

Oncology: Construction underway on Pendleton cancer center

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"It's a very nice addition not just for the Pendleton community, but for those to the south and east as well who will no longer have to travel out of the region," he said.

Some of the other "critical community members" in attendance on June 18 included Harry Geller, president of St. Anthony Hospital; Tim Simons, Pendleton's city engineer; Dr. John McBee, a longtime advocate of bringing specialty health services to the area; and Dr. Cindi Holmes, the radiologist at St. Anthony.

The center will be located down the street from St. Anthony Hospital and will use its imaging

capabilities to compliment its treatments.

"It's been a collaboration with them," Leasure said. "They've been very helpful in establishing that connection."

As for the oncologist who will staff the facility, Leasure said that they are in negotiations and plan to announce a hire in August.

RBS announced its plans for the center at the end of last year, and after its completion, it will become the fourth center the company has developed. RBS already operates two facilities in Alaska and another in Oklahoma.

Though the center will hold its grand opening sometime in January 2020, it hopes to welcome its first patients in December. RBS has a his-

tory of quick turnarounds on its development projects. At its center in Juneau, Alaska, the first patient was treated six months after its groundbreaking, the same proposed timeline for the Pendleton facility.

RBS was formed in 2010 by a group of physicians and targets rural communities with the goal of eliminating long distances that people must often travel to receive cancer treatments.

"We were excited to find an area like Pendleton where we can make a real impact," said Denise Gerlach, the company's vice president of business development and marketing.

As of June 28, Leasure said the project has secured roughly two-thirds of its

local investors. The project is also working with a newly formed nonprofit organization, which will be called the Eastern Oregon Cancer Network, and satisfies another goal set by RBS at the project's onset.

The nonprofit is designed to help collect and distribute funds to patients at the new center, specifically to assist those who must travel and make overnight accommodations in the area for their treatments.

RBS will work in conjunction with the Eastern Oregon Cancer Network to host an event at the unfinished facility at noon Sept. 7. With construction stopped for the day, the event, titled "Written in Stone," invites commu-

nity members to write their names along with motivational or encouraging messages on the walls of the building's unfinished vault.

The idea is for patients at the center to see the names and messages of those who have undergone treatments themselves, or who know someone who has, so that they feel the support of the entire community behind them, Gerlach said.

While RBS turned to its usual source of Alaskan-based Denali General Contractors for the project, Leasure said construction has been subcontracted to local and regional companies. Simons, Pendleton's city engineer, confirmed that nine different locally based companies had been con-

tracted for the project.

The company's prior experience in rural development projects has made things smoother for the city as well.

"What's been really enjoyable about working with them is that they've done this before in other places," Simons said. "They were very prepared and very knowledgeable. There's been no hand-holding."

In general, Leasure, who has been accepted as a member of the Rotary Club since the project's announcement, said communication and collaboration within the community has been robust.

"People have done anything and everything I've needed," he said. "The community has really opened up."

Wrap up: Despite disagreements, bipartisan work was accomplished

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and community colleges to charge in-state tuition for Native American students who graduated from an Oregon high school. He said he heard from Nixyaawii Community School in Pendleton that they have tribal students who attend during the school year while living with relatives, but keep a home address outside the state.

"The bill seemed to make good sense that we keep these students in Oregon if they want to go here," he said.

One of the bills Hansell sponsored was brought to his attention by a constituent in Adams, whose insurance denied coverage for a type of cancer treatment that Hansell himself benefitted from when he survived cancer. Senate Bill 740 requires insurance companies that cover radiation therapy for cancer to also cover proton beam therapy.

Another bill sponsored by Hansell will allow small rural cemetery districts to annex more land into their districts.

Hansell said it was a tough session, but he was pleased with the number of capital projects the district will see funding for.

He said projects such as a mental health-related renovation of the Umatilla County Jail and a joint medical and mental health Walla Walla Valley Center for Wellness are expected to serve as an example to the rest of the state in better serving those with mental illnesses and addictions.

Smith was a sponsor or chief sponsor on 85 bills and resolutions this session. One was SB 408, which allows counties to approve certain types of land zoned for exclusive farm use to site utility facilities "necessary for public service." He said the bill will assist Umatilla Electric Cooperative as it

continues to serve the growing region.

