

# EAST OREGONIAN

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2022

146th Year, No. 38

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## INSIDE WINTER CONCERT SHOWCASES LOCAL YOUTHS IN GO!

# Commission grants fire station project more money

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The owners of the old Pendleton fire station at 911 S.W. Court Ave. walked away from a Pendleton Development Commission meeting the night of Tuesday, Jan. 18, with a commitment for an additional \$80,281 in urban renewal money.

It's not as much as couple Scott Hart and Erin Bennett originally requested, but it came as a result of

talks with the city.

The commission already granted Hart and Bennett \$494,819 to get their business started, but they appeared before the commission in December to request more money to finish the project after rising construction costs and labor shortages ballooned the bottom line of the renovation project. They requested an additional \$188,288, plus an expedited reimbursement schedule for the second story and

facade grants they already secured.

City Manager Robb Corbett, the executive director of the commission, told commissioners he met with Hart and Bennett and then with city staff to figure out how they should respond. They eventually came up with \$80,281 by estimating the rise in construction costs based off of a price index.

While a staff report provided the commissioners didn't make a recommendation one or the other, Corbett

recommended the commission approve the increase in grant funds.

"You probably couldn't pick a worse time to start a project based on the economy and what happened at that time," he said.

The Pendleton City Council, which comprises the development commission, is especially invested in the fire station project because it handpicked Hart and Bennett to buy the former headquarters of the city fire department. Acting as the

commission, the council granted the owners nearly a half-million dollars to turn the old fire hall into a multi-faceted business.

At the December meeting, Bennett said she and Hart already relocated their existing motorcycle parts businesses — Moto Stuff and SRC Moto — to the facility and had opened up the BackFire Station restaurant. Expanding the business

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### RIVER DEMOCRACY ACT

## Cliff Bentz expresses opposition to RDA on House floor

By RONALD BOND  
Wallowa County Chieftain

WASHINGTON — Oregon Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, denounced the River Democracy Act on the House floor Jan. 11, saying the legislation that would label 4,700 miles of waterways as "Wild and Scenic" instead would leave them "just waiting to be burned and ruined."

"The overwhelming majority of my 62 county commissioners have serious and unanswered concerns about the dangers the act presents," Bentz, a freshman congressman, said during his floor speech. "Chief

among them is that this designation will prevent what needs to be done to protect these watersheds, placing them in a bureaucratic wasteland where it will take years, if not decades, to initiate and then complete plans that may or may not allow the treatment activities needed right now."

Bentz noted that with a mile-wide corridor — a half-mile on each side of the designated areas — being marked Wild and Scenic, the area cordoned off, 4,700 square miles, would be about the size of Connecticut.

Bentz said the bill would allow just one method of fire prevention — prescribed burning — which he contended would actually increase the threat of fires.

"I cannot emphasize enough how dangerous it is to use prescribed burns in overgrown, densely packed, dry forests without thinning the forest first," he said. "Prescribed

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Bentz

### MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Marchers carry signs Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, along East Main Street in downtown Hermiston during the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace March.

# Striving for a better world

## Marchers spread words of peace in Hermiston on Martin Luther King Jr. Day

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Jesus Rome has lived in Hermiston for 30 years, and he said he has been to every Martin Luther King Jr. Day Peace March in the community since its inception in 2000.

Monday, Jan. 17, was no exception. Rome is the treasurer for the Hermiston Cultural

Awareness Coalition, which organizes the event each year.

"When I think about MLK and other civil rights leaders, I can't help but remember and appreciate all the past pioneers that have gone before me and paved the way so I can have the rights and freedoms I have now in this country," Rome said.

Rome pointed out injustice in Oregon's past. In 1844, he said, Oregon voted into law the Black Exclusion Act, which essentially made it illegal for any Black families to move into Oregon territory.

"I just can't imagine being my skin color and growing up in those days and even during the days of the civil rights movement era and experiencing the constant racial trauma and discrimination on a daily basis," he said.

Around 80 people attended the march, which began at 11 a.m. at the Hermiston First

United Methodist Church, 191 E. Gladys Ave., and traveled down Main Street.

Police escorts and a United States flag bearer led the procession. People of varied ages, elders to children, took part. Some people sang "We Shall Overcome," and others held homemade signs depicting King.

Pastor Patty Nance, whose church hosted the event, walked at the back of the march. She said she was glad her church could play a role in the celebration of King. In addition, Nance expressed hope that people would hear the speakers and gain understanding of the state of the world and its need for change.

Kicking off speeches, the Rev. Chuck Barnes, St. John's Episcopal Church priest, offered a prayer.

Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith

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# Meat of the Matter

## Biden administration aims to level the playing field in the meatpacking industry

By JAYSON JACOBY  
Baker City Herald

WASHINGTON — Curtis Martin doesn't expect a problem that was decades in the making to be solved by a single announcement from the White House, even one that comes with a billion-dollar pledge.

But Martin, a North Powder cattle rancher and past president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, is nonetheless encouraged by the Biden administration's effort to

increase competition in the meatpacking industry where four corporations dominate.

"I think it's wonderful," Martin said of the administration's recent announcement that it would divert \$1 billion from the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act to address problems in the meat processing system and try to encourage the construction of smaller, regional meat processing operations and, potentially, curb a recent rise in beef, pork and poultry prices at the retail level.

"It's really a positive report, and I think the best thing ranchers can do is engage in it and help Tom Vilsack," Martin said.

Vilsack is the U.S. Agriculture

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Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Riley Martin operates a tractor filled with hay to feed his cattle April 5, 2021, at the Martin family cattle ranch in North Powder. Martin, along with his father, Curtis Martin, are among several ranchers who were former skeptics of the Biden administration. That skepticism was eased by the administration's initiative, announced Jan. 3, 2022, to increase competition in the meat processing industry.

