Ave., Pendleton. Share ideas on format of Pendleton area's newest radio station. (Vickie or Gary 541-566-

2744 or 541-566-0131)
CHRISTMAS CANTATA, 6 p.m., First Christian Church, 518 S. Main St., Milton-Freewater. Choirs from the First Christian and Ingle Chapel Congregational churches will perform "The First Noel," celebrating the birth of Jesus. Originally scheduled for December but postponed due to the weather. Free. (Janet Collins 541-938-3854)

ADULT OPEN GYM, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Half-court basketball. Adults only. (541-276-8100)

MONDAY, JAN. 16
ADULT OPEN GYM, 6-7 a.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Half-court basketball. Adults only. (541-276-8100)

WALKING FOR WELLNESS, 8:30-9:30 a.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. (541-276-8100)

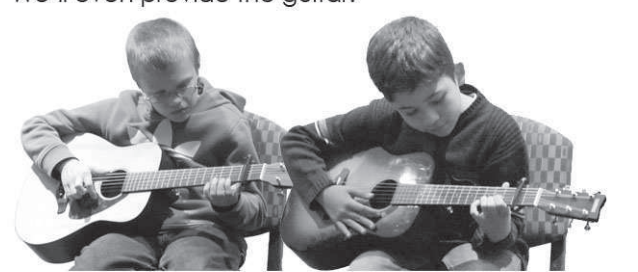
TAI CHI: MOVING FOR BETTER BALANCE, 9-10 a.m., Good Shepherd Wellness Center, 610 N.W. 11th St. (modular behind hospital), Hermiston. Falls prevention program for older adults. Space limited to 15 participants. Free, but registration is requested. (541-667-3509)

TOT TIME, 10-11 a.m., Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. For children ages 0-5. Costs \$1 per child per session. (541-276-8100)

PRESCHOOL STORY TIME, 10:30 a.m., Athena Public Library, 418 E. Main St., Athena. For ages birth to 6. (541-566-2470)

Every rock star had to start somewhere.

Youth (8-12 yrs.) beginning guitar classes start Jan. 9 and run each Monday 5:00-6:00 pm through March. We'll even provide the guitar.



PENDLETON CENTER for the ARTS

Mention this ad and pay just \$40 for all 10 sessions. More info: 541-278-9201 or pendletonarts.org