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EAST OREGONIAN

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141st Year, No. 122

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RURAL PRIORITIES

Gov. Brown promises attention outside metro areas



Passerby Mike Wilson, Salem, inspects a tractor on display in front of the Oregon State Capitol building during Oregon Rural Days, April 4, in Salem, Ore.

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregonians from Roseburg to Cascade Locks gathered at the state library Tuesday to talk rural.

The day's events included exhibits from economic development groups, school districts and businesses.

In remarks to attendees in the morning, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said she was focused on education, health care and economic development in rural areas of the state.

She said that while Oregon has one of the fastest growing GDPs among U.S. states, and a low unemployment rate, those economic gains have not always extended outside of the state's major metro areas.

To boost economic development, Brown said she wants to invest in infrastructure such as affordable housing, roads and water treatment; and invest in "innovative technologies"

and workforce development.

In response to a question about bills before the Legislature to reduce what was characterized as the "regulatory burden" on rural health care providers, Brown said that the expansion of Medicaid had been a boon for Oregon, adding that more Oregonians are insured and that the expansion created jobs in the healthcare sector.

But the governor said that the "challenge" is figuring out how to pay for it. Although the federal government initially covered all costs associated with expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, the amount of financial support is scheduled to gradually shrink.

In terms of affordable and low-income housing in rural Oregon, Brown said she wanted to encourage more private-public partnerships for housing development and encourage the legislature to dedicate more bonding capacity to housing projects.

Farmland protection fund criticized as unaffordable

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A proposed fund dedicated to protecting farmland from development in Oregon has come under fire from critics who say the state government can't afford it.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Fund would buy easements from farmers that limit their ability to develop property, thus preserving the land for agricultural production.

Organizations that "hold" easements by enforcing such constraints, such as land trusts, would also receive money and technical assistance from the fund, as would farmers who need help with succession planning.

Investment decisions would be made by a 12-person commission under House Bill 3249, which creates the fund without directing a specific

See **FARMLAND/8A**

In this 2016 file photo, heads of wheat turn from green to gold in a field outside of Mission.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



PENDLETON

Schools could turn to layoffs if funding slashed

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

Pendleton School Board members wrestled Tuesday night with the vexing task of creating a budget without solid numbers from the state.

Because of uncertainty, the board paved the way for layoffs to happen if the need arises.

Board chair Debbie McBee explained that state legislators are enmeshed in a prolonged budget process that could stretch into a special session this summer. That leaves Oregon school districts struggling to predict the future.

"We may not know from the Legislature until late June," said McBee, "but our school district has to provide a balanced budget in May, despite the unknown data."

"As we come closer to the end of the academic year and deeper into the budget season our financial situation continues to

See **SCHOOL/8A**

PENDLETON

Winter scars left on streets, racking up repair costs

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

The snow and ice from Pendleton's historically harsh winter might have melted away, but it's left behind a more lasting damage.

The potholes that now pock-mark the city's streets might be the most directly felt by Pendleton drivers, but the damage extends beyond that, according to a report delivered by public works director Bob Patterson at the Pendleton City Council meeting Tuesday.

"This was not our typical winter," Patterson wrote before further detailing Pendleton's new infrastructure issues.

Patterson said the city has identified seven new streets that need extensive repairs, which will be added to the city's list of paving projects.

See **STREETS/8A**

PENDLETON

Wicked Kitty owner inks plea deal, avoids jail time

Lybrand gets three years probation, \$3,200 in fines

East Oregonian

Jason Lybrand, the owner of a Pendleton tattoo and piercing parlor, will not face jail time after he was charged on several counts of drug possession and delivery.

He will also write a court-mandated letter of apology to his mother.

At a court hearing in Pendleton Tuesday, Lybrand changed his plea to guilty on one felony count of methamphetamine possession and another misdemeanor count of marijuana delivery.

The other five charges — two felony

counts of delivery of methamphetamine, a second felony count of methamphetamine possession, felony delivery of a federal Schedule III substance (methandrostenedione, a steroid) and misdemeanor possession of the Schedule IV opioid pain killer tramadol — were dismissed by Circuit Court Judge Jon Lieuallen as the result of a plea deal reached by Lybrand's attorney, Michael Breiling, and the Umatilla County District Attorney's Office.

In accordance with the deal, Lieuallen sentenced Lybrand to three years probation and \$3,200 in fines.

Besides avoiding jail time, Lybrand also won't have his driving license

See **LYBRAND/8A**



Jason Lybrand of Pendleton stands in the courtroom of Umatilla County Circuit Court Judge Jon Lieuallen during a change of plea hearing on Tuesday in Pendleton.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

