

Barr skips House hearing; Pelosi accuses him of lying

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WASHINGTON — Attorney General William Barr skipped a House hearing Thursday on special counsel Robert Mueller’s Trump-Russia report, escalating an already acrimonious battle between Democrats and President Donald Trump’s Justice Department. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Barr had already lied to Congress in other testimony and called that a “crime.”

Democrats raised the prospect of holding Barr in contempt after the department also missed the House Judiciary Committee deadline to provide it with a full, unredacted version of Mueller’s report and its underlying evidence. Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler of New York said that if the attorney general doesn’t provide the committee “with the information it demands and the respect that it deserves, Mr. Barr’s moment of accountability will come soon enough.”

Barr’s decision to avoid the hearing, made after a disagreement with the committee over questioning, and the Democratic pushback brought both sides closer to a court battle — one that could pit Trump against House Democrats well into



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., speaks to the media at a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington on Thursday.

the 2020 campaign season. The standoff further heightened tensions sparked by Trump’s refusal to comply with House investigations, with some senior Democrats hinting that a continued blockade could nudge them closer to impeachment.

Nadler said he wouldn’t immediately issue a subpoena for Barr’s testimony but would first focus on getting the full Mueller report, likely including a vote holding Barr in contempt of Congress.

With Barr absent, Democrats convened a short hearing that included an empty chair with a place card set for Barr. Shortly afterward, Pelosi increased the tensions

further. In a reference to the attorney general’s testimony last month, Pelosi said Barr “was not telling the truth to the Congress of the United States — that’s a crime.”

At a hearing on April 9, Florida Rep. Charlie Crist asked Barr about reports that members of Mueller’s team believed he had failed to adequately portray their findings in a four-page memo that was released before the full report.

Crist asked at the hearing, “Do you know what they are referencing with that?” Barr responded, “No, I don’t,” and went on to say Mueller’s team probably wanted “more put out” about what they had found.

Dwellings: LUBA’s understanding of the law restored

Continued from Page A1

Lane County’s government approved the request, which was overturned by Oregon’s Land Use Board of Appeals because the homes hadn’t been assessed for property taxes within five years.

The Oregon Court of Appeals took a different view of the statutory language and ruled that the five-year property tax requirement didn’t apply to dwellings that had been demolished or destroyed.

The state’s highest court has now struck down that opinion and restored LUBA’s understanding of the law, finding that the five-year “look-back” provision applied to demolished homes as well as

those that were merely dilapidated.

Before the state Supreme Court had reached that decision, however, House Bill 3024 sought to dispel the uncertainty by allowing replacement dwellings regardless of when property taxes were last assessed.

That legislation was approved by the House 52-6 last month and is scheduled for a hearing before the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources on May 9.

Landwatch Lane County is troubled by the bill’s attempt to “punch holes in the law” to benefit a single landowner while allowing properties statewide to be fragmented and overdeveloped, said Lauri Segel-Vaccher, the group’s

legal analyst.

“They were trying to intercept the high court,” she said.

The bill didn’t encounter opposition while being reviewed by the House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use, but Landwatch Lane County now plans to fight the proposal in the Senate.

“Landwatch had no idea this bill was being pushed through,” Segel-Vaccher said, noting that the organization doesn’t have a lobbyist. “Regular people don’t know this stuff is happening.”

The Oregon Property Owners Association, which supports HB 3024, believes the Oregon Supreme Court correctly interpreted the land use law, which is “pre-

Democrats have raised questions about that testimony since it was revealed this week that Mueller had written Barr two weeks earlier, on March 27, complaining that the attorney general’s memo “did not fully capture the context, nature and substance” of his work.

Barr said Wednesday his answer was not misleading because he had been in touch with Mueller, rather than members of his team, and that the concerns were mostly about process and not substance. Within minutes of Pelosi’s comments, Justice Department Spokeswoman Kerri Kupec called her words “reckless, irresponsible and false.”

Pelosi also said the administration’s refusal to respect subpoenas by a House committee is “very, very serious” and noted that ignoring congressional subpoenas was one of the articles of impeachment against former President Richard Nixon.

