

Local & State

Savannah Potter places second in speech contest

Savannah Potter, a senior at Harvest Christian Academy in Baker City, placed second in the statewide Voice of Democracy speech contest sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Potter, who received her award Friday in Eugene, received \$2,000. She finished first at the local Post level and at the district level. Her speech is printed below.



Potter

LOCAL BRIEFING

Soil-water districts plan meetings

Baker County's soil and water conservation districts have scheduled meetings for February. All meetings are open to the public, and meals are available for those who RSVP by calling Tara at 541-523-7121, extension 100.

- Baker Valley — Feb. 5 at noon at the USDA Service Center, 3990 Midway Drive in Baker City.
- Burnt River — Feb. 5 at 5:30 p.m. at the USDA Service Center, 3990 Midway Drive in Baker City.
- Eagle Valley — Feb. 11 at noon, location to be announced (call the above phone number for details).
- Keating — Feb. 12 at noon at the USDA Service Center, 3990 Midway Drive in Baker City.

Hydraulic repair shop grand opening set

Elkhorn Hydraulics, a new repair shop, will have its grand opening open house Friday, Feb. 1 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The business, owned by Dan Sherman, is at 41280 Highway 30, just north of Baker City. The shop is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Bunco night fundraiser for MOPS

A Valentine-themed Bunco night for women that's also a fundraiser for a local mothers' group is set for Feb. 7 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Baker City Nazarene Church, 1250 Hughes Lane.

Cost is \$5. Snacks will be provided. Proceeds benefit the local MOPS group — Mothers of Preschoolers.

BTI offers wilderness first aid course

A wilderness first aid course is scheduled for Feb. 4 and 5 at the Baker Technical Institute, 2500 E St. (enter from 9th and G streets). The two-day class will run from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. Cost is \$225 per person.

The course will cover first aid treatments for injuries and illnesses common in the outdoors. Each person who completes the course will receive a certification in wilderness first aid and adult CPR. To register, call 541-524-2651.

County planners to hear cell tower plan

The Baker County Planning Commission will have a public hearing Feb. 12 to consider a request for a conditional-use permit to build a cellphone tower on private land near Unity.

The applicant is New Cingular Wireless. The company wants to build a 199-foot-high tower on land owned by Bill and Nancy Moore. The tower would fill a gap in cellular service coverage for AT&T customers in the Unity area, according to the Baker City-County Planning Department.

The public hearing will start at 5 p.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St.

Copies of the application and other documents are available by email for no cost. More information is available by calling Eva Henes at 541-523-8219, by email at ehenes@bakercounty.org or by visiting the Planning Department in the basement of the Courthouse.

Wildland fire refresher course set

Eastern Oregon Training Group will have the RT-130 Wildland Fire Refresher course on April 13 in Baker City. The course will start at 8 a.m. at the 5J School District Building, 2090 Fourth St. Cost is \$100. All participants should bring gloves for the practice fire shelter deployment.

Registration can be done at oregonfiretraining.com. Pre-registration is requested; the cost will be \$120.00 at the door.

This is a required class for all federal and state contractors. More information is available by calling Laurel Goodrich at 541-403-0907 or Jeff Sherman at 541-519-6213.

A small, thin strand of woolen thread has been measured and placed into a loom, where it is woven in with hundreds of thousands of other threads — some scarlet, some white, and some blue. The single thread is weak and can be easily broken by itself; however, when weaved in with the millions of others, not only is it strengthened, but it becomes part of the whole, the pattern. A pattern of bravery and courage, loyalty and truth, faith and purity. A pattern that is a symbol universally understood to mean freedom. This one thread has been united and now has the power to represent what America has stood for since the Founding Fathers established this country; this one thread joined with others and formed the American flag. Just as the threads are different colors, so can Americans have different beliefs, opinions, political views, and religious stances and still be woven together to form one united nation under God — the United States of America. Similarly, as one thread holds the potential to become an emblem of freedom, so does one voter have the potential to make an impact in our country.

Our country is a constitutional

republic. The people's voice dictates our government, our schools, our social norms, and most importantly, the direction our country is heading. Every citizen has the responsibility of putting strong, confident, intelligent leaders in office — leaders who are capable of and committed to protecting our rights. James Garfield summed this up on the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, when he said: "Now more than ever before, the people are their Congress. If that body be ignorant, reckless and corrupt, it is because the people tolerate ignorance, recklessness and corruption. If it be intelligent, brave and pure, it is because the people demand these high qualities to represent them in the national legislature."

Today, Congress' approval rating is at an all-time low and animosity between political parties is deepening. As a result, fewer people want to be involved in voting. Statistics show that in 1880 around 84 percent of people eligible to vote voted; move forward to modern day and that number has dropped 25.5 percent based on surveys conducted in 2016. Imagine how tremendously different elec-

tions would be if every eligible voter participated!