Smith said despite prominent disagreements between Republicans and Democrats during the session, there was also bipartisan work. One example was a package of reforms of Measure 11. Smith, who didn't sponsor the bill but did support it, said he believed the reforms balance "justice and mercy" for young offenders.

Measure 11, passed by Oregon voters in 1994, set mandatory minimum sentences for certain offenders and required offenders ages 15-17 be tried as adults, allowing them to receive life without parole. Under Senate Bill 1008, those convicted of a crime before their 18th birthday will be given a hearing halfway through their incarceration that would consider whether they might serve the rest of their term under supervision outside of prison. They will also be allowed to apply for

parole after 15 years.

Offenders would not automatically be released, Smith pointed out, but the new law will allow the justice system to take into account how someone who committed a violent crime at age 15, 16 or 17 might have changed in the years since.

"I would hope I'm not the same person today as I was at age 15," he said.

The beginning of the 2019 session focused heavily on education. Smith sat on the Student Success Committee that toured schools throughout the state as legislators worked on a package of bills to help boost graduation rates and other measures of educational success.

Smith ultimately voted no on the resulting tax bill, however. He said business and industry leaders told legislators they knew more revenue needed to be raised for education, and made an "extremely reasonable

request" to be given a couple of weeks to come up with language they could support.

"When that deal was rejected, I knew I needed to step back," Smith said.

He said much of the school-related work this session was focused on elementary and secondary education, but he expected assisting higher education would be a major focus in the next biennium.

He said beyond sponsoring legislation, an important part of being a rural Eastern Oregon legislator is also educating legislators from urban areas on issues facing rural Oregon and how one-size-fits-all bills might have negative consequences for the east side of the state.

That work will likely continue into the next session, he said, as the legislature grapples with how to address climate change while protecting jobs.

Barreto was sponsor or chief sponsor of 83 bills and

resolutions this session.

Hansell said it was Barreto who spearheaded a bill that the two Eastern Oregon legislators co-sponsored requiring Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to consider elk overpopulation when issuing tags as part of the Oregon Landowner Damage Program. Farmers and ranchers in Eastern Oregon often experience damage from elk herds.

Barreto was also chief sponsor of a bill that appropriated \$1.43 million to the FFA.

He joined Smith and Hansell in working to bring tax dollars back to Eastern Oregon for capital construction projects.

In a Facebook post reflecting on the session, Barreto thanked his colleagues and said it had been an honor serving with such "hard-working men and women" as the House Republicans.

"A very tough session but we persevered!" he wrote.

Tax: Worries linger over Washington sales tax

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"They walk in the door. They want some filters. You ring it up, you tell 'em how much, and they say, 'Oh, I'm from Oregon, no tax,'" he said in late June.

"Yeah, they'll make you re-ring \$2, cause they don't want to pay the extra 15 cents."

In the days leading up to July 1, Ogden worried. He checked his records. Twenty percent of his business last year came from Oregon customers — more than \$1 million in gross revenue. If his customers don't want to pay sales tax on an inexpensive filter, why would they cross the river to pay 7.7% sales tax on a \$30,000 tractor with a front loader?

They like his service, but Oregonians don't have to pay sales tax at home.

"I just think our legislators are out of touch with reality," he said. "I think that they want money so bad that they'll do anything to get it. But the ramifications on our local businesses in Clark County are extreme."

Over in Vancouver, Washington, the sales tax change was keeping Don Thompson up at night.

"You know, wake up at 3 o'clock in the morning and wonder how it's all gonna fit together," he said.

Thompson owns the America the Beautiful Dreamer furniture store in Vancouver, Washington. He checked his records, too. This spring, about 40% of his business came from Oregon customers.

"Well, it's a bit scary," he said the week before the



OPB Photo/Kate Davidson

Skip Ogden, who owns Dan's Tractors outside Battle Ground, Wash., said 20% of his business last year came from Oregon customers — more than \$1 million in gross revenue.

change. "If we have 40% of our business from Oregon, how much are we going to lose? Twenty percent? Thirty percent? I really have no idea. It's kind of unnerving."

Thompson has four children who work for him. He just refinanced his building. He wants to raise revenue, not shrink it.

