

Findley, farmers hope drought relief will come up during legislative session

By **LESLIETHOMPSON**
(Ontario) Argus Observer

ONTARIO — For the second time this year, Gov. Kate Brown has called a special session for the Oregon Legislature. This time around, the aim is to prevent evictions for several thousand renters during the upcoming winter. There also is the potential that drought assistance will be taken up during the legislative session.

Lawmakers will convene on Dec. 13 in Salem with the primary focus being the state's rental assistance program. Oregon's \$289 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds for that program were said to be nearly spent or pending request by Dec. 1.

Brown said that during the week of Nov. 21, Oregon Housing and Community Services and partners had paid out close to \$150 million of those funds to more than 22,000 households. In the two weeks prior to that, nearly \$20 million was said to have been paid. There remains more than 25,000 applications which are still under review.

In addition to extending safe-harbor protections for those who have applied for assistance, Brown proposes to ensure landlords are paid in full for what they are owed, provide up to \$90 million in additional assistance for low-income tenants through the winter, and provide \$100 million to transition to long-term local eviction prevention services.

Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, who was on his way to a town hall in Jefferson County on Friday, Dec. 3, spoke with the Argus Observer in a phone call about the coming

session.

He said that while the measures for rent relief, especially that landlords "be made whole" are "critically important," he is opposed to going into a special session. The reason, Findley explained, is that he believes it could be dealt with at an Emergency Board meeting, as has been done several times for several matters throughout the pandemic.

"A special session will cost thousands of dollars for us to all come to Salem," he said, adding that it could be done "virtually much faster and cheaper."

Brown has indicated that other time-sensitive issues which will require action before the short session from Feb. 1 to May 7 may also be addressed.

Findley said some of those issues — which include drought relief for Oregon and are in negotiations with discussions occurring "as we speak" — could also be done by the Emergency Board.

"I've been calling for an Emergency Board meeting for three months for drought relief," he said.

In Malheur County, many farmers were impacted by the drought and high heat this year.

Paul Skeen, a local onion farmer and president of the Malheur County Growers Association, said in a phone interview on Friday afternoon that every crop in the county was down this year.

"We had extreme heat and on top of the heat, we had the smoke from all the fires on the southwest side of Oregon and northern California," he said.

That smoke-choked vis-

ibility — and subsequently stifled growing — hit before the first of July, which is much earlier than normal.

"The onion crop is down significantly in size and yield," Skeen said.

Furthermore, wheat yields, corn, seed crops and sugar beets all were down, he said, with the latter not being hit as hard.

"It's been a tough year, and then you ask, is there any relief, and I talk to Lynn [Findley] a lot and I don't think he knows (yet)," Skeen said.

The local farmer said he is hearing from a lot of people who have been growing onions that they aren't growing anymore because they haven't made money for a while.

"Every day, I hear another good-size farmer say he's not growing onions anymore," he said, adding that in Vale, some people are selling their dairies, too.

"It's been bad," Skeen said. "I worry about all my young farmers. I'm a few weeks from being 68, and if I can't make it, it's my own fault. But the young guys who are trying to get started that don't have a lot behind them — they are our future. Somebody has got to feed us. It scares me a little."

He said there were some federal COVID relief programs, such as PPP that helped.

This year's growing season was about 21 to 22 days ahead in heat units, Skeen said, explaining that the onions essentially shut down because of it and before they had grown to size.

"That's why the yields are down," he said.

Walmart removes guns from its shelves in Oregon stores

By **ALEX WITTWER**

EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — It is unclear why, but Walmart has stopped selling guns and ammunition in its Oregon locations.

Walmart could not be reached for comment, but did release a statement to KATU news stating, "We are proud to serve hunters and outdoorsmen and women and will continue to serve them with an assortment that reflects our heritage of supporting hunting and outdoor sports."

The retail giant stopped selling firearms following a policy change in November. Before that, the store had seen some complaints against it

for refusing to sell firearms to residents under the age of 21, including residents in St. Helens and Medford in 2018, who had tried to purchase a firearm, only to be turned away by store associates.

The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries slapped Walmart with a fine of \$5,000 after refusing to sell a firearm to Hannah Brumbles, 18, according to reporting by The Oregonian. After a circuit court ruled in favor of Walmart, it was struck down in the Oregon Court of Appeals earlier this year, and returned to the lower court.

Similar retail stores such as Dick's Sporting Goods and Bi-Mart also implemented a

policy where they refuse to sell firearms to residents under the age of 21, but continue to keep ammunition and guns for sale. Walmart stores in Washington and Idaho continue to sell firearms and ammunition through their stores, however.

The decision for Walmart to deny the sales of firearms and ammunition to those under 21 came after a deadly shooting in 2018 at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. which killed 17, including 14 students and three staff members.

It is unclear if the removal of firearms and ammunition at Walmart will affect sales on local gun shops.

WRESTLERS

Continued from A5

Senior Gauge Bloomer won both his matches, by forfeit against Vallivue and by pin against Columbia, and fellow senior Alex Ritter pinned his Vallivue opponent.

"They are both wrestling very aggressively and will have a great opportunity to win state this year," Young said of Bloomer and Ritter.

Bloomer was the Class 4A state champion at 195 pounds in June 2021.

Young said Ritter gave up one of his matches to give Bloomer a second match against Columbia, even though it was against a heavier opponent.

Jaden Martin, who was runner-up at the state tournament in June in the heavy-weight division, wrestled an Idaho state champion from Columbia on Wednesday.

Martin nearly had a takedown but ended up in a bad position and lost by pin, Young said.

"It's great for him to run into some guys that are at that next level, which is what he is striving toward," Young said of Martin. "This is only Jaden's third year of wrestling. He is also looking into competing in wrestling at the college level."

The Baker girls also competed.

Young said they had a tough night against Columbia, which won the Idaho state title last year.

"It was a great experience for them to be able to compete against other girls at that high level," Young said.

He said Baker's JV team "probably had the best performance of the night."

"They were gritty and just got after it," Young said.

Individual Baker results:

Boys

- Joey Duncan, 3-1, 106 pounds
- Marcus Chamberlain, 2-1, 113
- Aldo Duran, 1-1, 120
- River Clark, 0-2, 126
- Michael Endersby, 1-1, 126

- Sage Darlington, 1-0, 126
- Riley Martin, 0-2, 132
- Samuel Nelson, 0-1, 132
- Cole Hester, 101, 138
- Jimmy Sullivan, 0-2, 145
- William Brown, 1-0, 145
- Gavin Stone, 1-1, 160
- Ben Coburn, 0-1, 160
- Graison Stone, 1-1, 170
- Ryan Brown, 1-0, 170
- Simon Tryon, 1-0, 170
- Cody Eskew, 0-2, 182
- Connor Jensen, 1-0, 182
- Ethan Morgan, 1-0, 182
- Tristan Mulkey, 0-1, 182
- Gauge Bloomer, 2-0, 195
- Adrian Allen, 1-0, 195
- Alex Ritter, 2-0, 220
- Jayden Clark, 1-0, 220
- Billy Kargianis, 1-0, 220
- Jaden Martin, 1-1, 285
- Russell Walden, 1-1, 285

Girls

- Lilly Collins, 0-3, 138 pounds
 - Sarah Plummer, 0-3, 155
 - Sheylin Karolski, 0-2, 155
- Baker is competing in the Calhoun Classic in Nyssa this weekend.



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