As Democrats portrayed Barr as untruthful, they sought to speak to Mueller. Nadler said the panel hoped the special counsel would appear before the committee on May 15 and the panel was “firming up the date.” It wasn’t clear whether Barr would eventually negotiate an appearance with the House panel.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Community Health Worker Jessica McKay with Good Shepherd Medical Center helps size a bicycle helmet for Aurora Thomas, 6, of Hermiston, at a celebration of National Screen-Free Week on Thursday on Hermiston.

Screens: ‘An hour once dedicated to YouTube becomes an hour spent outside’

Continued from Page A1

Gutierrez said she appreciated that the community hosted a screen-free event each year.

“I like that it’s family-friendly, that everyone can come,” she said. “I also like that they actually teach the kids things.”

Elise Royer, 8, was looking through the free books available from Altrusa International. Her mom Melissa Royer said Elise had persuaded the family to come downtown after getting a flyer for the event from school.

Her kids Elise and Logan, she said, are “big readers.”

“I have a lot of books,” Elise added.

She ended up going with “Matilda” by Roald Dahl, on a recommendation from her dad Casey, who promised to read it to her.

Brian and Jeannie Thomas brought their children — Aurora, 6, Phoenix, 4, and Alphonse, 2 — downtown for the free bicycle helmets from Good Shepherd Health Care System. Once they got the helmets, they said, they planned to stick around and participate in some of the other activities.

Angie Treadwell, a founder of the Healthy Families Coalition and chair of the Children’s Health Committee, said she helped coordinate the event, but there was a long list of community organizations participating. She said the goal was to remind people to put down the screens and spend some time interacting as a family or as a community. “We’re missing a lot

of that,” she said. “These days, everyone is behind a screen.”

Even at the “screen-free” event, some people automatically pulled out phones to capture photos of the event or post to social media.

The event is part of a larger movement of National Screen-Free Week, held the first week in May. The movement focuses on “entertainment screens” like video games, television and scrolling through social media, not screens used for work or homework.

“Even though it’s about turning off screens, Screen-Free Week isn’t about going without — it’s about what you can get!,” screen-free.org states. “An hour once dedicated to YouTube becomes an hour spent outside; ten minutes wiled away on social media turn into ten minutes spent doodling; a movie on a rainy afternoon is replaced by time spent reading, chatting, or playing pretend!”

Many health organizations have warned that children’s still-developing brains can suffer ill effects from too much time in front of a screen, and that too much time on social media or watching television can also negatively affect adults’ physical and mental health. Last month the World Health Organization released recommendations against any screen time for children under two, and against more than an hour a week for children between the ages of two and five. Those recommendations are similar to ones released by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2016.

Pendleton: Urban renewal district is set to expire in 2023

Continued from Page A1

the association had grown to 87 members in 2018 and it was aiming to expand to 95-100 members this year.

He followed it up with another announcement: The Pendleton Downtown Association had followed up a \$100,000 grant it got for the Rivoli Theater in 2017 with a larger grant that will go toward two facilities this year.

The nonprofit secured a \$155,000 Oregon Main Street Revitalization grant to help with renovation costs for the Vert and the old Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks Lodge.

Murack said both buildings were a big part of Pendleton’s arts and entertainment scene, and their respective renovations were the type of projects the association wanted to help out.

“They represent something that was built here in Pendleton,” he said.

Part of the money will go toward assisting in restoring the exterior stairs to the Vert, an auditorium built in the 1930s that mostly acts as the main venue for the Oregon East Symphony today.

Symphony Executive Director J.D. Kindle said years of wear and tear and winter saltings have caused patrons to complain about the stairway’s condition and created a tripping hazard.

“One fall could close the Vert,” he said.

The money will help fund fixing both the steps and access ramps.

The rest of the grant will go toward the Pendleton Elks Lodge, which was long used by the fraternal organization

before it vacated the building in 2017.

Lance Leonnig of Portland bought the 14 S.E. Third St. building in January, rechristened it The Lodge, and turned it into a bar and performance venue.

The Lodge held its first show in April, but the 24,000-square-foot building is still under renovation.

Leonnig said the grant will help pay for a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system, which only covers about 30% of the building currently.

