Gas:

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imately 600,000-800,000 barrels per day, according to J.P. Morgan. In comparison, the U.S. produces nearly 12 million barrels per day domestically, according to the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers trade association. Still, the U.S. is a net importer of oil.

It has left many at the pump wondering why exactly gas prices have risen so dramatically.

"The U.S. does not get a lot of oil from Russia," said Marie Dodds, director of government and public affairs at AAA Oregon/Idaho. "Only about 3% of our imported oil (8% of our imported oil and refined products) last year came from Russia, but Europe gets a lot of oil from Russia, roughly 25%, so any time you take a big chunk of supplies away, it sends prices higher. It's basically supply and demand, as we learned back in economics 101. When you have a major global producer of oil,



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Grou

Diane Miller replaces a diesel fuel pump nozzle Thursday, March 10, 2022 at a Chevron gas station in Island City. Miller paid more than \$140 to fill up half a tank. She said she was lucky to be able to afford the fuel and noted many people she knew would not be able to pay for the increased prices.

Russia, and its product is taken off the global markets, all of the sudden you have to look around and figure out where that oil is going to come from."

Two records, two years

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, oil prices fell to their lowest

price in history, reaching negative values in April 2020. That spurred producers to cut output as oil tankers sat outside ports, unable to offload their oil shipments. In the U.S., thousands of oil workers were laid off, and the number of active drilling rigs plummeted from 700 in Janu-

ary 2020 to approximately 200 rigs according to reporting by The New York Times.

Prices for gas in spring 2020 went down drastically, with gas prices falling below \$2 a gallon nationally for the first time in decades.

"In the spring of 2020 it was incredible; we saw

demand for oil and gas fall to dramatically low levels that we hadn't seen since the 1960s," Dodds said. "And now here we are, two years later, and people are returning to their normal routines, going back to work, going back to school. We are consuming more gas around the globe, but the production is not back where it was pre-pandemic. Production hasn't kept up, so that's the main driver of higher prices."

As the price of gas rises, manufacturing businesses are faced with the tough choice of having to increase prices to offset transportation costs. Patrick Raimondo, plant manager for Behlen Country, Baker City, said the company is waiting for a few weeks to decide how to handle the cost increases.

"As of right now we're holding off on doing any surcharges for our customers," Raimondo said. "As these prices increase, it is going to affect us down the road, just from the additional costs. We're just trying to see how it goes over the next couple of weeks and having conversa-

tions with our customers just to make sure we're all on the same page."

tions and open communica-

A global economy

The U.S. has continued to bring oil rigs back online. By January 2021, 374 rotary rigs were operating in the United States, according to the EIA. By Dec. 31, in response to rising prices, that number rose to 586. That's still a far cry from the 700 rigs operating pre-pandemic.

In Russia, ongoing sanctions have locked the country out of foreign banks and goods and have caused the Russian ruble to plummet to nearly half its value at the beginning of this February.

According to J.P. Morgan, almost 70% of Russian oil is struggling to find buyers even though it is being offered at a record \$20-per-barrel discount in comparison to national oil suppliers, as of March 8.

"What happens halfway around the world can and does also have an impact on oil prices," Dodds said. "There's much more at play than just what's happening in the U.S."

Newspaper:

Continued from Page A1

prise if he bought it.

"I already have staff in place that would run the paper quite well," he wrote." I never said it would be shut down."

In a response to a request for comment, Smith provided a written statement.

"The Malheur Enterprise, a privately owned company, publicly announced it was for sale," he said. "Gregory Smith and Company, also a privately owned company, made an offer to purchase the Malheur Enterprise. Other than being publicly 'mocked' by the seller, no reply to our offer has been received. Moreover, Gregory Smith and Company has not publicly stated its reason for purchasing the paper. It is unfortunate, some speculate to the negative."

Smith's history with the Enterprise

A two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist with The Oregonian, Zaitz, along with his family, bought the Malheur Enterprise in 2015.

Zaitz eventually took over the paper's editorial operations and worked toward growing the weekly's presence. Zaitz expanded the newsroom and started collaborations with national news organizations as the Enterprise collected new accolades and awards

and awards.

