

EOTEC: Council approved rodeo and fair leases

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the salary was competitive enough to draw someone with the experience needed to successfully market the event center.

"In that kind of price range you're going to get college kids," Kirwan said, proposing the number be "possibly double."

Smith said that would be difficult without additional contributions from the city and county.

Marketing and booking are currently handled by business manager Heather Cannell, and Smith said some EOTEC board members had expressed interest in promoting Cannell to general manager when the time comes.

Nate Rivera, one of the early planners of the EOTEC project, said the original planners visited a variety of similar trade and event centers. He said the difference between successful centers and ones in the red seemed to be that the successful ones were managed through a management company with the experience, resources and networking to market the center nationwide. He asked the city and county to consider contracting out the general manager position.

Councilors and commissioners expressed interest in having Smith research that option, in addition to coming back to them with more firm

dollar figures on the proposed management structure.

In a recent county commissioners meeting, commissioner George Murdock proposed that the county pull out of EOTEC completely and turn it over to the city. On Monday he acknowledged that his two colleagues had shot down that idea, but asked what happens in the future if the city wants to spend more on EOTEC than the county is willing to give.

"I fear that we will come to a juncture where the city is considerably more interested in contributions and improvements than the county," he said.

Kirwan also said that he feared the county was more focused on EOTEC as home of the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo, whereas the city was more focused on creating sustainable year-round use.

Those sometimes-competing interests came to light later in the evening, when during their regular business meeting city councilors questioned provisions in leases with the Umatilla County Fair and Farm-City Pro Rodeo.

The proposed rodeo lease, already approved by the EOTEC board, stated that no third-party events could be held in the rodeo arena for 90 days before and 30 days after the Farm-City Pro Rodeo without first getting

written approval from the rodeo board. Kirwan pointed out that blocked out Memorial Day, Labor Day, the Fourth of July and the entire summer.

Rodeo board member Dennis Barnett said in order to have a successful rodeo they needed 30 to 45 days each year to prepare the soil to the right consistency for traction and safety. He said the board was worried EOTEC would approve something like a monster truck rally that would endanger cowboys and animals by destroying that careful cultivation of the soil and leaving hard-to-find screws and other parts behind.

He also said that the community only had so much rodeo sponsorship money and so much interest in buying rodeo tickets, so a competing rodeo event earlier in the summer would drain the Farm-City Pro Rodeo's resources. However, non-spectator roping events, barrel racing, etc. would all be things they would be more than happy to accommodate.

Barnett pointed out that the rodeo was building a \$500,000 mercantile building, additional grandstands and lighting, plus bringing over pens and panels and other items from the current arena. All of that adds up to a more than \$1 million investments in items that the rodeo board was originally told would be

part of the EOTEC project, Barnett said.

"We have so much investment in EOTEC, we want it to be successful," he said, promising that the board would approve every request that was "reasonable."

The city council approved the lease, but only after the rodeo board agreed to shorten the window before the rodeo to 60 days.

A similar conversation was had about the Umatilla County Fair's lease of the fairgrounds, which states that EOTEC must obtain permission for any concerts held on the EOTEC grounds for 60 days before the fair and 30 days after. Board member Dan Dorran made similar arguments that the fair board and community's sizable investments in the fairgrounds must be protected from competing concerts that will siphon off sponsorship money and interest from the fair.

"Look what (the community) has done for EOTEC, with the expectation that they will have a better event," he said.

The council also approved the fair lease as presented. The fair and rodeo are each paying \$10,000 per year plus utilities and maintenance for the time they are occupying the space.

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Oregon jobless rate falls to new record low

SALEM (AP) — State economists say the rate of unemployed Oregonians fell again in February to 4 percent, marking the lowest such figure the state has seen in at least the past four decades.

The rate of unemployed Oregonians fell again in February to 4 percent, marking the lowest such figure the state has seen in at least the past four decades and a full percentage point-drop in just two months, state economists said Tuesday.

In January the state's unemployment rate was 4.3 percent.

