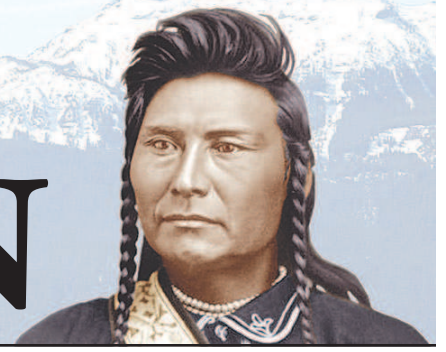




# WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN



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## A citizen's guide to finding your voice at the Capitol

By Claire Withycombe  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — When Oregon legislators meet this session, they could raise or lower your taxes, cut or boost government services and decide how much your landlord can hike the rent.

Interest groups, from the pharmaceutical industry to labor unions, spend millions of dollars lobbying legislators and contributing to their campaigns.

We asked former lawmakers and citizen advocates: how can an ordinary constituent, without the same cash or cachet, have an impact?

Here's their advice to help you influence what happens at the Capitol

### Get a group

The old adage holds: There is strength in numbers. "Bills that get passed are the bills that the hearing room is full," said Bobbie Jager, school choice outreach coordinator at the Cascade Policy Institute. "They're bills that make senators take notice that it isn't just their opinion, it's their people and their constituents that want something, and things move usually that way."

Jager isn't a hardened political operative. She got

her start in politics after she was named 2012 Oregon Mother of the Year.

After the honor brought her to the Capitol to address legislators, she was asked to lead a group of parents advocating for education reform.

If you're passionate about an issue — affordable housing, for example, or criminal justice reform — find a group that shares your interests and point of view. They will track proposals that could become law.

Julie Parrish represented Tualatin and West Linn in the House for eight years until she was defeated for re-election in November.

"We're all a special interest at the end of the day," Parrish said. "If you're a veteran, if you're a senior, if you're a mom with kids in school, (you) have an interest in what happens in our government. And there's some group out there that is speaking with your voice, and so go find them, and get involved with them, and they will help mentor you as well."

Parents and families of people with disabilities have proven some of the most successful lobbyists, Parrish said.

"We worked on things that mattered to families because families showed up," Parrish said.

### Write to your legislators — in your own words

Whether you have your own idea for a change to state law or want to share your opinion about an existing proposal, lawmakers recommend writing a letter or email yourself and including your address so that they know you live in their district.

Most legislators want to stay in office, so they pay attention to what their constituents want. Many also hold town hall meetings in their districts where constituents can share their ideas or concerns.

To find your representative and senator, go the leg-

islature's home page at [www.oregonlegislature.gov](http://www.oregonlegislature.gov).

Beware of emails from advocacy groups asking you to click a link to send a form letter to legislators.

It may be convenient, but doing that can result in thousands of identical messages that pile up in lawmakers' inboxes.

"Most of those aren't read," said former State Sen. Alan DeBoer, a Republican from Ashland who didn't seek another term last year.

### Testify

If you have the means and

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On the move — Participants in the third annual Wallowa County Women's March smile as they spread their message walking down Main Street in Joseph. The march occurred on Saturday, Jan. 19, and about 75 people participated.

## WOMAN'S MARCH FOR PROGRESS

By Christian Ambrosion  
Wallowa County Chieftain

In 2017, Wallowa County's charming corner of the world came together to support a national Women's March. Now three years later, the number of marchers has dwindled but a positive spirit lives on.

At the inaugural march, about 300 local residents took to the streets in peaceful protest, surprising even local organizers. As it was then, this year's event took place on a cold, dreary weekend,

and in many circles it was politically unpopular. About 75 people braved the bad weather to take part.

Tracy Sword of Joseph had her first experience with the march this year.

Sword said she had a positive experience, and is already working with other participants about ideas for next year's event. There's talk of incorporating more activities and events, according to Sword.

"I hope that happens," she said. "I look forward to showing up to support the

women of Wallowa County and the message of equality again next year."

Beyond the excitement surrounding this dynamic event, any observer can sense that change is in the air. Without deviating from its foundational goal of addressing concerns regarding national politics, in 2019 the movement has adapted to meet the diverse needs of Wallowa County.

For Marky Pitts of Joseph "the woman's march is all about respect — for women, for immigrants and ref-

ugees, and for maintaining the integrity of the U.S. Constitution."

Enterprise resident Kate Forster said she is more interested in the social justice element that is gaining steam within the movement.

"I march for those who can't," said Forster, who said she is most interested in "[bringing] our community together, to have those conversations, listen, learn, and grow together alongside our neighbors."

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## Chieftain welcomes familiar face as editor

By Christopher Rush  
EO Media Group

A familiar face to many locals already, Joseph resident Christian Ambrosion has taken the reins of the *Wallowa County Chieftain* newsroom as its new editor.