Today, Zaitz said the Enterprise is profitable and growing. As he neared his 50th year in the journalism business, Zaitz said he decided to sell the paper because he felt it was the right time to hand over the Enterprise to a new generation.

"We're not going to sell to



East Oregonian, File

Les Zaitz works in 2018 at his newspaper, the Malheur Enterprise in Vale. He put the paper up for sale in early 2022, and Rep. Greg. Smith, R-Heppner, a frequent subject of the Enterprise's investigative work, sent Zaitz an email offering to buy the paper. Zaitz, however, is not selling to Smith.

anyone that shows up with a check or a suitcase full of \$20 bills," he said. "The Malheur Enterprise is an essential source of local news and is a role model for local journalism. So it's import goes beyond just reporting on Malheur County. It's import is also helping show newsrooms large and small how to do effective local journalism that generates business success."

When Smith made an offer to buy the Enterprise, Zaitz said he took it seriously.

Elected in 2000, Smith is the longest-serving legislator in the Oregon House of Representatives. Although his district's lines have shifted significantly over the years, Smith always has represented a chunk of Northeastern Oregon from his home in Heppner.

But being a legislator is only a part-time position. His full-time work involves him serving a number of economic development positions throughout Oregon, both within and outside his legislative district. Some of his titles include being the project manager for the Columbia Development Authority in Boardman, the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center in La Grande and the economic development director in Malheur County.

His status as an influential lawmaker who also is in charge of raising money for local projects and institutions around the state has earned him scrutiny in the media. The Willamette Week referred to Smith as the "best compensated lawmaker in Salem" while also noting his actions were "perfectly legal."

The Enterprise also has done reporting on the connections between Smith's personal business and his work in the Legislature, in addition to focusing on his work in Malheur County,

publishing stories on his contracts with the county and his handling of local economic development projects.

Zaitz declined to provide further details on the editorial that prompted the exchange with Smith before it was published, but later summarized the Enterprise's various dealings with Smith over the years.

"He complained that our reporting on him represented criminal conduct," he said. "The sheriff looked into that and essentially laughed him out of Malheur County on that allegation. He has publicly ridiculed the Enterprise and has made representations that raise questions about whether the Enterprise is paying its taxes. This is a man who has a pattern of taking aggressive actions against the newspaper that is doing no more than reporting on matters of public importance."

After Smith made his offer, Zaitz followed through on his promise and shared excerpts from the exchange on the Enterprise's Facebook page and asked readers what they thought. As of the evening of Thursday March 10, nearly 70 people have commented on the post. Almost all the comments either opposed Smith buying the paper, expressed support for the Enterprise's current ownership or both. Many questioned Smith's motiva-

Even if Smith doesn't get involved in the Vale media business, he'll continue to be a prominent figure in Eastern Oregon for the foreseeable future. No one filed to contest Smith in either the Republican primary or the general election, all but assuring him a 12th term in Salem.

Pitch:

Continued from Page A1

"Imagine when this is no longer just my vision and dream, but a reality that everybody gets to wake up to and consequently sleep soundly at night," she said. "A place where children are safe, appreciated and given a chance to develop their skills and strengthen their foundation. Where the windows of opportunity for growth and development do not open and close without being nurtured and maximized."

Jackson's speech segued into Brown's pitch, which focused more on the logistics of what the children's center needed to open and expand.

The children's center acquired the former senior center in January and now is working toward opening in the fall. But the building needs a number of renovations before it can begin welcoming students. According to the children's center, the facility needs new heating, ventilation and air conditioning, plumbing, electrical work, fire suppression sprinklers and more.

The children's center estimates it will take up to \$2 million to complete the remodel and already is fundraising toward that goal. Brown said the children's center has secured \$250,000 from the Oregon Community Foundation and received commitments from some of the city's largest employers, including Hill Meat Co. and St. Anthony Hospital.

Transforming the structure next door from an office building into a child care facility brings its own costs. The children's center plans to allow the building's tenants on the lower floor, which includes a church, a dog groomer and counseling offices, to stay. The upper floors will be used for children's center operations, and renovating that space will cost the nonprofit another \$3.5 million plus another \$600,000 to

purchase the building.
Councilor McKennon
McDonald told Brown the
development commission
had traditionally avoided
investing in nonprofit projects. For past commissioners, focusing on private
projects ensured a rise in
property value, which would
eventually come back to
the urban renewal district
through property taxes.

