

Hayes faces \$100,000-plus in fines for ethics violations

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Ethics Commission Friday unanimously voted that there is enough evidence to show former first lady Sylvia Hayes violated ethics law 22 times largely by using her public position to win a paid fellowship and several contracts for her environmental consulting firm between 2011 and 2013.

Hayes served as a “super lobbyist” for private consulting clients who paid her to advocate on green energy, said Commissioner Daniel Mason.

“This is a case study in what you are not supposed to do as a public official. For that reason the statute gives us the authority to levy significant fines and I think that’s what we should do,” said Commissioner Nathan Sosa.

Hayes and her attorney were

absent from the meeting Friday where the ethics commission reached its decision.

The vote establishes what the commission calls “preliminary findings of violation.” Hayes may appeal the findings or reach a settlement with the agency before the agency issues a final order with penalties.

She faces fines of up to \$110,000. On top of that, commissioners could propose she pay double the amount of money she received from work acquired as a result of her positions as first lady and policy adviser to Gov. John Kitzhaber. That could equal hundreds of thousands of dollars, ethics investigator Marie Scheffers said.

The commission would have to prove that Hayes would not

have secured the contracts without her public positions, said Ethics Commission Director Ron Bersin.

In addition to using her position for private gain, Hayes also accepted an unacceptable amount of gifts from people interested in influencing policy and failed to disclose several conflicts of interest, according to an ethics investigation released earlier this week. Investigators found 23 violations, but commissioners dismissed one of those violations related to the first lady’s use of a dignitary protection unit — essentially the governor’s security detail — for non-public business.

Commissioners briefly discussed removing one of the conflict-of-interest counts but decided not to because Hayes failed to show up or

send a representative to respond to the accusations.

Hayes and her attorneys, Whitney Boise and Josh Ewing, had not responded to a request for comment as of press time Friday.

Hayes and Kitzhaber have been under an ethics investigation since July.

They had been under a federal criminal investigation for more than two years before that, after *Willamette Week* reported the first lady may have used her position to win several consulting contracts. The scandal eventually prompted Kitzhaber to resign from office in February 2015 and led to former Secretary of State Kate Brown’s succession as governor. Federal prosecutors ultimately filed no charges against the couple. By the time the federal investigation had concluded, the statute of limitation had run out for any state charges.

In November, the ethics commission rejected a proposed settlement with Kitzhaber in which he agreed to pay \$1,000 for ethics violations related to conflicts of interest and accepting gifts with value of more than \$50 from any one source during the year. A majority of commissioners said they felt the settlement was too lenient.

The ethics commission is scheduled to reconsider his case next month.

Chairwoman Alison Kean said the report on Hayes’s violations also is evidence against Kitzhaber and should be considered when determining penalties for Kitzhaber.

“He was the vehicle by which she was able to profit, so I view these cases as interlinked,” Kean said.

“My recommendation would be to staff as we are negotiating ... that the governor be treated with a much higher standard.”



Hayes

With rare disorder, man looks for a new lease on sight

Couple hopes to fundraise \$10K for eyesight equipment

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

Nick Ballard was fitted with his first pair of glasses in second grade, but his eyesight was all downhill from there.

It would be years before he would be diagnosed with Stargardt disease, a rare disorder that heavily deteriorated his vision to the point that he’s now legally blind.

With the curtains drawn in their Pendleton home to help protect Nick’s vision, his wife, Bethany Parker-Ballard, played a video that showed the effect of Stargardt. As an eye researcher spoke to the camera, his face was blurred to show the early effects of the disorder while the peripherals around him remained clear. As the condition worsened, the researcher’s face became a black spot.

After the first video finished, she played a second video. This time, smiling people strapped on a piece of equipment that resembled a virtual reality headset as a narrator promised that it could reverse the effects of blindness.

Bethany believes this equipment, called eSight, can



restore her husband’s vision. She is mounting a fundraising campaign for the \$10,000 to purchase it.

Nick was diagnosed with Stargardt disease when he was 15-years-old and on a trip to visit his father in Texas. In the midst of learning to drive, he struggled to operate his dad’s Ford Bronco, spurring his father to take him to the optometrist.

He was referred to a specialist in Dallas, who told him that he had Stargardt. Nick realized he would never be able to drive again.

“It’s pretty unnerving,”

he said.

Growing up in Port Orchard, Washington, Nick had always struggled in school, a fact that he attributed to being a “noxious prick” as much as his poor vision. But when he went to the Washington School for the Blind in Vancouver, he became an A and B student.

He returned to public school and graduated before bouncing around between Bremerton, Wash., and Portland.

Nick moved to Pendleton in 2010 to attend Blue Mountain Community College,

where he met Bethany, a late bloomer who was attending college for the first time at 39.

Graduating with a degree in multi-disciplinary studies, he stayed on at BMCC to work as a tutor and married Bethany. She teared up as she recalled how Nick wasn’t able to fully see her on their wedding day.

“When you get married, you don’t want to be oblivious to the hard times, but you don’t really think of them,” she said.

Hard times would come for the Ballards in 2015, when Nick was laid off from



Staff photos by E.J. Harris
LEFT: Nick Ballard of Pendleton was diagnosed with Stargardt disease, a degenerative eye disease, when he was in his teens and has been slowly losing his sight. **ABOVE:** Bethany Parker-Ballard has begun a fundraising effort for her husband, Nick, hoping to raise \$10,000.

BMCC and they lost their house.

With his condition, Nick struggled to find new work until he was hired by the Eastern Oregon Alcoholism Foundation.

A “detox technician,” Nick described his position as a combination den mother/housekeeper with some work with computers thrown in.