"I am so excited to have an editor who brings his love for this community to the *Chieftain*," said general manager Jennifer Cooney while making the announcement last week. "I am confident in his ability to embrace the role with confidence, knowledge and incredible passion for community news."

Ambrosion, who recently served as development coordinator for Fishtrap, is a graduate of Joseph High School.

"I've enjoyed spending the past several years rekindling relationships and friendships throughout the Wallowa Valley, as well as making new ones," said Ambrosion.

At age 15, Ambrosion moved with his parents Rodd and Mary Ambrosion from Lake Oswego to the Wallowa Valley. After high school, he attended a small liberal arts university in Ohio and obtained a degree in sociology before entering law school at Willamette University in Salem, where he earned President's List honors. While earning his law degree, he also served as a research assistant and as associate editor for the *Willamette Law Review* and the *Willamette Journal of International Law and Dispute Resolution*.

Ambrosion worked as a criminal defense attorney in Redmond and Portland before returning home to Wallowa County. He said he is ready to dive headfirst into a community journalism career.

"My excitement is matched only by my mindfulness of the heavy responsibility and integrity required to meet the high standards of quality and trustworthy community journalism that we've all come to expect from the *Wallowa County Chieftain*."

Ambrosion may be contacted via e-mail at [editor@wallowa.com](mailto:editor@wallowa.com)

## Wallowa Lake Dam reconstruction plans underway

By KATY NESBITT  
For EO Media Group

JOSEPH, Ore. — With \$16 million earmarked in Gov. Kate Brown's budget to rebuild the Wallowa Lake Dam, irrigators are preparing for its reconstruction in August 2020.

The Wallowa Lake Irrigation District owns the 100-year-old dam, long in need of repair to ensure safety for downstream communities. When news broke that the governor's budget included money for the dam, the district's board of directors hired McMullen Jacobs Associates of Boise to manage the project.

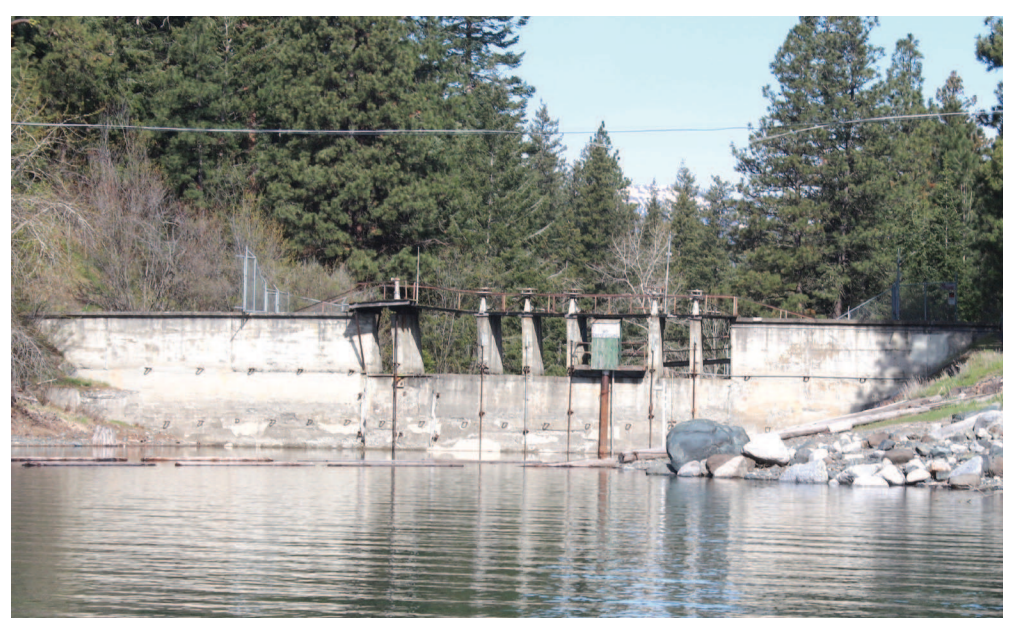
At a public meeting Jan. 16 in Joseph, Morton McMullen

said his timeline is aggressive, but doable, putting shovel to dirt in 18 months and completing construction by the end of June 2021.

McMillen said, "We need to implement a schedule that ensures completion within the state funding cycles."

The board has been getting ready for this moment. Dan Butterfield, the district's board president, said McMullen first drew a conceptual reconstruction design in 2002, but money was always an issue.

"Mort's been ready for a long time," Butterfield said. "We got really close a couple times to getting funding and then it fell out."



The Wallowa Lake Dam will be rebuilt if \$16 million in Gov. Kate Brown's proposed budget passes the legislature.

Katy Nesbitt/Capitol Press

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