The primary reason why most Americans don't vote is because they feel like their vote will not make a difference. That's like asking what can that one little thread do? The thread holds the flag together; without that thread, the fabric is weakened and will begin to unravel. As the material loses more "threads" — or as America loses more voters — the tapestry becomes tattered strips of its former glory; losing what made it so great in the first place — the unity of different threads forming one symbol.

Every voter is like that one thread, and for that reason, every vote matters. If we don't vote "intelligent, brave, pure" leaders into office, then we will have to tolerate "ignorant, reckless, corrupt" leaders in office. If we don't take a stand for what we believe and make our beliefs known through our vote, then we will watch as thread after thread snaps, weakening our country and diminishing the strength every individual voter adds to the fabric of our nation. Ultimately, if we don't vote and add our voice to the governing of our nation, we will lose our voice altogether.

Sheriff's Office warns of financial scam

The Baker County Sheriff's Office has issued a warning to county residents alerting them about a financial scam that uses the sheriff's name in an attempt to gain money or financial information.

Here's how the phone/

email scam works, according to a press release:

The caller or person sending the email identifies himself as Sheriff Travis Ash and asks for payment to be made through various online platforms.

Returned phone calls

go directly to the dispatch center and email replies go directly to the sheriff, said Ashley McClay, public information officer for the Sheriff's Office.

McClay said those who receive such calls or emails should be aware that the

Baker County Sheriff's Office would never call or email residents to request payment or financial information from them.

Anyone who believes he or she has received a fictitious phone call or email is asked to call Ash at 541-523-6415.

ROAD

Continued from Page 1A

The dispute over a section of the road, which runs through private property between Lookout Mountain Road and Connor Creek near Brownlee Reservoir, dates back more than a year.

The road is blocked by a locked gate that was installed more than a year ago by the property owner, Todd Longgood.

Commissioners met in an executive session Tuesday afternoon, which was closed to the public as allowed under Oregon's Public Meetings Law.

The law does not, however, allow public officials to make decisions during an executive session. Commissioners ended the executive session and then voted to pursue the legal decision regarding the road.

They later rescinded that vote because the public notice for Tuesday's meeting mentioned only the executive session. The law requires that notices for meetings which will include both an executive session and a public session mention both sessions, to give people a chance to attend the public portion of the meeting.

Commissioners will take up the road issue again, including potentially voting

on whether to file a legal challenge, during the Feb. 6 meeting, said Heidi Martin, the county's human resources director.

The legal argument is based on a 19th century federal statute, RS 2477, which consists of a single sentence: "The right-of-way for the construction of highways across public lands not otherwise reserved for public purposes is hereby granted."

The county cited that statute when a different property owner installed a locked gate across the Connor Creek Road several miles to the east of the current gate.

That property owner eventually removed the gate after the county assembled evidence, including historic maps, showing that the road is a public route.

But Longgood's attorney has cited maps that show the current road follows a different route from the older road.

Tuesday's executive session was the seventh commissioners have had since July on the road issue.

Commissioner Mark Bennett said Tuesday that that the county has a public process for people who want to close roads, and he regrets that that wasn't pursued in this case.

Interior Secretary restores grazing permit to Hammonds

PORTLAND (AP) — The two Oregon ranchers whose conviction for intentionally setting fires on public land sparked a weeks-long standoff with anti-federal government protesters at a remote wildlife refuge have had their grazing rights restored.

Former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, in one of his last actions before resigning, ordered the renewal of a 10-year grazing permit for Dwight Hammond Jr. and his son Steven Hammond, The Oregonian/OregonLive reports. The decision was dated Jan. 2, but it wasn't sent out until this week.

"It's been awhile in coming, but I'm happy to get our permit back," Dwight Hammond Jr. said. "It is a relief." The Hammonds' case was embraced by critics of federal land policy, who said local communities and states had too little control. But others, including environmentalists, said authorities were too accommodating of ranchers and other interests and urged the federal government to administer public lands for the widest possible uses.

Chris Saeger, executive director of Western Values Project, condemned the Hammonds' permit renewal. Saeger said it sets a "dangerous precedent by conceding to known anti-public land factions that may endanger public lands, managing agencies and employees."

"By allowing these lawbreaking extremists back on public lands, the Trump administra-

tion is sending the message that politics will always trump our American birthright," Saeger said in a statement.

Last year President Donald Trump pardoned the Hammonds, whose case had prompted the armed occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon in 2016, led by two sons of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy.

In February 2014, the federal government had rejected the Hammonds' renewal application, citing their criminal convictions for setting fire to public land. Zinke ordered the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to renew the grazing permit through 2024.

"I find the pardons constitute unique and important changed circumstances since

the BLM made its decision," Zinke wrote in the decision.

Zinke announced his resignation late last year amid multiple investigations tied to his real estate dealings in Montana and conduct while in office.

The Hammonds had been convicted in 2012 of arson on land where they had grazing rights for their cattle. They

were ordered back to prison in early 2016 to serve out five-year sentences in a case that incited right-wing militias and inspired the 41-day armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, which abuts the Hammond family ranch.

But on July 10, 2018, Trump pardoned the father and son.

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