February was the second month in a row that Oregon's jobless rate declined to record lows since the state began tracking local labor data back in 1976. Oregon's jobless rate was notably lower than the 4.7 percent

nationwide average, and it also managed to drop by one percentage point since December's 5 percent rate.

February's jobless rate represents about 82,000 unemployed Oregonians out of the labor market's overall 2 million-plus workers.

Nonfarm payrolls also added 8,200 jobs last month, up from the revised gain of 700 in January. More than half of those job gains came from government, helping the sector recover from its loss of 3,400 workers during the prior month.

A similar trend took place in the health care and social assistance sectors, which gained 2,400 workers following January's 1,700 loss. Job gains totaling 900 were also seen in construction, at a much slower pace than its 2,500 new-hires in January.

Four in Malheur standoff guilty of trespassing

PORTLAND (AP) — A federal judge in Oregon found four men guilty Tuesday of misdemeanor counts of trespassing and tampering with government vehicles and equipment during last year's high-profile takeover of a wildlife refuge after a bench trial that was overshadowed by the conviction of the same men by a jury on more serious felony charges.

U.S. District Judge Anna Brown found defendants Jason Patrick, Darryl Thorn, Duane Ehmer and Jake Ryan guilty of the lesser crimes 11 days after the men were convicted by a Portland jury of charges ranging from conspiracy to possession of firearms in a federal facility. Patrick was also found guilty

of destruction and removal of property on Tuesday.

Early in the trial proceedings, Brown separated the misdemeanors from the felons and pegged them for a bench trial over the objections of the defense, who felt allowing the jury — and not the judge — to consider the lesser charges would have helped their clients.

Patrick, who was part of the initial group that seized the refuge in remote southeastern Oregon, has said he will appeal the case.

They all face years in prison at a sentencing hearing set for next month.

Thorn, Ehmer and Ryan remain free while awaiting sentencing but Patrick chose to turn himself in Tuesday.

WALDEN: Since 1998, has won reelection 10 times

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don't intercede now, fewer people will have access to insurance — period."

The bill rolls back Medicare expansion, nixes the requirement for large employers to offer coverage to full-time employees and ditches a mandate that compels Americans to get insurance, instead using a system of tax credits to induce younger, healthier Americans to buy insurance on the open market. Medicare funding would come in the form of block grants.

Walden points to double-digit insurance increases and the shrinking list of insurers on the open market as reasons for why the ACA needs to be scrapped.

"Last year, 225 counties in America had one option left to choose from on the exchange," Walden said. "This year, it's 1,022 and that's before Humana pulled out. This insurance market is collapsing before our eyes. The CEO of Aetna said (the market is) in a death spiral. Those aren't our words, those are his words. As I talk to insurers, they're looking at whether they can sustain the losses they're enduring."

Though Walden's political sway seems at an all-time high, some of his constituents in Oregon's 2nd district are pushing back against the proposed dismantling of the ACA. In January, for example, a group of locals rallied in Walden's hometown of Hood River to protest the repeal.

Those constituents say Walden isn't listening to the people back home. Retired health care administrator Fran Finney helped organize the Hood River rally as a way to protest repeal and get a message to Walden that he wasn't doing their bidding.

"We organized this at the last minute because we were concerned about the direction we see health care going in," Finney said. "The word got out informally. About 80 people showed up. It was a very cold day — about 15 degrees — and we stood in the snow."

Protesters waved signs proclaiming "Save our Health Care" and "Health Care for All Americans." They took turns speaking into a microphone about fears of losing health benefits. Some spoke in support of a single payer plan. Finney worried aloud about the "slippery slope of potential cuts to Medicare and Medicaid." Mostly, she is concerned about family and friends.

"People are concerned about losing their health care," she said.

In Walden's rambling district, which covers about



Staff photo E.J. Harris

Congressman Greg Walden listens as Dwight Holton, CEO of Line for Life, explains some of the issues with pain killer addition in the state during a roundtable discussion with health care providers, pharmacists, hospital administrators and law enforcement at Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston in May, 2016.

two-thirds of Oregon, Medicaid enrollment surpassed 30 percent in eight of the counties. About 129,200 people in the district are covered by Medicaid expansion. The district's uninsured rate has dropped from 17 percent to eight percent.

