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HOUSE BILL 4002

House votes to end ag overtime exemption

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — After an emotional three-hour debate, the Oregon House voted 37-23 on Tuesday, March 1, to end the state's agricultural exemption from higher overtime wages.

The measure is awaiting a vote in the Senate.

The overtime exemption would be phased out over five years under House Bill 4002, and tax credits would cover some of the higher wages paid by farmers. But critics claimed those provisions won't prevent the inevitable loss of family farms.

"They could be the nail in the coffin for farmers who can't absorb any more increased costs," said Rep. David Brock-Smith, R-Port Orford.

Many growers operate on razor-thin margins and would likely go out of business while waiting for the promised money from tax credits, since they can't afford higher overtime payments, he said.

Rep. Raquel Moore-Green, R-Salem, said House Bill 4002 also isn't likely to help farmworkers, since their employers likely will seek to reduce weekly hours, switch crops or simply exit the industry.

"They could reduce their operation size or cease farming altogether and sell out," she said.

Supporters of HB 4002 cast the legislation as a matter of constitutional fairness and noted if an ongoing lawsuit against the agricultural overtime exemption is successful, farmers won't get assistance to ease the economic blow.

"I believe it's time to live up to the promise of equal protection of the law," said Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene. "We owe basic protections to farmworkers and we owe it to farmers not to make a major change to their bottom line without a safety net."

Before approving HB 4002, the House voted 32-27 against remanding the bill back to a joint committee to consider an amendment favored by Republican lawmakers.

"There is still time to find a more workable solution. An Oregon solution," said Rep. Shelly Boshart-Davis, R-Albany.

Under that amendment, farmworkers would receive overtime relief payments from the state government after they'd worked more than 40 hours per week.

Meanwhile, farmers would pay workers time-and-a-half overtime

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HOTEL FOR SALE

The Marigold Hotel is on the market

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Marigold Hotel could get a new lease on life.

Crystal Investment Properties, a Vancouver, Washington, real estate investment company, is advertising The Marigold, 105 S.E. Court Ave., as a property for sale for \$1.7 million mere months after the city of Pendleton declared it a nuisance and shut it down.

Crystal Investment describes the property as a 47-room hotel that includes a commercial kitchen located in Pendleton's historic downtown area.

But the advertisement doesn't explain why the motel isn't operational.

"Hotel is not currently operating," the ad states. "Buyer to conduct all investigations into suitability for use."

Crystal Investment also brokered the last time The Marigold was sold in 2019. The buyer, Shivam Patel and his business

Mahantam Hospitality of Columbia City, bought the property for \$1.5 million.

Shortly after Patel took over, police began to respond to an uptick in calls for service at the hotel. Pendleton Police Chief Chuck Byram attributed the criminal activity at the motel to Patel's staff and their permissive attitude and complicity with hotel guest behavior. The situation reached a head in 2021 when a man at The Marigold opened fire at a car that was driving away from the hotel, injuring a 17-year-old boy.

The city in early December 2021 declared The Marigold a nuisance and revoked its business license, but Patel appealed the decision to the city council. Patel argued he intended to make a more hands-on role with the business, had made necessary staffing changes and was in the process of upgrading the building's security features.

But Patel's promises weren't enough to convince the city council to reverse the decision, meaning The Marigold was forced to stay closed.



Photos by Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Signage adorns the front of The Marigold Hotel on Wednesday, March 2, 2022, in downtown Pendleton. The business, which the city in early December 2021 declared a nuisance property and revoked its business license, is on the market for \$1.7 million.

Patel has since put the hotel on the market, and Charles Denight, the associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, said he already has seen signs the property may come off the market soon.

Denight and other Pendleton economic development officials took an active role in marketing a vacant motel at 310 S.E. Dorion Ave. to the Portland-based Cascadia Hospitality. After purchasing the property, Cascadia is renovating it and plans to reopen the hotel as the MotoLodge later this year.

Denight said he's not playing the same role this time around because the circumstances are different. Whereas Cascadia needed to be convinced to take a detour into Pendleton on its way

to scoping out a property in Baker City, Denight said prospective owners are inquiring about what kind of financial aid the urban renewal district could offer to The Marigold.

"It's been much more direct," he said.

Denight said Pendleton seems to be a hot market right now, pointing to the steeply rising price of houses. Coming out of the pandemic, the local hospitality industry also is growing. Besides MotoLodge, a new Radisson hotel at the Pendleton airport is expected to open this summer. And the owner of Pendleton's Holiday Inn has announced his intent to build a new building for the franchise while maintaining the current motel under a different brand name.



Sidewalk construction takes place Wednesday, March 2, 2022, in front of The Marigold Hotel in downtown Pendleton.

Rural fire districts could change under proposed law

By ALEX WITTMER
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Rural residents outside city limits may be brought into a city's fire district under a proposed law in the Oregon Legislature, resulting in increased taxes to pay for the service.

Senate Bill 1582 would allow rural fire districts to annex areas within 7 road miles of a fire department into their district. That means residents who might have forgone paying taxes for fire protection services could see an increase to help fund the departments. The Senate on Feb. 17 passed the bill 18-8.

For some fire chiefs, the legislation would give their departments the

option to increase taxes. La Grande Rural Fire District Chief Craig Kretschmer said his department is not keen on making property owners pony up for the service.

"Essentially, it would give fire protection districts the right to annex folks 7 miles from their station into your district," he said. "It's not something we really want to do, to force people, right?"

Instead, Kretschmer said his department would focus on using the legislation as a tool to educate residents not covered by the district about their options, and give them the ability to join if they choose to do so.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

Pilot Rock Rural Fire Protection District and crews from other fire departments and districts work to extinguish a fire May 5, 2021, on Northeast Second Street in Pilot Rock. Senate Bill 1582 in the Oregon legislative session would allow rural fire districts to annex areas within 7 road miles of a fire department into their district.

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