While the children's center plans to hire the equivalent of 40 full-time positions once it's in full operation, Brown argued the economic impact of the children's center was larger than that. By offering quality child care to the city's residents, the children's center would help put Pendletonians back to work.

"I think it will be significant, and over the years that will really add up to many hundreds of thousands of people," she said. "I think when people hear that there's a large, high quality child care center in Pendleton, and they're thinking of moving here or somewhere else, they're going to move to Pendleton."

And while previous iterations of the commission shied away from contributing to nonprofits, there's no law or rule that requires the urban renewal district to direct its funds to for-profit projects. Charles Denight, the commission's associate director, said the development commission has made contributions to nonprofits, including Pendleton Underground Tours and the Horizon Project in the past.

While the commission gave the children's center no assurances or promises, members seemed amenable to striking a deal. Mayor John Turner encouraged Brown to emphasize the children center's economic development potential in an application to the development commission.

But before it can file an application, the children's center will need to become a part of the urban renewal

district itself.

The children's center's facilities lie just outside the district's boundaries, the railroad tracks that form the border to the district lying just northeast of the buildings.

The children's center wasn't the only entity looking for expansion. A couple members of the audience also went up to the podium to tell the commission their properties lie just outside the district but also wanted to be included.

At the request of the commission, Denight said he would look into the laws surrounding urban renewal expansion and would return at a future meeting with more details on the process.

Editor's Note: Kathryn Brown is the vice president of the EO Media Group, the parent company of the East Oregonian.

Training:

Continued from Page Al

Miller, a three-year veteran of the district, was a natural fit, Rostov said. She carries a variety of nationally recognized certifications in emergency medical and firefighting disciplines and in December completed her Instructor I certification.

Miller said she was a cadet with the fire department in Sisters during high school before living for 15 or so years in areas that didn't have volunteer fire departments. When her husband's job brought them to Pilot Rock a little more than three years ago, she jumped on the opportunity to pursue her interests in the fire service.

The past three years of training for Miller have taken place largely outside of Pilot Rock, with classes in Pendleton, Hermiston, Portland and even as far as the Seattle area. Rostov and Miller have been eager to bring those opportunities to Pilot Rock.

"I have seen, just in

the last five months or six months of the training that we've done, the skill level of our current volunteers and their confidence go through the roof," Miller said.

Miller and the rest of her department, except Rostov, are paid on-call employees, meaning they receive compensation only when on a call. This structure differs from places such as Pendleton and Hermiston, which offer career firefighter positions.

Rostov said he is planning to expand the department's training offerings in an attempt to attract people who intend to pursue a career firefighter path. Rostov said some volunteer departments discourage those who wish to pursue a firefighting career because they will only be in the volunteer department for a limited period.

"Instead of discouraging that type of people, we're encouraging that group of people so that we can land some really motivated people that are going to train really hard and serve our community for that amount of time,"

he said.

He said increased training opportunities and outreach to surrounding communities will allow the department to recruit more trainees.

"As long as we know the rules of the game, and we configure our training around that, then we have a period of time that we can benefit from those people," he said.

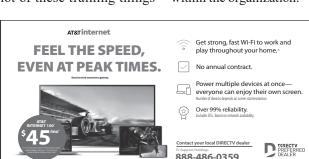
Rostov added he feels Miller is integral to expanding the district's volunteer base as training officers typically play a large role in recruitment and retention. He said she will also be key in the department's first fire academy later this year.

"It allows me to bring a lot of these training things

in-house when they would normally need to be done outside of the fire district," Rostov said. "The benefits are many fold — the recruits get to train on their own equipment that they're going to be using in real life where they are fighting real fires."

Rostov said the first fire academy likely will be in June and bring through a small class of recruits from local districts.

"They acclimate to being able to be effective members of an operation very quickly," he said. "Because they're trained within their own environment by their own department members, they also build that sense of teamwork within the organization."





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