According to a report by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce, Walden's district expanded Medicaid more than any other Republican district in the country.

Finney and her friends wonder about Walden's political future because of this disconnect. Until now, the road has been smooth. Since 1998, Walden has easily won reelection 10 times running.

Could reelection in 2018 be less of a cakewalk?

"We think he could be vulnerable," Finney said.

That's a 180-degree turn from President Donald Trump's analysis, who warned House Republicans Tuesday they could lose their seats if they failed to replace the ACA. The Republican bill to repeal the health care act comes before the House Budget Committee on Thursday.

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hepner, is an Oregon lawmaker whose district geographically falls within Walden's. Smith said he hears concerns about health care when he travels the area. Smith said Walden has to travel some rough roads in the coming months.

"Health care is a challenging issue for the Congressman and for folks in Eastern Oregon," Smith said.

Rural Oregon has a large population of people dependent on the ACA and the Oregon Health Plan, he said. "They believe they have a right to affordable and accessible health care." Smith called the effort "truly a balancing act to figure out how Oregonians can have access to health care without intruding into their private lives or being overly excessive." That said, Smith

likes the health care system Oregon has developed.

"Our state has been innovative in its approach to health care," he said. "Oregon has significantly contained the cost of health care in comparison with other states."

Oregon Gov. Kate Smith credited the ACA for bringing the level of insured to 95 percent of adults and 98 percent of children in the state.

"We know the ACA works in Oregon," said Brown last week to a crowd gathered outdoors at the Capitol. "It's considered a model system around the country."

She called the proposed federal health plan "absolutely unacceptable." Brown cited findings from a 19-page Oregon Health Authority/Consumer and Business Services department report that estimated nearly half a million Oregonians would lose health coverage and that

"Our report found that for every step of progress Oregon has made, this proposal will take Oregon three steps back."

— Gov. Kate Brown

42,000 jobs would disappear.

"Our report found that for every step of progress Oregon has made, this proposal will take Oregon three steps back," Brown said. "This bill is not about improving health care. This bill is about giving tax breaks to the wealthy."

Representative Smith is reserving judgment about potential harm to Oregon.

"I'm not ready to go there yet," he said. "I think it's really premature. We don't know what Congress will do yet."

Walden has touted the plan at town halls in his district, assuring nervous constituents that no one will be denied coverage because of pre-existing conditions and that adult children may remain on their parents' insurance until age 26.

"We want to take the time to get it right — so there's a lot of work going on," Walden told a Boardman audience last month. "Our mission is to give Americans more choices and to bring the costs down."

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PENDLETON: Approved purchase of airport building for use as 'range control facility'

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drinking water infrastructure.

Patterson said leveraged water rate hikes helped secure the loan, which will help pay for replacing some of the city's aging water mains, 33 miles of which will hit or exceed the century mark by the 2020s. Other projects include a new well and a new reservoir and booster station in the airport area.

Patterson said these water system improvements are necessary and would have gotten only more expensive the longer the city waited. He added that the water rates will eventually fall below other cities again as they address their own water issues.

"We've kicked the can down the road for too long," he said.

The council approved the purchase of a building at the airport for use as a "range control facility" for the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range.

The city is buying the 1906 N.W. 56th Drive

building back from Community Bank, which used the facility for check and debit card processing when the city sold the building in 2005.

City manager Robb Corbett said the building has been on the market for a while at \$500,000, but the city is buying it for \$395,000 through a 10-year financing plan.

A drone business has already committed \$88,000 toward renting the building, and the city plans to use hangar rental revenue toward covering the purchase price.

Corbett said the city expects to generate \$500,000 in revenue from the test range over the next 10 months.

Range manager Darryl Abling said the control facility was integral toward recruiting businesses to testing at the range and could easily house other companies interested in using it.

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