



Wallowa County Voices



Maverick Gilbert
Enterprise

Newcomer makes his home here

ENTERPRISE — Maverick Gilbert is fairly new to Wallowa County and he already finds it home. He and his family moved here last summer from Boise, Idaho, and are living on Leap Lane north of Enterprise.

Living with his mother, brother and sister, Gilbert is still looking for work — some kind of “hands-on stuff.” In the meantime, he’s working to get his GED diploma at the Alternative School.

“I dropped out of school for a year because of COVID and they’re doing some good stuff with me,” Gilbert said of the Alternative School.

“It’s nice here,” he said of Enterprise. “It’s a small, peaceful little town. It’s cold — I’m not liking the snow — but the people are friendly.”

He recently shared his thoughts about living in Wallowa County.

What’s your favorite thing about Wallowa County?

It’s got to be the people or the lake. It’s really clean, compared to other lakes I’ve seen. This is the first lake I can see the bottom.

Are you getting cabin fever yet?

No. I’m liking it here.

What are you looking forward to once the weather warms?

Biking. I’m going to bicycle around and check out any trails.

Do you think the Russian invasion of Ukraine is affecting the high price of fuel?

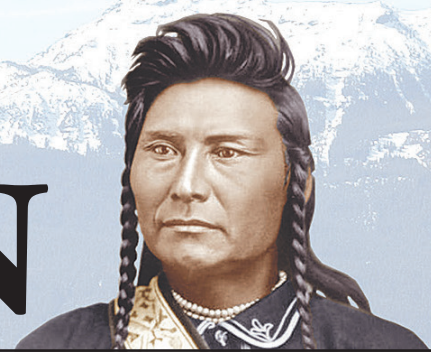
Oh yeah, once sanctions were put on crude oil prices, that had an effect.

What’s your advice for people who are thinking about moving here?

Be ready for the cold and snow. It’s a warm community, but you’ve got to show people who you are. You get what you give. That’s what I’ve noticed about this community.

— Bill Bradshaw,
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN



Fairgrounds, history center to receive funding

\$1 million for fair, \$500,000 for history center

By RONALD BOND
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Two Wallowa County entities are in line to receive a combined \$1.5 million for infrastructure, which will

provide funding needed to further improvements.

House Bill 5202, which passed a vote of the Oregon Legislature on Friday, March 4, will allocate \$1 million to the Wallowa County Fairgrounds from its general fund for “fairgrounds infrastructure,” according to the text of the bill. It is one of 15 counties in Oregon set to receive at least that amount for their fairgrounds.

Additionally, the Wallowa His-

tory Center is slated to receive \$500,000 to “support the restoration of the Bear-Sleds Ranger District Compound,” according to text from the bill.

The bill passed the House 41-16 on March 4, and the Senate later that day, 23-2.

The money for HB 5202 can come from state lottery funds, federal American Rescue Plan Act funds or the general fund, according to Ann Rava, staff member for

Sen. Bill Hansell. General fund dollars are primarily from tax revenue.

Rava noted that given the bill contains an emergency clause, it “becomes effective upon passage, so as soon as it is signed by the governor they can start distributing the funds.” However, she said in an email to the Chieftain that how long it actually takes for the funds

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Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Russ Eoff, left, and Kevin Melville look over a hydraulic line that needs repaired on a tractor at the Melville family-owned Cornerstone Farms Joint Venture near Enterprise on Thursday, March 10, 2022. Eoff is one who will be negatively affected by HB 4002.

Serious implications?

Ag overtime bill won’t seriously affect most local producers, but farmers, ranchers here object to it anyway

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — Farmers and ranchers in Wallowa County won’t be seriously affected by the Legislature’s recent elimination of the overtime exemption for agricultural workers, but they see it as another example of the urban-rural divide in Oregon.

“I’ve been following it all along. The thing people don’t understand is it’s different out here,” said Mike Coppin, who raises cattle and hay near Joseph. “People in the city don’t understand it. We’re going to have to hire more help. It’s going

to hurt the worker, not us so much. It’s more government regulations.”

House Bill 4002, passed by the Democrat-controlled House on March 1 and the Senate March 3, reduces incrementally over a five-year period the number of hours a farmworker can work without being paid time-and-a-half for overtime. In 2023-24, the cap on hours is 55, dropping to 48 hours per week for 2025-26 and then 40 hours per week beginning in 2027.

The bill awaits the signature of Democrat Gov. Kate Brown.

Few ag workers here

The reason the bill doesn’t affect many producers in Wallowa County is simple: Not many here have many employees on their farms and ranches.

