

BMCC Board postpones decision on faculty layoffs

BY JOHN TILLMAN

East Oregonian
PENDLETON — The Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education at its meeting Wednesday, June 1, postponed action on a 2022-23 budget proposing faculty layoffs.

The board's reading of state law requiring seven day public notice was responsible for the delay, BMCC President Mark Browning explained.

The board plans to reconvene in a special meeting June 6 to consider approval of the budget. The budget committee agreed to the BMCC Faculty Association's request to resume talks on teacher layoffs June 3.

"I don't ever want to close that door," Browning said. "We have a plan, but of course (the administration) is willing to listen. The (BMFA) came up with some good ideas before talks broke down. I give them credit for that."

Before the final decision to delay the budget vote, the faculty union went ahead with its rally outside Pioneer Hall. The demonstration of support for teachers attracted about 120 attendees, according to new BMFA President Sascha McKeon. She has been on the union executive team for two years and a biology instructor for 10.

"The other faculty and I are grateful for the extraordinary support we have had from our students, alumni and the community at large," she read in a statement to the board. "As of this afternoon, our petition to save BMCC faculty has garnered over 1,900 signatures between our Google sheet and Change.org."

The event featured sign-carrying, blue and yellow T-shirted union supporters, a band of instructors playing classic rock, and stacks of pizza boxes and water bottles. Public speakers' comments began at 5 p.m.

The first speakers were Roy Barron, Hermiston city councilor and educator, and Enrique Ferrera of Clackamas, vice president of the Oregon



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

About 100 Blue Mountain Community College faculty, students and community members gather Wednesday, June 1, 2022, on the Pendleton campus to protest proposed budget cuts before a meeting of the BMCC Board of Education.



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About 100 Blue Mountain Community College faculty, students and community members gather Wednesday, June 1, 2022, on the Pendleton campus to protest the college administration's budget proposal that would cut several teaching positions.

Education Association, the union that represents the faculty association. Paul Keefer, Boardman mayor, 1987 BMCC grad and sixth grade teacher, next addressed attendees, followed by Hermiston educator Tammy Fisher. Umatilla teacher Chris Early, president of Columbia River UniServ, which supports OEA locals in the region, rounded out the list.

Speakers sounded themes of unity and solidarity, and emphasized the value of full time teachers to students and the community. Two urged administrators to "figure it out."

"Something is hinky here," Early wrapped up. He urged an outside audit of at least the past five years, and to "send the architects of this outrage packing."

McKeon thanked all who spoke and attended the rally. "A budget says a lot," she added. "Students don't come for a snazzy website or pretty campus. They come for good faculty. Diversity of courses and quality of instruction will get them where they want to go in life."

Faculty supporters formed outside the doors of Pioneer

Hall, but found them locked. McKeon produced a key, and the crowd marched into the hallway outside the conference room. Part-time philosophy teacher Nicholas Nash led the way.

Chair Don Rice of Boardman, Vice Chair Jane Hill of Pendleton, Kim Puzey of Hermiston and Chris Brown of Heppner attended in person. Bill Markgraf of Baker, Kent Madison of Echo and Abe Currin of Milton-Freewater attended remotely.

Sign-carrying faculty supporters opposed to layoffs marched into the room. Rice allowed 30 minutes for public comments of a maximum three minutes each. About 15 community members, present and past BMCC faculty and students spoke. Alan Feves of Pendleton said he supported the faculty because the community needs arts and music. Dale Baker said he graduated 45 years ago but his automotive and auto body degrees are no longer available.

Then the board turned to its agenda.

"We recognize that the board has a fiduciary responsibility to pass a balanced budget," McKeon said as faculty association president, "but propose you have an equally great responsibility to advocate for the community's needs. Well, they are (here), speaking loud and clear — discretionary cuts to faculty and student scholarships should come from other line items."

Two agenda items took up most of the meeting's time. Dean Tammy Krawczyk reported on early college credit classes for high school students. Executive Vice President John Fields reported on accreditation and enrollment.

Chair Rice and President Browning concluded the meeting by explaining the postponement of a budget approval vote. Board member Brown shook hands with and thanked the remaining faculty-supporting guests.



S. John Collins/Baker City Herald, File

Standing water serves as a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Spring

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The 200,000-acre district includes most of Baker, Bowen and Keating valleys.

The average high temperature during May was almost 6 degrees below average at the Baker City Airport.

April's average high was nearly 7 degrees cooler than average.

The chilly spring has kept standing water, whether from rainfall or from flood irrigation, relatively cool.

The warmer the water, the faster mosquitoes move through their larval stages, Hutchinson said.

Floodwater mosquitoes, which make up the bulk of the bugs locally early in the season, laid their eggs last fall.

Conditions changed rapidly starting in early April, transitioning from an unusually dry start to the year, Hutchinson said.

"It's been an interesting spring," he said.

Hutchinson and his seasonal staff spend most of their time during the spring applying products that kill mosquito larvae — a process known, appropriately, as larviciding.

The goal, Hutchinson said, is to minimize the population of adult mosquitoes, since they cause all the itchy problems in the district.

With several relatively warm days during the second half of May — of the five days during the month that topped 70 degrees, four happened in the second half, including a monthly maximum of 84 on the 26th — the workload increased.

"We've been pretty busy with the larviciding the last couple weeks," Hutchinson said. "The adult numbers have been low, but we're starting to notice a few with the warmer weather."

Although the soggy spring has increased the amount of submerged acreage in the district, Hutchinson said the ongoing drought, with irrigation water likely to be in short supply, could result in a moderate mosquito population this summer.

Mosquitoes can also breed in small water sources, including birdbaths, discarded tires and almost anything else that can hold water for sustained periods.

