

‘The election was not stolen, it was bought’

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Oregon U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, does not believe former President Donald Trump’s claim that President Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election because of voter fraud.

“The election was not stolen, it was bought,” Bentz, a first-term congressman, said during a meet-and-greet Thursday, Jan. 6, in La Grande.

Bentz said Democrats had an enormous edge in funding donors with deep pockets, including one who donated \$400 million to Biden’s campaign. Bentz said the Democrats spent several times more money per vote than the Republicans did.

Bentz referenced a large donation Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg made and suggested it benefited Biden and Democrats.

According to a 2020 article from the news website Vox, Zuckerberg and his



Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, speaks to a group of residents during a meet-and-greet Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022, at Brother Bear Cafe in La Grande.

Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

wife, Priscilla Chan, personally made a \$300 million donation to two groups: Center for Tech and Civic Life and the Center for Election Innovation & Research. The money was specifically designated to recruit poll workers, supply them with personal protec-

tion equipment and set up drive-thru voting. The rest was distributed to state election officials throughout the country.

Both groups are 501(c)(3) nonprofits, which are legally prohibited from political campaign activity.

Bentz is hopeful Repub-

licans can win control of the House of Representatives in midterm elections in November. He noted, though, that is when heavy lifting will begin for Republicans. He said House minority leader Kevin McCarthy, R-California, issued this warning earlier

when speaking at a gathering of about 40 Republican freshmen in Congress.

McCarthy said members of the minority party have it easier because they often find themselves just voting no. McCarthy said, however, they will find when they are in the majority party the situation can be more challenging.

“He told us, ‘When you are in power you have to make things happen, it is hard,’” Bentz said.

Bentz spoke in La Grande on the one-year anniversary of the day Trump supporters rioted at the Capitol Building in an attempt to reverse the results of the 2020 presidential election. Bentz said he believes Democrats are blowing the Jan. 6 riot out of proportion in an attempt to divert attention from the issues people really are concerned about.

“It is a huge opportunity for them to distract the nation from inflation,” Bentz said.

Bentz also said United States Attorney General

Merrick Garland is asking the FBI to investigate a rise in harassment and threats of violence against school board members nationwide. Bentz said it is not the FBI’s place to do this.

“This is what communities should be looking into,” he said.

On Oct. 4, Garland released a memo directing the FBI to meet with federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement to develop strategies to address “harassment, intimidation and threats of violence” against school board members and school employees.

Later that month, Garland defended the memo at a Senate Judiciary Committee meeting after Republicans accused the attorney general of overreach, according to The Associated Press.

“The obligation of the Justice Department is to protect the American people against violence and threats of violence and that particularly includes public officials,” Garland said.

Slight improvement in drought conditions, drought monitor shows

By **RONALD BOND**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Drought conditions that have heavily impacted Wallowa County — and, really, the entire West — are starting to show a little improvement, but there is a ways to go before it lifts entirely.

In recent weeks, the U.S. Drought Monitor website, which is “produced through a partnership between the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the United States Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,” has shown the severe drought conditions slightly improving in the state in recent weeks.

Wallowa County saw its largest movement in late December and early January, as the Dec. 30 update showed the county with 58.84% of its territory in the “extreme drought” range, down from 78.87% the previous week, and down from more than 82% just two weeks earlier. And on Jan. 6, the percentage of the county in the extreme range was down to 38.1%. The number was the same on the Jan. 13 and 20 reports.

The remainder of the county is still in drought conditions, but is categorized as “severe.”

The drought monitor has six stages that a region is categorized in, ranging from “None” or no drought, all the way to D4, the worst, which

is considered “exceptional drought.” In between are D0 (abnormally dry), D1 (moderate drought), D2 (severe drought) and D3 (extreme drought).

The state saw its worst conditions this year in the Sept. 14, 2021, report, which showed the entire state in at least D1 and more than 99.3% of its territory in D2, or a severe drought. That report was also the third in a row to show 76.69% of the state in extreme drought — including most of Wallowa County — and was the third of seven straight weeks that showed 26.59% of the state in an exceptional drought, marked on the monitor’s map with a streak of crimson cutting through the middle of the state.

At its worst this summer, Wallowa County had 83.22% of its range in either D3 or D4, where it stayed from Aug. 31 to Oct. 19. During that stretch, there was a sliver — 1.43% — of the county marked as D4, or exceptional drought. That D4 percentage, in fact, held from the first report in August until the last report in November.

The county first moved into D2 on the June 8 report, and the entirety of the county has been in D2 or worse since July 6.

One winter ago, in December 2020, 61% of the county was considered to be abnormally dry, but the other 39% was rated as having no drought. The worst conditions in 2020, in fact,

actually happened in the first month of the year, when the entirety of the county was in at least D0 and only 4.17% was in D1.

According to the drought monitor website, the last time conditions were even close to this bad in December was in 2015, when the month started with the whole county in at least D2 and nearly 98% of the county in D3. By the middle of the month, the whole county was still in severe drought, but the extreme drought conditions were wiped out.

That summer, the county was considered in extreme drought from Aug. 25 to Nov. 24.

Other than 2015, the last time the website shows

drought conditions close to the current level were in 2007 and 2001. The site has data going back to 2000.

Snowy conditions in the county — which included near-record snowfall earlier in December in Joseph — have helped. The National Weather Service reported 27.3 inches of snow in Joseph in December, which is more than three times the monthly average. That total has amounted to 2.29 inches of precipitation during the month, close to an inch above the average of 1.29 inches.

The county is in an area that the Climate Prediction Center believes will remain in a drought through mid-March, though it expects the conditions to improve.

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