

EAST OREGONIAN

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Pacific Power rolls out new meters

As utility installs 22,000 meters for area, its customers, critics call them a threat to privacy

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

As Pacific Power changes its electric metering systems for thousands of customers across Eastern Oregon, it's trying to allay concerns about what those changes will mean.

Pacific Power is pitching the changeover from digital and analog meters to a "smart meter" system as a boon for consumers.

Instead of sending a meter reader every month to calculate the bill, smart meters will be able to send out an hour-by-hour readout of energy consumption to Pacific Power.

According to a Pacific Power press release, switching over to a smart meter will allow the company to respond to power outages sooner and give customers better ability to monitor their power usage and change their consumption habits if necessary.

Lori Wyman, Pacific Power regional business manager for northeast Oregon, said the Eastern Oregon push is part of a statewide rollout for smart meters that will affect 590,000 customers that started in 2018.

Pacific Power will install a total of 22,000 new meters for customers in Pendleton, Hermiston, Adams, Arlington, Athena, Board-

"IT'S A HUGE, HUGE STEP FORWARD IN TECHNOLOGY."

Lori Wyman,
Pacific Power regional business manager for northeast Oregon

man, Echo, Helix, Milton-Freewater, Pilot Rock, Rieth, Stanfield, Umatilla and Weston.

"It's a huge, huge step forward in technology," she said.

Cody Estlund, Pacific Power manager of advanced metering infrastructure operations, said millions of customers across the country have already switched to smart meters.

But the national effort to replace traditional meters has spurred skepticism in communities across the country, with critics arguing that smart meters aren't worth the

cost and are a threat to privacy.

One of the common concerns among the smart meter opposition is that the new technology will lead to invasion of privacy from utility companies, who will have new access to customers' power consumption data.

Additionally, hackers could breach the data the utility companies have collected and use it for their own means.

Estlund said the encrypted data that's produced from customers will only show whole home usage and will be connected to account

numbers instead of names.

As for potential hacks from outside sources, Estlund said Pacific Power will regularly perform penetration exercises to make sure all the data stays safe.

Other critics have expressed concern that the smart meters result in higher bills.

Recently a North Carolina woman reported her power bill tripling after the local utility company installed a smart meter at her home.

The utility company and a state agency both determined that her old meter had been faulty and the smart meter resulted in higher energy bills because it was now accurately measuring consumption.

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Education tax bill clears first hurdle

By **MARK MILLER AND RACHEL ALEXANDER**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — A \$1 billion-per-year tax plan to boost education cleared a major procedural hurdle in the Capitol on Monday.

The legislation, House Bill 3427, goes to the House following Monday evening's party-line vote in the Joint Student Success Committee.

The milestone follows more than a year of work by the committee to seek ways to improve local schools and find the money to do so. The bipartisan group of lawmakers visited school districts across Oregon, hearing from students, parents, teachers, administrators and support staff.

Among the goals of the new spending is to increase the number of students graduating from high school and improving reading in elementary schools throughout Oregon's 197 school districts, which serve about 580,000 students.

Jim Green, executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association, said the Student Success Act has drawn more interest than any education-related bill he can recall since the early 1990s, when the state pushed smaller districts to unify.

"This is a huge investment," he said.

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JUST PASSING BY



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A pod of American white pelicans huddles together along the banks near the convergence of Wildhorse Creek and the Umatilla River on Tuesday in Pendleton. American white pelicans regularly migrate to northeastern Oregon during the summer months.

Umatilla County group recommends hiring manager

Proposal would boost commission to five members, and shift all to part time

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

Umatilla County's government could get a major overhaul.

The county's Charter Review Committee wrapped up a more than a year's work on Tuesday night with the approval of three formal recommendations for the board of commissioners to consider putting to voters.

The most consequential would increase the board from three commissioners to five but make all the positions part time. The five-member board would hire a county counsel and a county manager, a big idea the committee has considered for months.

"Our core suggestion," committee chairwoman Michele Grable said, "is to change the structure of our

county government."

Three board positions would represent districts, also new, and two would be at-large. Voters would elect positions 1 and 2 in November of non-presidential years and the other three positions in November during presidential elections. All would serve four-year terms.

The larger board may provide for greater institutional memory, according to the committee, and growth of the county demands the need for a professional administrator, which also would improve the consistency of overseeing county operations compared to the different styles of the three commissioners now.

The second proposal from the eight-person group recommending changes to the county's

founding document would end the problem of lame duck commissioners staying on for months after losing elections in May.

Under a revised election process, when one or two candidates run for commissioner no May primary election is necessary. The names of the candidates instead only go on the ballot for the general election in November. If three or more people run, the two who win the most votes in the primary face off in the general.

The third recommendation would change the charter's description of the law enforcement department to the sheriff's office. The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office long ago adopted that name, and the sheriff is an elected office. The committee wants language in the charter that references Oregon law for criteria of officers.

The committee debated a little about the value of

"THIS IS GOVERNMENT AT ITS BEST. THIS IS GRASS ROOTS."

Michele Grable,
Charter Review Committee chairwoman

packaging the three proposals in one large measure but in short order decided each as individual ballot measures would be better. Committee member Dan Dorran said keeping the recommendations separate allows voters to decide if they want one, two or all three proposals.

Voters only get that say, however, if the county board of commissioners puts the charter changes on the ballot. The review committee is pitching the recommendations to the board on May 29 at 5:30 p.m. at the Umatilla County Courthouse, Pendleton.

The committee also listed some other matters for the board to consider, such as requiring commis-

sioners to be at least 18, suggesting commissioner stipends of around \$30,000 a year and a county manager salary of \$250,000 to \$300,000 a year. The county pays commissioners now more than \$90,000 a year plus benefits.

In the meantime, county counsel Doug Olsen is drafting the ballot measures and compiling a committee report that includes the numerous people the board heard from and questioned since starting the task in March 2018.

Grable concluded the meeting with praise for the committee members and their nonpartisan attitudes.

"This is government at its best," she said. "This is grass roots."