

Oregon Sec. of State Richardson dies

By **Andrew Selsky**
Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, the highest-ranking Republican in Oregon state government, has died after a battle with brain cancer. He was 69.

Richardson's office said in a statement that he died at home Tuesday night surrounded by family and friends.

Richardson announced in June that he

had been diagnosed with brain cancer in May. As he battled the disease, he kept working, encouraging Oregonians to register to vote, using social media as a pro-democracy tool and overseeing audits done by his office's audit team.

Gov. Kate Brown ordered all flags at public institutions to be flown at half-



Richardson

staff in honor of Richardson.

Brown will appoint Richardson's successor. In a statement her office said she would make a choice in the coming weeks and would consider a Republican who commits to not entering the 2020 election.

"Regardless of what side of the aisle his colleagues sat on, we all knew Dennis' kind heart guided his career of service to the people of Oregon," Brown said.

SNOW DAY

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And then there are those in the middle who think the District is risking safety of the students and staff by requiring them to be at work and in the classrooms despite the weather and the road conditions.

"It's management of probability," Witty says.

And the probability of bus drivers bringing the students they are charged with transporting safely to and from school daily is based on their abilities as professionals and information gathered throughout the night.

And today is no exception. The District has scheduled classes as usual despite heavy falling this morning.

Regardless of the criticism that comes his way no matter what decision is made, Witty says District administrators — Wayne Paxton, transportation supervisor in particular — base that decision on safety.

Paxton has been on the phone calling people in vari-

ous areas throughout the District for the past three nights. He began driving the roads about midnight and continued checking conditions and weather reports throughout the wee hours of the morning before decisions were made to schedule school as usual this week.

There was some concern in the Keating area this morning, which reportedly had about 3 inches of new snow compared to about an inch that had fallen in Baker City by about 7 a.m., Witty said.

Paxton conferred with one of the bus drivers in the Keating area and the driver felt comfortable transporting students in the current conditions.

"Generally speaking, unless there is a lot of wind, we should be able to get the students home without any trouble," Witty said.

Witty said thanks to new technology, the District is able to monitor buses as they travel along their routes to ensure they are progressing as expected to pick up and deliver children.

"The buses are heavy and we have professional and experienced drivers, and the buses have chains," Witty said in explaining some of the factors taken into consideration.

Thanks to the professionalism and experience of the transportation staff, the District is able to bring students to school and to return them home safely, he said. But not all parents have agreed with those decisions, according to comments made on social media.

"At the end of the day, safety is our primary consideration," Witty assures those people.

The varied microcosms of climate found in the communities served by the Baker School District make it especially difficult to soothe the nerves of all parents at all times, Witty says.

"Sumpter is definitely different than Keating and Medical Springs," he says. "That does make it more challenging, but we try to make the best call we possibly can."

There is a community risk that comes with clos-

ing school on snowy days as well, Witty says, recalling that when he was a teenager at Adrian, many of the high school students got in their cars and drove to Ontario for the day when a snow day was called.

On Tuesday, two buses were experiencing mechanical problems and messages went out to alert the affected families through the ParentSquare notification system, which includes text messages and automated phone calls.

A year ago during the last week of February, classes were cancelled on Feb. 26, after about a foot of snow was dumped overnight on the town and throughout the valley. Two years ago when record snowfall covered the area for weeks, classes were closed for four days.

"We're not perfect," Witty says. "But we're trying to do the best we can to manage the situation. We know whichever way we call, somebody out there will be saying it was the wrong decision."

COUNCIL

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If the Justice Court judge deems a property a chronic neighborhood nuisance, access to the property could be blocked until the issue has been dealt with and any fees or fines paid.

The judge could allow the property owner to continue to use the property if the owner agrees to try to remedy the situation or pay fines.

Christopher Christie of Baker City, who has been the only vocal proponent of the proposed ordinance, submitted written comments prior to the meeting and read them aloud during the citizens' participation portion of Tuesday's meeting.

"Since Council has been working on the ordinance it has been transformed into probably the most extreme chronic nuisance ordinance in the state, if not the nation," Christie said "Now, instead of three strikes you're out for six months, it's potentially one strike and you could be out forever, if you don't have the money to pay the fines and fees."

Christie contends that some of the items the city removed from the property at 1975 Birch St. had value.

"To protect the property rights of Baker City citizens, I think that the Council needs to create a legal procedure that docu-

ments what occurs when a property is abated, including an inventory of the property taken," he said.

Carmen Ott, as one of the neighbors of the Birch Street property and a proponent of the ordinance, said she doesn't believe it would be feasible to do an inventory of what the city removed from that property.

Christie said he believes the ordinance gives the Justice Court judge too much flexibility to decide what constitutes adequate water and sewer service.

"In conclusion, I believe this ordinance may violate the due process and equal protection rights of some citizens, especially the poor, disabled, or otherwise troubled citizens of Baker City," Christie said.

In other business Tuesday, the council appointed Christina Martin to the budget board for a term ending in January 2020.

Councilors also scheduled a work session to discuss efforts to reduce the fire danger in the city's watershed in the Elkhorn Mountains about 10 miles west of town. The work session will take place March 13 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St.

Next week the council will have two work sessions — a budget orientation meeting on Tuesday and on Wednesday a discussion of water and sewer capital plans. Both start at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall.



Lisa Britton / For the Baker City Herald

Ashlynn Treanor practices writing her name at Masterminds Preschool in Baker City.

