

EDUCATION: ‘School choice isn’t really an issue (in Eastern Oregon)’

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Given that a majority of policy decisions and funding comes at the local and state level, Mulvihill said school officials were far more concerned with the \$1.8 billion budget gap being discussed in the Oregon Legislature than a change in federal policy.

That being said, Mulvihill said he and his colleagues do have concerns about the new direction of the U.S. Department of Education.

Besides the fact that DeVos has no previous experience with public education, Mulvihill was troubled that the Trump administration put a halt on implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which gave states more authority to make their own accountability standards.

“It was one of the biggest successes of a gridlocked

congress,” he said, noting the bipartisan support the law received.

Mulvihill expected strong resistance from “blue state” Oregon if Trump and DeVos enact their policy ideas on charter schools and private school vouchers.

“School choice isn’t really an issue (in Eastern Oregon),” he said.

Mulvihill praised Oregon’s charter school laws, which gives them flexibility in hiring teachers and establishing curriculum while still requiring oversight from a local school board.

Mulvihill noted Nixyaawii Community School, a charter school on the Umatilla Indian Reservation that is under the Pendleton School District but maintains unique curriculum components centered around tribal culture.

Mulvihill said other communities created “charter

districts,” like those in Lone and Cove, to open up enrollment to students outside their traditional boundaries.

Traditional districts have largely negated the need for charter districts by signing agreements with surrounding districts to ease the transfer process.

That means Pendleton parents who want to send their child to Helix for the smaller class sizes can do it without having to deal with a lot of red tape.

Mulvihill said Eastern Oregon parents who want choice generally have it, but data shows that many parents would rather see their local schools improve than send their kids elsewhere.

At a Stanfield school board meeting Wednesday night, superintendent Shelley Liscom broached the idea of a charter school. Citing several smaller districts in the region

that have switched to charter schools, she felt it was worth looking into.

“I may not be for it, it doesn’t mean we’re going to do it,” she said. “I just think we need to have a discussion.”

Board members said they would research and discuss the idea.

Meanwhile, some leaders of charter and private schools are taking a wait-and-see approach with DeVos.

Lone School District superintendent Jon Peterson anticipated a school voucher program would probably have a greater effect on urban areas than the rural Lone Community Charter School, which mostly draws students from Morrow County and western Umatilla County.

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DISPATCH: Sheriff’s office willing to listen to its partners

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One-on-one dealings through a liaison obscure whether others are having the same problems, she said, and if a solution that works for one will work for others.

“That’s where the focus should be,” she said. “Are these common problems among all users, or are they just with a particular agency making requests for something?”

Case in point, she said, was the trouble the dispatch center and its users had in 2015 with the new digital records system.

Littlefield said most problems are “just small adjustments” to accommodate a request from a one department or another, and at this point few agencies have the same issues.

“If we did have a situation that we did know affected multiple agencies, we would see that and address that pretty quickly,” he said.

Huxel also said a regular meeting with sheriff’s administrators seems unnecessary. When Umatilla police have a problem with the dispatch center, she said, that’s when she would address it.

“All I’m saying is, I don’t want to get into a situation where we end up in a meeting where everyone has the same issues, and it’s an on-going situation that could have been addressed long ago,” Huxel said.

“We just want the communication with the sheriff’s office.”

Littlefield said the sheriff’s office is willing to listen to its partners about the dispatch, the jail or any other services because the goal is to improve local law enforcement. All agencies, he said, “need to take some kind of ownership and responsibility” to make the dispatch center better.

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WILDLIFE: ODFW no longer does emergency feeding for big game

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down the Malheur River canyon to escape the deep snow, only to find themselves sucked in along roads and highways.

“The poor critters are just trying to find a place to stand,” Torland said. “They’re just looking for a place to go that’s not covered in snow.”

Torland said he is aware of numerous vehicle collisions with wildlife, but he has not kept track of the total number. The latest figures are not yet available from the Oregon Department of Transportation, though there were 1,539 roadkill reports from Eastern Oregon in 2015.

Staff are preparing to start big game surveys next week, Torland said, with population estimates by spring. Deer figures usually hover around 12,500 animals in the Beulah Unit.

Justin Primus, assistant district wildlife biologist in Baker City, said they are also seeing deer and elk moving down from the mountains. While snowpack is close to

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— Scott Torland, district wildlife biologist for ODFW

average at higher elevations, Primus said storms have blanketed the valleys this year as well, leaving animals to scrounge deeper for forage.

Over the last few weeks, Primus said there has been about 30 inches of snow throughout the region. Typically by now, the lower slopes in the Keating Valley and along Snake River Road will begin to melt off, but that hasn’t happened yet, Primus yet.

“I think we’ve had a little higher mortality on deer than we’d normally see,” Primus said. “I don’t think our elk have really been as affected by the winter conditions.”

As of last Friday, Primus said temperatures are beginning to poke back above freezing and some spots and melted up to a foot of snow in some areas.

“Things are starting to

together, Dennehy said, which makes them more susceptible to predators and poachers.

ODFW does, however, still maintain feeding programs at three sites in Eastern Oregon — at the Elkhorn, Wenaha and White River wildlife areas — designed to keep wildlife off of adjacent agricultural lands. Those three areas currently feed more than 70,000 pounds of hay and nearly 33,000 pounds of pellets per day to thousands of deer and elk.

While winter may bring short-term mortality to deer and elk, Dennehy said the increased snow will be a good thing over the long-term for the animals, improving summer forage conditions after multiple years of drought.

Should spring surveys find a significant amount of over-winter mortality that would require fewer hunting tags this season, ODFW will alert hunters by April 15.

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Chris Kennedy announces bid for Illinois governor

CHICAGO (AP) — Chris Kennedy, son of the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, announced Wednesday he will run for Illinois governor in 2018, bringing the instant name recognition of his family’s political legacy to what’s expected to be a sharply contested race.

The Democratic businessman said Illinois is heading “in the wrong direction” under Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner, who’s seeking re-election. In an email and video sent to supporters, he talked up history of service and said he wants to “restore the American dream to the people of this state.”

“Today, I am announcing my run for Governor because I love Illinois, but we have never been in

worse shape,” he said. “We don’t need incremental improvement — we need fundamental change in state government.”

Kennedy, 53, is the eighth of 11 children of Ethel Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, a former U.S. attorney general who represented New York in the Senate and was assassinated in 1968 while seeking the Democratic nomination for president. He is the nephew of former President John F. Kennedy.

His campaign video featured footage of his parents and other family members, and Kennedy told The Associated Press he believes Illinois voters “remember fondly the service to this country of the Kennedy family.”



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