

EAST OREGONIAN

NOVEMBER 13-14, 2021

146th Year, No. 12

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INSIDE
HEPPNER, WESTON-MCEWEN MEET IN 2A QUARTERFINALS, B1

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Tax credit will keep a light on our democracy

Imagine this page was blank except for one question: “What if there were no local reporters?” That was the front-page question posed by our friends at Pamplin Media last week.

It’s a good question and regardless of how you get local news — by watching TV, listening to local radio or reading a story in the newspaper or on a news organization’s website — it’s not hyperbole to say communities suffer when there is no local news coverage or when independently owned media companies are gobbled up by hedge funds that gut newsrooms.

And it’s a timely question because there is a bipartisan provision in the federal budget reconciliation bill working its way through Congress that will give media companies a temporary payroll tax credit to hire and retain journalists. Oregon’s Sen. Ron Wyden, D, chairs the Senate Finance Committee that will have a great deal of say on whether this provision makes it through to the finish line.

Wyden is a co-sponsor of the bill written by Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington. Being the son of a prominent journalist, he is a longtime champion of a free press. In a recent interview with the Seattle Times, Wyden responded to a question about the potential for some to dislike government helping the press. He said, “This is not the government putting its hand on certain types of speech. This is about generally empowering local journalism in a big way. By the way, there are plenty of local journalism outlets that span across the political spectrum, left, right, center, you name it.”

On the House side, the bill was co-authored by Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Washington, and Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, D-Arizona, and is strongly supported by two key Oregon representatives — Peter DeFazio and Earl Blumener.

For anyone who follows the challenges of media companies and the reality of growing news deserts around the country, this temporary tax credit known as the

See *Democracy*, Page A10



A United States flag flutters in the late afternoon sun Wednesday, Nov. 10, 2021, along Midco Lane at Pendleton High School. Students in the high school’s leadership class placed the flags along the driveway leading up to the school in honor of Veterans Day. Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

DAY FOR OUR VETERANS

Flag displays, breakfast, parade and solemnity mark Veterans Day

By **BRYCE DOLE AND ERICK PETERSON**
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Pendleton High School students lined the fields outside their school with dozens of United States flags on Wednesday, Nov. 10, in a gesture of appreciation and support for local veterans.

Roughly a dozen leadership students took part in the activity celebrating Veterans Day. They walked along the roads, staking the small flags into the ground while laughing and chatting on the clear, sunny fall afternoon.

This was one of several local Veterans Day events to recognize those who served.

Students with family members who served in the armed forces shared what the federal holiday means to them. Sauren Garton, a senior at the high school, said she felt it was important to recognize the people who fought for the country.

“I’m about as American as they get,” Sauren Garton, a senior at the high school said. “I think it’s really important that kids get reminded that we didn’t get all



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

A member of the Hermiston VFW plants a POW MIA flag at the start of a Veterans Day breakfast on Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021, at the Hermiston Community Center.

these things for free.”

Curt Thompson, assistant principal at Pendleton High School, said placing the flags instills in students a sense of pride in their country after years of political division.

“Things like this are a good reminder to all of us that we’re all part of the same country and we need to be working together and support each other,” Thompson said.

Sam Jennings, a senior leadership student and track athlete, said serving in the armed forces is an important part of his family. He struggles to count how many of his family members have served, but estimates there are at least six.

“It’s nice to have a day for them, to honor their willingness to serve,” Jennings said. “They deserve it.”

Jennings said the flags this year are a step-up from efforts the school has made in the past to show support. He said he gladly would have dug trenches and staked 10-foot flags, “but this is

just as good.”

Rylee Demianew said the flags are a physical reminder for students leaving school that Veterans Day isn’t simply a day off. To her, it’s a day to show veterans the students are thinking of them.

Breakfast and camaraderie

In Hermiston, Aaron Watterling and around 140 other veterans shared food and camaraderie during a breakfast.

“It’s always a great time,” Watterling said about the annual event, and he credited Hermiston Parks and Recreation Department employees, including Diana Picard, recreation coordinator, and Kelly Schwirse, clerk, for a “fantastic job helping us.”

Brandon Artz, the parks and recreation department’s interim director, explained that his department took over the breakfast to keep it from being a drive-thru event. His department got together with sponsors, including Hale’s Restaurant, the Pheas-

ant Blue Collar Bar & Grill and Vern’s Food Service, he said. He added that volunteers, such as the Hermiston Kiwanis Club, helped make the breakfast possible.

Watterling, who served in the Marines from 1966 to 1970, told stories of his service during the Vietnam War. His service made a lasting impact, he said, which included 20 years of “jungle rot” on his feet that mostly went away.

The larger effect was on his personality, he said. Watterling described a “military bearing,” which to this day even influences how he dresses.

His service, he said, also links him to other service members, whom he interacts with as “old friends,” even when he does not know their names. Watterling said he talks with these friends about family members and shared acquaintances, reminiscing over old times and discussing life events.

One of these fellow vets at the event was William Hill, 74, of Hermiston, who served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. He said he is proud to have served and he is happy for opportunities such as the breakfast, which allow him to meet other veterans.

An honor guard member for American Legion Post 37, Hermiston, Hill said he is not accustomed to talking about his Army days.

“It was a million-dollar experience,” he said, “but I’d hate to have to spend a million dollars to do it again.”

Artz said he hopes next year’s event can include more people. Pre-pandemic, the Veterans Day Breakfast did not try to limit the number of attendees, he said.

See *Veterans*, Page A10

Worshipping behind the mask

Some local churches continue to take precautions against the coronavirus

By **ERICK PETERSON**
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — On Sunday, Nov. 7, Pastor Patty Nance and two young children in suits began a morning service by walking up to the front of their church and lighting candles. They were all wearing masks, trying to reduce the chance of COVID-19 transmission, and they were not alone in their mask wearing.

Every single person in Hermiston First United Methodist Church, 191 E. Gladys Ave., Hermiston, was wearing a mask. During the entire service, the only time anyone removed a mask was when speaking at the front of the church, behind a lectern or at the altar.

This comes at a time mask-wearing has become politicized, and some television evangelists have decried both masks and vaccinations. First United, however, has sided with precautions, according to the pastor. For not only was everyone masked, but the church had other signs of the seriousness by which they are taking COVID-19.

See *Masks*, Page A10



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A stained glass window illuminates churchgoers Sunday, Nov. 7, 2021, at the Hermiston First United Methodist Church in Hermiston, where all of the congregants continue to wear masks for services.



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