Coppin said during the summer, he has three to four employees. This time of year, he has one full-time worker along with his son.

“You wonder what their motive is. The workers are going to suffer because they’re going to get cut back on their hours. ... It comes

down to hiring more people,” Coppin said. “It’s different out here, and they don’t understand it.”

Kevin Melville, who is partners with his father, Tim, and brother, Kurt, in Cornerstone Farms Joint Venture, said the change likely won’t affect Cornerstone this year.

“It probably won’t affect us this year because of the 55-hour threshold,” he said, adding that they will monitor employee hours. “We will not be paying overtime.”

Cornerstone, which largely grows wheat and hay but also has other crops, has six to eight employees during the peak season. They have only a few full-time employees year around.

But there are times Cornerstone has people working long hours, such as during the peak planting and harvest seasons.

“It hurts,” Melville said of HB 4002. “There are times we’ve had people working over 60 hours a week. ... By the time we get down to 40 hours in couple years, it’s going to hurt.”

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Lathrop sentenced to jail, probation, restitution

By BILL BRADSHAW
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Betsy Lathrop of Lostine was sentenced Friday, March 11, in Wallowa County Circuit Court, to 36 months probation, ordered to pay \$33,252.22 in restitution and to serve 70 days in jail with credit for 30 days already served.

Lathrop, 55, appeared before Senior Judge John L. Collins of Yamhill County in a virtual hearing. Collins also recommended — but did not order — a substance abuse evaluation of Lathrop, given allegations of past incidents involving such abuse. Extra fines and court costs were waived. She will be allowed time off for good behavior, as her attorney requested.

Collins was the judge who presided during her trial on multiple charges of criminal mistreatment and identity theft involving her father, Robert “Wayne” Lathrop. She was convicted Feb. 9, on four of the 28 counts in the original indictment.

Her court-appointed public defender, La Grande attorney Jim Schaeffer, said after the sentencing that Lathrop will appeal both the convictions and the sentence.

The charges

Betsy Lathrop was accused of 20 counts of first-degree criminal mistreatment and eight counts of identity theft, all Class C felonies, alleged to have taken place between Nov. 21, 2014, and July 8, 2016, in violation of her legal duty to provide care for an elderly person — her father — according

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Merkley talks Ukraine, energy, forest health in town hall

By RONALD BOND
Wallowa County Chieftain

The crisis between Ukraine and Russia is providing an opportunity to move the world further away from fossil fuel dependence.

That was one of the takeaways shared by U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley during a virtual town hall Tuesday, March 8.

Merkley briefly touched on the war, and called the actions by Russia “horrible.”

When asked about the opportunity the conflict has given to move away from foreign oil — and fossil fuels in general — Merkley said there is a real incentive to make that move.

“For 50 years presidents (of) both parties have said we’re going to end our dependence on foreign

oil, we’re going to transition away from fossil fuels, but in the early period of that 50 years we didn’t have the climate effect, and renewables weren’t inexpensive,” he said. “... There’s already a huge reason, but you throw in this situation that you see producers like Russia are using their leverage with fossil fuels to attempt to kind of (keep) Europe from not supporting Ukraine. ... The biggest way to take away the leverage is to reduce the world demand for oil and gas. A lot can be done.”

The senator spoke of the benefits of solar energy, and said efforts need to be made to improve charging stations for electric vehicles across the state. He also said costs are cheaper for renewable

energy, and that electrifying more of the planet will be a benefit. He even cited Wallowa County as being a solar leader.

“The big picture, if we simplify this — it’s basically electrify everything with renewable energy,” he said. “If we do that, we will cut our costs, undermine the Russians and Irans of the world, and save our planet.”

The senator also addressed questions about recycling, forest health and the rural community getting federal support.

On recycling, Merkley touted his Break Free of Plastic Pollution Act and cited the concerns brought about by microplastics in the air and in food.

“Right now we’re eating (and

breathing) the equivalent of one credit card of plastic a week,” he said. “Who wants to eat plastic? Microplastics are a problem.”

On forest health, he talked about what he saw from the Labor Day wildfires in 2020 and said there needs to be collaborative efforts to improve forest health — and he said that does include having some logging in place.

“I am working and have succeeded in getting a lot more funds for forest health, and what that means is a strategy of thinning in places where it increases fire resilience, and when you get that win-win, you get jobs in the woods, jobs in the trucks, you get saw logs for the mills, and you get a forest that is more fire resilient,” he said.

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