Hutchinson recommends

residents check their property for such potential breeding spots.

"With the amount of rain that has fallen in recent days, draining or removing anything that can hold water for up to 5 days will help reduce mosquitoes around your home," he said.

Trapping and testing

In addition to controlling mosquito numbers, Hutchinson and his crew maintain a series of traps across the district — baited with carbon dioxide, the same gas we exhale, which is how the bugs find us.

Hutchinson collects mosquitoes from those traps regularly and sends the dead bugs to a testing laboratory at Oregon State University in Corvallis, where the mosquitoes are tested for West Nile virus.

Mosquitoes can transmit the virus to people through bites. West Nile virus has been found in mosquitoes in Baker County every year in the past decade except 2018 and 2020.

In 2021, the virus was detected in 19 batches of mosquitoes trapped in the Baker Valley Vector Control District. One person and one horse were also infected, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Hutchinson said he didn't have any information about the one human case.

Most people infected with the virus have no symptoms, according to the state health officials, but about 20% will have symptoms such as a fever, headache, body aches, vomiting, diarrhea or a rash.

In rare cases the virus can be fatal.

Although floodwater mosquitoes tend to be most numerous in the district early in the summer, a different species, the culex tarsalis, a permanent water mosquito, is much more likely to carry West Nile virus, Hutchinson said.

When adult mosquito numbers reach certain thresholds, based on public reports and trapping totals, Hutchinson can use both truck-mounted foggers and aircraft to spray a pesticide that kills adult mosquitoes.

More information about the Vector Control District is available at <https://www.bvncd.org/> or by calling 541-523-1151.

Essay

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But the basic requirements are the same: good spelling, sentence structure, and documented research.

"It's a great opportunity for our kids to deep dive into American history and do quality research," Wilde said. "We're so thankful for your contest."

DAR registrar Lynne Zwanziger told Wirth that her essay will go into the DAR history book.

"This will go down in history," she told Wirth.

The American History Essay Contest is open to grades 5-8. One winner is selected by the local chapter to advance to the state level.

"There's a lot of work to doing these essays," said DAR member Joan Smith. "To win state, you have to have an extra special essay."

The prize-winning essay

"The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier"
By Bailee Wirth

It all started July 28, 1914, when my brother Andrew went to fight in World War I in France. My brother was a great person and I would have done anything for him. He wasn't just my brother, he was my best friend. When he went to war I just hoped I would see him again, but while he was serving, he disappeared and no one ever saw him again. My family and I were devastated. I didn't just lose my brother, I lost my best friend.

On November 11, 1921, my family and I were invited to see The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which was a couple years after my brother disappeared. A couple weeks later we went and visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. My family and I were grateful that we could go to this very special event. When my family and I went to the ceremony we looked at the wonderful tomb, it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. It was huge and from as far away as I was, I could still see that it was made out of marble. I went up to the guards and asked, "How much does The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier weigh?" They said, "The base of The Tomb weighs over 158 Tons." My family and I were so surprised. We wondered how much it was worth because marble was a lot of money.

The meaning of The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is to honor the people in World War I.

According to the Arlington Cemetery website, "In October 1921, four bodies of unidentified U.S. military personnel were exhumed from different American military cemeteries in France. The unknown soldiers were placed on a horse-drawn carriage and taken to Arlington National Cemetery Nationwide, Americans observed two minutes of silence at the beginning of the ceremony."

The Tomb represents all the soldiers that served for us and lost their lives for everyone to survive and not have to deal with a war. It is for the people who died and no one knew who they were. Thousands of people risked their life and The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is to hope that people will respect that. You are free and safe, because of those people and that is the most important thing that The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier represents. According to the Arlington National Cemetery website, "The Tomb sarcophagus is decorated with three wreaths on each side panel (north and south). On the front (east), three figures represent Peace, Victory and Valor. The back (west) features the inscription: "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God."

Bibliography

"The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier." Arlington National Cemetery, www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Explore/Tomb-of-the-Unknown-Soldier.

Ramp

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Although the work will result in temporary sidewalk closures and detours, from the vantage point of a wheelchair or a walker, the improvements at nearly 50 intersections in the city, to comply with Americans with Disabilities standards, will make the city easier to navigate.

In some places, textured yellow pads, with soft bumps called "truncated domes," will be installed. These are highly visible for people with sight impairments, and secondarily they alert drivers who might confuse the ramp as a vehicle entrance. The texture also alerts people who are blind that they've reached safe passage.

The ramps will have a gentle slope of 8.3 percent.

Moles said crews are working on Campbell Street — where a new section of sidewalk will be built on the north side of the street near Interstate 84 — and Dewey Avenue.

Specific schedules are diffi-

cult to list for the entire project, she said.

"Just the way things are set up the guys will be jumping around a lot," Moles said.

In addition to Campbell and Dewey, ramps will be upgraded on sections of Main, Broadway and Elm streets.

Those sections of streets, though inside the city limits, are also part of state highways, which is why ODOT is responsible for the project.

Chad Maxwell of Murray Smith Consultants, the company ODOT hired to oversee the local project, said some of the ramps haven't been touched in 10 to 20 years.

Besides the curb ramps, workers will install a rapid flashing beacon at the intersection of Myrtle and Elm streets in south Baker City.

Its design is similar to the one on Campbell Street just west of the Powder River bridge.

Those who missed the open house can still contact Vicki Moles via Vicki.L.MOLES@odot.oregon.gov as the project ramps up.



Work was underway on June 2, 2022, on a wheelchair-accessible curb ramp on Dewey Avenue near Estes Street in Baker City.

Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald