

Funds:

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Funding bump for Rivoli

The funding is from House Bill 5202, the 114-page spending bill that allocates tens of millions in funds for projects statewide. Hansell said he was involved in a couple of key appropriations, including the \$1.5 million for the ongoing restoration of the Historic Rivoli Theater in downtown Pendleton.

The amount is not a big ask compared to the totality of Oregon's multi-billion dollar budget, Hansell said, but it was at the top of his to-do list.

"So this was my priority this time," he said, "and we got it."

He credited Andrew Picken, president of the Rivoli Restoration Coalition and his team for "just doing a marvelous job" of restoring the iconic theater and working toward reinvigorating it as a performing arts center.

"I remember going to the Rivoli when I was a kid," he said.

Hansell explained he first learned of the theater project from a presentation Picken made to the Umatilla County Historical Society and was eager to do what he could to help. But obtaining funding for the project took some time.

When the coronavirus pandemic hit in 2020, the Oregon Lottery tanked and project funding with it. And in the 2021 session, he said he had to make good on two key Pendleton projects already in the queue: the Umatilla County Jail renovation and the Facility for Agricultural Resource Management project — or FARM II — at Blue Mountain Community College.

The 2022 short session, then, was time to go after funding for the Rivoli.

The money should go to helping move the project along as well as allow the

Rivoli Restoration Coalition to leverage for more grants and funding.

"Spread the peanut butter," Rep. Greg Smith, R-Hep- pner, said he worked to bring state funding to projects in his district, which now spans Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam, Sherman and Wasco counties.

"The projects within HB 5202 were requested by the communities," Smith said, "and then I negotiated on their behalf, as a member of the full Ways and Means (Committee) and the Capital Construction Subcommittee."



Hansell



Levy



Smith

He said a big highlight is the \$4.59 million for the Northeast Oregon Regional Acute Care Center that will be in the Hermiston area.

He said the facility will be a "navigation center"—a place for people suffering behavioral or mental distress who "need a place to chill out for a couple of days" but have not broken any laws.

A navigation center came out of the 2021 session, but that is at the western end of his district in The Dalles. Smith said that's quite a drive for police from Milton-Freewater, for example, especially in the winter.

This new center could go on property the Port of Umatilla owns, he said, or even the Columbia Development Authority site, the former location of the U.S. Army's chemical depot near Hermiston.

He said while he has traditionally worked to obtain state funds for infrastructure and capital improvement projects, local governments, including the ports, cities and counties, are doing well there. But when it comes to mental and behavioral health, he said, there are people in our communities who are hurting and need the help.

Still, Smith pointed to the \$1 million each for infrastructure improvements at regional fairgrounds and the nearly \$167,000 each that went to a number of smaller

cities, including Spray, Fossil, Condon and Arlington. That kind of funding to small towns, he said, is akin to \$10 million in Portland.

"Let's spread the peanut butter to everyone," he said.

Ukiah School District benefits

Getting \$500,000 for teacher housing in Ukiah was another focus, Hansell said.

The village of Ukiah in southern Umatilla County has teachers driving there from as far as Hermiston. In the winter, when roads can shut down, that's a problem because most Ukiah students walk to school.

Hansell said Ukiah School District Superintendent Jim Reger had the idea to have housing for teachers to use during inclement weather or that could be part of a hiring package to incentivize a teacher to live in Ukiah.

Hansell said this is funding that makes a difference to a community.

Big money comes to La GrandeProjects in La Grande received big allocations, including \$4 million to Eastern Oregon University to improve its grand staircase and \$1 million for EOU's Visual and Performing Arts Scholarship.

The biggest allocation in the Union County seat went to Grande Ronde Hospital Foundation — \$5 million for the hospital's project to expand its surgical center and facilities.

Hansell said the hospital is in the beginning stages of the \$50 million project, and asking for 10% seemed steep.

In a normal short session, he said, that kind of fund request would have been shoved to the next long session. So he said he conferred with his friend and colleague Sen. Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, D-Portland, who encouraged him to apply.

"It ended up getting funded as well," he said.

And like the Rivoli Theater project, Grand Ronde can use this money to leverage more grants and funding opportunities, he said.

Not every bill is a winner

Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, said the money from the short

session will benefit her district, but funding for those projects was possible only because the Democrats supported them. The two key bills she pushed for, she said, did not make it.

Levy led the charge on House Bill 4127, which would have pulled an additional \$1 million from the state general fund into the Oregon Department of Agriculture fund to compensate ranchers for wolf problems.

She was a chief sponsor of the bill, along with Smith, Hansell and fellow Republicans Rep. Mark Owens of Crane and Sen. Lynn Findley of Vale. But the bill faced strong opposition from Democrats and environmental groups and never made it out of committee.

Likewise, Levy and Hansell were the chief sponsors on HB 4154, which would have provided \$400,000 to expand the capacity of the fuel farm at the La Grande/Union County Airport.

"I didn't get funding for either one of them," she said. "Those were my top priorities."

Hansell said he had two bills, one didn't even get a hearing and one he had to "gut and stuff" and it still didn't go. He said there were 50 bills with Democrats as chief sponsors that moved forward in the Senate, compared to just four bills with Republican chief sponsors.

He also said the short session was biting off more than it could swallow.

"We're trying to do far too many major policy bills in the short session," he said. "It was never intended for that."

Hansell said there are two fronts when it comes to legislation: policy and projects. Policy proposals he tends to bring in the long session, he said, and in this short session he worked only on projects. That work involves finding sources to fund everything from infrastructure improvements to building construction.

He said that takes building relationships, collaboration and teamwork to deliver funds to crucial projects in Eastern Oregon.

"That's rewarding as well," he said.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Elizabeth Doherty smiles on stage Wednesday, March 2, 2022, after receiving the Outstanding Young Citizen of the Year Award at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce's 52nd Annual Distinguished Citizens Awards at the Hermiston Community Center.

Gala:

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"Because of the people sitting out here, the people who live here, people who work here and people who raise their families here. ... It is a great community."

The Award of Merit

Christmas Express received the Award of Merit.

Hermiston Mayor Dave Drotzmann presented the Award of Merit to Christmas Express, describing the program as "Hermiston's finest hour."

The Hermiston Police Department runs the all-volunteer program, now in its 53rd year, that provides gifts to children and full holiday dinners at Christmas time to more than 500 less fortunate families in the Hermiston area.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston accepted the award.

"This isn't a police department event," Edmiston said. "This is a Hermiston event."

There are countless people who donate money to the program each year, he said, and hundreds of locals are involved.

"We gladly accept this award, and we will continue with the program," Edmiston said.

Other awards

The Midway Bar & Grill received the Bob Severson Rotary Business of the Year Award.

Elizabeth Doherty received the Altrusa Outstanding Young Citizen Award.

Tricia Mooney, Hermiston School District superintendent, announced the educators of the year:

- Brianna Gilman, special educator teacher, Hermiston High School.
- Ethan McDonald, social studies teacher, Hermiston High School.
- Kirby Warner, physical education teacher, Armand Larive Middle School.
- Megan Reeve, math teacher, Sandstone Middle School.
- Tanya Kennedy, dean of students, Desert View Elementary.
- Angie Cooke, fourth grade teacher, Highland Hills Elementary.
- Ibbet Radant, instructional coach, Rocky Heights Elementary.
- Susan Frink, instructional coach, Sunset Elementary.
- Brenda Caldwell, instructional coach, West Park Elementary.
- ricia Desjarlais, special education facilitator, Hermiston School District.
- And the Hermiston School District Administrator of the Year Award went to Katie Saul, director of business services.



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