Despite Nick’s new job, the couple still considers themselves low income. Bethany wants to go back to school to get her bachelor’s degree in hospitality management.

They rely on food stamps to help buy the groceries and the \$10,000 eSight glasses

aren’t covered by any kind of insurance.

Bethany started a crowdfunding account at www.gofundme.com/esight-fund and is also looking to open a donation account and do a fundraiser at a local restaurant.

The eSight glasses work by using high definition cameras and LED screens to provide users with enhanced vision with virtually no lag.

Bethany envisions Nick being able to mow the lawn and other mundane tasks the seeing take for granted. And maybe one day, with the aid of eSight glasses, he could even drive a car.

Don’t want to pump your own gas? Local gas stations say don’t worry

By **JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN**
East Oregonian

A new law allowing rural counties in Eastern Oregon to permit 24-hour self-serve gas stations does not mean changes are imminent.

The rule, which went into effect Jan. 1, states that counties east of Portland with populations under 40,000 can now let customers pump their own gas any time of day. For the past two years, rural counties in Oregon were permitted to offer self-serve stations between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.

But employees at local stations say little will change for them. Brian Owshin, the manager at Love’s Travel Stop in Boardman, said many people are now taking advantage of the new law. But he said they will continue to have staff available for those who don’t want — or don’t

know how — to pump their own gas.

“We always have someone to assist, at least until 6 p.m.,” he said, referring to the old law.

Owshin said he didn’t know whether the law would affect the number of employees at the station in the long term. But he said for the immediate future, no changes were planned.

“No one’s losing jobs with Love’s, which is great,” he said.

Owshin said many of their customers were local farmers or other workers who already pumped their own gas at night, and that most people seemed to view the new rule as a positive.

Steve Scott of the Irrigon Shell gas station said he hadn’t heard anything from owners about whether they planned to allow customers to self-serve. He said as of now,

they will continue to have attendants fill tanks.

Shane Dubry, an employee at the Heppner Circle K, said until 6 p.m. attendants are still helping people pump. He said they anticipate no changes to their procedures or staffing.

Skyler Hall, an employee at the Lexington Sinclair gas station, said if people want to pump their own gas they can, but they still plan to have an attendant on duty in case people don’t want to. He said so far, very few people have elected to pump their own gas.

The new law is effective in all Eastern Oregon counties except for Umatilla, which has about 76,000 people.

HERMISTON

Police search for armed robbery suspect

East Oregonian

Hermiston Police are searching for a suspect in an armed robbery that happened late Thursday night.

Officers were called to 11th Street Market around 11:56 p.m. for reports of a man who had taken out a handgun and demanded money. The male clerk complied with the demand and gave a minor amount of cash to the robber, who then left on foot heading south.

Officers arrived and searched the area around the business at 425 N.W. 11th Street.

Officers say that after reviewing video footage,

they are not able to determine the race of the suspect. They released a still photo of the suspect taken from video, which shows a person in a gray hooded sweatshirt, in a black ski mask and a dark-colored pea coat with buttons.

Officers said they also determined the man is

between 5 feet 6 inches and 6 feet tall, and was wearing black and white Nike shoes, as well as a ring on the middle finger of his left hand.

Anyone with information about the robbery is asked to call Lt. Randy Studebaker at 541-667-5095.

HERMISTON'S STAND UP COMEDY EVENT
COMING SOON!
Melonville Comedy Festival
Saturday, January 27
Hermiston community Center

The 25th edition of the Melonville Comedy Festival will feature three headline stand up comedians. These comics are in demand corporate show entertainers.

CORY MICHAELIS

A comic who appears in clubs in Las Vegas, Seattle, New York and Los Angeles. Cory has been on the stage of several Comedy Festivals



KERMET APIO

A Hawaiian native, Kermit has been working in standup comedy since 1990. His credits include Las Vegas, Seattle and Aspen Comedy Festivals and everyday life. Gabriel is based in Olympia.

DEREK RICHARDS

Derek is a comic who has worked USO Tours, the Bob and Tom Show and you can hear him on Sirius/XM Satellite Radio.



Tickets \$35 per person
Doors open at 7pm, Show starts at 8:00
Tickets available at Hermiston Chamber of Commerce at the Cornerstone Plaza
Reserve Tickets at: 541-561-7488



NO REFUNDS • 21 & OVER

JANUARY FRAME & LENS SALE
50% OFF RAY BAN FRAMES
Mens • Women's • Children's • Sunglasses
Plus 25% OFF LENSES
Includes Transitions, Anti-Reflective and Polarized Lenses
AFFORDABLE FAMILY EYEWEAR
Se Habla Español • Open Monday to Saturday • Same Day Service on Most Prescriptions
Dr. Anderson: Saturday Appointments Available
Most insurances accepted: MODA, Ameritas, Regence and Many More!
541-567-3790 • 1045 N. 1st St, Hermiston, OR • www.affordablefamilyeyewear.com
*Excludes special order lenses, glass and safety eyewear.

Saager's Shoe Shop
WINTER CLEARANCE SALE
Up To 50% off
Men and Women's Shoes!
50%-70% off
Women's apparel
WINTER/FALL COLLECTIONS INCLUDING SWEATERS, BLOUSES, TUNICS, DRESSES, AND JACKETS
Taos • Jafa • Altra • Hoka One One • Brooks
• Dansko • Teva • Keen • Pikolinos • Bussola • Eric
Michael • Ahnu • Earth • Earthie • Merrell
Store Hours:
Mon - Sat: 8 AM - 6 PM
Sun: 12 PM - 4 PM
613 N. Main St.,
Milton-Freewater, OR
www.saagersshoes.com
541-938-5162
SAAGER'S SHOE SHOP