"I sent an email to the governor. I said 'You're the head salesman for the state of Washington. Give me one reason why a furniture store should operate in Clark County versus just moving to Portland,'" he said. "Vancouver/Clark County already loses half of their high-ticket sales to Portland because of the sales tax."

For years, Washington lawmakers have been eyeing the automatic sales tax exemption for shoppers from places like Oregon with no sales tax. This year, the move to eliminate it passed, with exceptions.

Oregonians, Alaskans, some Canadians and oth-

ers still won't pay sales tax on cars, boats or farm equipment. Skip Ogden's tractors are largely used by homeowners and builders, not farmers, so he won't get much relief there.

But days before the automatic sales tax exemption ended, Ogden realized he could take advantage of another exception: Items delivered to Oregon apparently don't count. Ogden's relief was palpable. His tractors are often delivered.

The whole idea of the sales tax exemption was to keep Washington businesses competitive with their counterparts in sales tax-free Oregon. Even the prime sponsor of the legislation ending the automatic exemption says border businesses have legitimate concerns. But state Sen. Christine Rolfes, D-Kitsap County, says that, in general, it's a fairness issue.

"That is how Washingtonians feel about it — that everybody should be charged the same amount of money

when they purchase something," she said.

Lawmakers' first motivation was revenue. With no income tax, Washington relies more heavily on sales tax to bring in money. Democratic lawmakers pointed to a range of pressing funding needs, particularly education, but also mental health care, rape kit testing and orca recovery.

The second motivation, lawmakers said, was residents' annoyance.

"It's very unpopular with Washington residents that may be standing in a line," and hearing Oregonians skip sales tax, said Democratic state Rep. Sharon Wylie of Vancouver. "And the people in line listening to this don't care for it very much."

This year, Wylie voted to get rid of the automatic exemption, despite having supported it in the past. She says she's heard the concerns of the business community.

Lawmakers' third motivation was the potential abuse of the system.

Some legislators fixed on the idea that people were misusing the sales tax exemption. They pointed to Washington residents undermining the tax base by using old Oregon IDs to skip sales tax. So they tried to make that harder.

"We didn't get rid of the exemption, but we changed the way it's carried out," Rolfes said.

Now instead of showing ID, shoppers from places without sales tax will have to save all their receipts and submit them once a year to get the 6.5% state sales back. Local sales tax can't be recouped.



Rendering Courtesy of Blue Mountain Community College

BMCC plans to use FARM II as indoor rodeo arena in addition to classroom space for veterinary science, UAS, and other agricultural education.

FARM II: BMCC gets \$13 million

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nered bipartisan support. We look forward to serving the region even further with this facility."

In an interview, Hansell said getting the governor to include the project in her budget proposal was important and pointed to local efforts to get Brown's endorsement as the reason.

BMCC, the city of Pendleton, Umatilla County, and other local private and public entities met before the session started to plot out which projects they wanted to lobby for in the Legislature.

FARM II and a Umatilla County Jail renovation rose to the top of the legislative list and both were eventually funded.

Although FARM II had bipartisan support, it still overcame some late obstacles.

Casey White-Zollman, the BMCC vice president of public relations, said the college was concerned that an Oregon Senate walkout would lead to the Legislature concluding business without appropriating the Article XI-G bonds and lottery funds needed to financially back the project.

Republican senators held

a nine-day walkout toward the end of the session to block a cap-and-trade bill, only returning the day before the session was set to end after receiving assurances that the bill was dead.

If BMCC didn't get the funding, it would have to mount a fundraising effort to help fund the project, White-Zollman said.

Hansell, who participated in the walkout, said he was concerned about FARM II's fate as well, and he was glad that senate business resumed before the session ended.

"I think Shakespeare said, 'All's well that ends well,'" he said.

FARM II will be located west of the Round-Up Grounds on land owned by the Round-Up Association.

The city and Round-Up had been buying land west of Southwest 18th Street for years, and in 2018, the Round-Up acquired 11 of those properties from the city when it looked like FARM II was coming closer to fruition.

White-Zollman said BMCC will begin soliciting bids for an architect over the winter and the design and planning process will help determine the construction timeline.

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