CHILD CARE

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Both women are involved in the Eastern Oregon Early Learning Hub, which encompasses Malheur, Baker and Wallowa counties.

Child Care Deserts

A child care desert is described as an area where care options are scarce or nonexistent. According to the report, Baker County qualifies as a child care desert with seven children under the age of 3 for every available licensed child care slot.

"Child care is an extreme problem clear across the state," Brooks said.

Kim Mosier, a working parent in Baker City, was asked by ReadyNation to look over the report's findings.

"I put a great value on

"Child care is an extreme problem clear across the state."

— **Martha Brooks, state director, ReadyNation and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids**

early childhood education," Mosier said. "A lot of the data stood out to me, affirming what I already knew."

She and her husband met and married in Baker City, then moved to Western Oregon. When they had their first child, they considered both the high cost of living and of child care — and moved back to Baker City for a lower cost of living, no commute and proximity to family.

Their situation would allow one parent to work part-time, but child care was not simple.

"We cobbled together child



Lisa Britton / For the Baker City Herald

Martha Brooks talks about how Oregon is a "child care desert" during a visit to Masterminds Preschool in Baker City. Brooks is the state director of ReadyNation and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids.

care options for me to work part time," she said. "It really affected how I went back into the work force."

When looking over the report's data, Mosier said one particular statistic stood out: Baker County has 26 licensed slots for infants and toddlers, yet there are nearly 600 children in that age group.

Brooks said that in Oregon,

59 percent of mothers with infants are working. This requires child care. The ReadyNation report found that 58 percent of children under age 3 are in some form of "non-parental" child care. Of these, 42 percent are in informal care with family, friends or neighbors. Just 16 percent are in organized child care centers.

The limited options, Brooks said, "doesn't allow you to find a good fit for your family."

The report highlights three major concerns in Oregon:

- **Access:** There are seven children under age 3 for each licensed child care slot.

- **Affordability:** Infant care in a center in Oregon averages \$13,292 per year — 62 percent of the income of a minimum

wage worker.

- **Quality:** Only eight percent of child care centers and one percent of family child care homes are licensed.

Insufficient child care options has a financial impact. The report concluded, based on survey results, that worrying about child care resulted in less time at work and reduced income.

State level

Brooks said there are several bills relating to child care that are currently in consideration at the state level that would protect and expand programs to enhance the affordability and availability of child care.

Among these are creating a Child Care Task Force to study the child care situation and provide recommendations. Another would provide funding for professional development for providers and increase child care licensing. Currently, there is one licensing person for 137 facilities.

Ideally, Brooks said, Oregon needs a continuum of services from birth (such as home visits, with the parent's approval) to Early Head Start, Head Start, and Preschool Promise.

These all fit into the early learning focus, which includes child care and preschools. But first, she said, the lack of available resources must be addressed.

"We've got to solve the problem," Brooks said.

The report can be viewed at: <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/848-want-to-grow-oregons-economy-fix-the-child-care-crisis>

Storms pounds California with up to 8 feet of snow

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A winter storm that slammed the western U.S. was barreling through California on Tuesday, bringing threats of flooding, avalanches and blinding, blowing snow on roads in the Sierra Nevada.

Heavy rain began falling Monday and the National Weather Service issued flood warnings and flash flood watches for the San Francisco Bay Area and many parts of the Sacramento area into Thursday morning.

The latest storm will be a "marathon rather than a sprint," the weather service predicted.

Some small creeks and streams

had flooded and the weather service warned that the Napa and Russian rivers were likely to overflow their banks by Wednesday morning.

However, while some areas could see 6 inches of rain or more over the next two days — and as much as 12 inches in some local mountains — the intensity won't be fierce enough to cause devastating mudslides in areas denuded by a string of devastating wildfires, such as Shasta and Lake counties, the weather service said.

Even so, some areas remained on alert. Sonoma County, where some areas were scarred by 2017 wildfires, activated its Emergency

Operations Center.

"This is the time to locate your emergency kits and review your evacuation plans with your family," said David Rabbitt, chair of the county Board of Supervisors.

In the Sierra Nevada along the California-Nevada line, forecasters warned of possible whiteout conditions from blowing snow in the high passes. The mountains could see up to 8 feet of snow at higher elevations and winds gusting to 140 mph over ridgetops.

"Heavy snow and gale force winds will create dangerous avalanche conditions" into Thursday morning for the Lake Tahoe area, the Na-

tional Weather Service warned.

Several mountain highways, including Interstate 80 at Donner Summit, were repeatedly closed for short periods Monday because of spinouts or avalanche concerns.

The storm already has barreled through other parts of the West, toppling trucks and trees, triggering power outages and closing roads and schools from Oregon to Montana.

Snow forced flight cancellations at the Portland airport, and prompted a blizzard warning for parts of Montana, where Butte public schools canceled classes Tuesday for the first time in at least 20 years.

Buses were getting stuck, and a superintendent told The Montana Standard that the district's snowplows haven't been able to keep up.

A power outage struck several thousand people in the Reno-Sparks area of Nevada.

The storm is the latest in a string that has dumped record levels of snow and rain this winter.

The culprit is an atmospheric river of moisture coming from north of Hawaii. The phenomenon has become frequent enough that scientists in California are introducing a 1-through-5 scale of intensity for atmospheric rivers, similar to those used to gauge hurricanes.