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One dollar



AP Photo/Molly Riley
Education Secretary Betsy DeVos addresses Education Department staff, Wednesday, at the Education Department in Washington.

New ed head effect unknown

Local officials more concerned with \$1.8B state budget gap

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

Besides the man who nominated her, no current political figure has been quite as divisive as U.S. education secretary Betsy DeVos.

Nominated for a position that rarely struggles to gather bipartisan support, the billionaire political donor from Michigan spurred backlash strong enough to cause a rare 50-50 split in the Senate's confirmation vote, requiring the vote of Vice President Mike Pence to break the tie.

While the controversy surrounding DeVos is well established, how her policy positions will affect schools in Eastern Oregon is less clear.

Before she was nominated, DeVos was a fierce proponent of the expansion and deregulation of charter schools. Her views seem to mesh well with President Donald Trump's plan to create a \$20 billion school voucher program that would allow low-income students to use a voucher at the public, private or charter school of their choice.

InterMountain Education Service District superintendent Mark Mulvihill



Mulvihill



Peterson

said the topic of DeVos' confirmation came up during a meeting with other Eastern Oregon school district superintendents on Wednesday.

See **EDUCATION/10A**

Sheriff's dispatch remains point of contention

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office program to work out dispatch center issues behind closed doors has generated pushback from a couple of west-side police departments.

In 2016, the sheriff's office invited all 24 agencies that use the dispatch center to join a liaison program to sort out any problems. A police department, for example, would designate a sergeant to discuss issues with a dispatch administrator and 9-1-1 call center. So far, the Pendleton Police Department and Umatilla County Fire District 1 are the only participants.

Undersheriff Jim Littlefield at a recent meeting called out agencies for the lack of involvement.

Two police chiefs said there are good reasons why they don't use the program.

Jason Edmiston, chief of Hermiston police, said his department rarely has complaints about dispatch. But more to the point, he and Sheriff Terry Rowan agreed some time back to discuss issues with each other and not through their staff.

"I plan on continuing to honor that," Edmiston said. "We're 30 minutes away. I really don't need our people traveling — yet again — to a meeting in Pendleton."

He also said he wants the sheriff's dispatch supervisors to be at the dispatch center supervising, not jumping from meeting to meeting.

Umatilla Police Chief Darla Huxel has been leading the push for agencies paying for dispatch services to have more say in how the center operates.

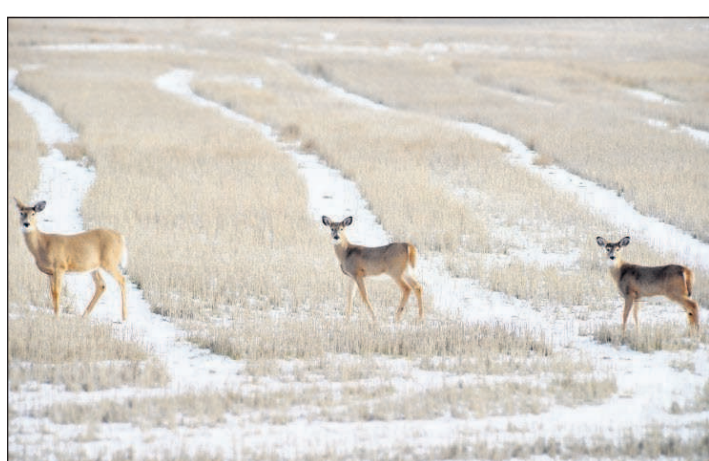
See **DISPATCH/10A**



A herd a deer forage for food in a thicket of snow-covered trees west of Meacham in 2015.

EO file photo

Winter wearing on wildlife



A doe and a pair of fawns walk across a snow-covered stubble field outside Mission.

EO File photo

ODFW expects increased mortality due to weather

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

Along with repeatedly closing highways, schools and government offices across Eastern Oregon, this year's harsh winter is expected to take its toll on local deer and elk herds.

The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife is anticipating increased overwinter mortality when conducting big game surveys

later this spring. Two areas of particular concern are Baker County and northern Malheur County, according to Michelle Dennehy, ODFW spokeswoman.

"Some die-off is normal, but we'll probably see increased mortality in some areas," Dennehy said. "We're not going to be able to have the full picture until we do our surveys."

Scott Torland, acting district wildlife biologist for ODFW in Ontario, said they are getting multiple reports a day of dead deer. The biggest issue, he said, are deer and antelope that make their way

See **WILDLIFE/10A**

Cities push reforms to increase property tax revenues

Want to change how taxes are calculated, remove limits on rates

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — As legislators set to work on balancing the state's budget, some lawmakers and lobbyists are considering property tax reform to benefit local government budgets.

In particular, supporters want to change how property taxes are calculated, and remove limits on tax rates.

Two ballot measures approved by voters in the 1990s, Measure 5 and Measure 50, limited the amount of property taxes Oregonians pay, and annual tax increases.

Measure 5, passed in 1990,

limited the total tax rates levied by all local taxing bodies to no more than \$15 per \$1,000 of assessed property value — up to \$5 for education, and \$10 for other local taxing bodies.

Measure 50, passed in 1997, decoupled a property's assessed valuation, the amount on which it is taxed, from real market value, according to the Oregon Department of Revenue, and put limits on how much a property's assessed value could increase from year to year.

The state's cities advocate a "transition" back to real market value-based calculations and for permitting local voters to approve rates exceeding the limits established by Measure 5.

Without a reduction in tax rates, the proposal would lead to higher property taxes. According to the League of Oregon Cities, there is a

state average of a 25 percent difference between the real market value of property and its assessed value.

The Legislature is also looking at a homestead exemption, which could cushion homeowners from sudden tax leaps on their primary residences.

Cities contend Measures 5 and 50 have meant that owners of similarly priced properties can pay significantly disparate amounts in taxes, and that cities have to compete with other local jurisdictions, such as counties and fire protection districts, for key funding.

Even if residents of a city support measures to pay for local libraries or to build a new police station, for example, the total tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed valuation can't exceed the state limits.

The proposal could also lead to

greater increases in assessments. Assessed valuations — due to the requirements of Measure 50 — typically grow at a slower rate than real market value. On the other hand, when the real estate market dips, so do real market values.

A senate resolution, Senate Joint Resolution 3, proposes repealing Measure 50 and replacing it with a real market value-based system. That resolution is scheduled for a public hearing before the Senate Finance and Revenue Committee Tuesday.

"We would support that in theory," said Wendy Johnson, an intergovernmental relations associate for the League of Oregon Cities, noting that the details have not been ironed out.

That resolution is the first placeholder bill in what cities expect to be a broader property tax reform package, Johnson said.