Besides the grant announcement, Murack also revealed the winners for the association’s inaugural “Best of Downtown” awards, a program meant to bolster traffic for member businesses.

This year’s winners included Moe Pho as “Best New Business,” Pendleton Underground Tours for “Best Customer Service,” and OMG! Burgers & Brews for “Best Restaurant, Tavern, or Bar.”

The “black hole”

Later that afternoon, Murack attended an advisory committee meeting for the Pendleton Development Commission, where members talked about how to take advantage of the urban renewal district’s waning lifespan.

The district is set to expire in 2023, and it’s only spent \$5 million compared to the \$33.5 million in maximum indebtedness it planned for when the district started.

The committee invited urban renewal consultant Elaine Howard to sit in on the meeting, and she gave mem-

bers three options to make the best use of their remaining time: market the development commission’s existing programs more aggressively, hire a project manager that can act as a guide for the development project, or have the city begin acquiring blighted buildings and renovating them itself.

Charles Denight, the executive director of the development commission, has frequently met with building owners about renovating their facilities.

Denight said he runs into problems when building owners start considering all the time, effort, money and risk it takes to renovate a building and all they can see is a “black hole.”

And while some local developers like Al Plute have had success in restoring historic buildings for modern use, Denight said most building owners don’t have a background in real estate development.

For those unfamiliar with the development process, Howard suggested the city hire an in-house project manager that could help owners through the development process.

But if the private sector is still unwilling to develop, Howard said the city could take it a step further and start buying prominent blighted buildings and restoring them with public money.

“Sometimes, to create momentum, you have to step in and be active,” she said.

While the city might receive criticism for competing with private developers, Howard said cities buying buildings to renovate

cisely why we need this bill,” said Dave Hunnicutt, the group’s executive director.

A revision of the replacement dwelling statute in 2013 wasn’t fair to the landowner at the center of the legal case and should have permitted replacement homes in such circumstances, he said.

“That was the intent, we just didn’t write it very well,” Hunnicutt said.

Even if HB 3024 passes, landowners hoping to rebuild will still have to demonstrate a demolished house had plumbing, heating, electricity and other attributes of an inhabitable dwelling, he said.

“We’re not adding a single new dwelling under this bill,” he said.

themselves has a track record of success in some Oregon cities.

The committee was also interested in honing in on fixing Pendleton’s blighted homes and reviewed housing programs instituted by other urban renewal districts.

The committee liked a proposal from Denight for a home rehab loan program.

Under Denight’s concept, the city would conduct annual inspections following the renovation. Following each successful inspection, the homeowner would have 20% of their loan forgiven, up to the entire amount of the loan.

Regardless of the tack it takes, Howard said the city and development commission needs to be intentional and concise about what it wants for the urban renewal district going forward, especially if it extends its lifespan.

The district is funded through tax increment financing, a process where the property tax rate is “frozen” within the district, and the development commission gets all the revenue earned on top of the frozen rate.

Howard said the commission could elect to let the current district sunset and then start over from scratch with a new tax rate.

But the city could also extend the current district by simply passing an amendment that pushes out the end date.

Although the city could do this unilaterally, Howard recommended the city meet with all the other taxing districts that are affected by urban renewal and talk it over with them.



EO file photo

In this 2014 photo, the Athena PGG farm supply store was preparing to close its doors. It was purchased by the Athena Mainstreet Association.

Athena: ‘We have asked the community, how can we best use this?’

Continued from Page A1

The association is matching the grant funds with \$68,544 from other grants and in-kind donations.

April Vorhauer-Flatt is the association president and said the group continues to “shape the vision for this project.”

The building consists of three spaces totaling 10,000 square feet. Vorhauer-Flat explained the space next to the Gem Theater is 2,500 feet, and the Gem likely will use that in the future. The association plans to lease another 2,500

square feet to a tenant. The association plans to move its offices into the mezzanine of the largest and third space, but Vorhauer-Flatt also said, “we have asked the community, how can we best use this?”

Oregon Heritage, a division of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, awarded 30 matching grants worth more than \$5.2 million statewide for building projects that encourage economic revitalization.

For more information about the association, contact Vorhauer-Flatt at 541-969-4811.