

Wyden promotes bill to curb oil company profiteering

BY ANNA KAMINSKI

The Bulletin

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden spoke to Bend residents Monday, Aug. 15 about a new bill that proposes taxing major oil companies, such as Exxon and Chevron, based

on their profits. Wyden hopes the Taxing Big Oil Profiteers Act will encourage lower gas prices

in Central Oregon and elsewhere while combating gas price-gouging, he said at the news conference.

“You’ve got big oil companies running a money vacuum, profiteering, as hard-working Oregonians, here in Bend and elsewhere on this side of the Cascades, are suffering,” Wyden said.

The new bill’s contents include a stock buyback provision, an excess profits surtax and closing a loophole that allows oil companies to downplay their profits and defer taxes on those profits.

“The small businessperson, the mom who’s taking their kid to child care, our farmers: They’re going to be our first priority rather than wealthy oil executives buying back stock,” Wyden said.

The stock buyback provision imposes a 25% excise tax, which is a type of tax that focuses on a specific good such as gasoline, alcohol and tobacco, on the stock that oil companies repurchase.

The excess profits surtax adds a 21% tax on oil and gas companies that make over a normal profit, which is defined as a 10% return on expenses, Wyden said.

“I can’t imagine making 10% profits,” Dan Ellingson, a local farmer and a member on the Central Oregon Irrigation District board, said to Wyden at the news conference.

A pandemic, drought and now high oil prices have made agricultural life much more difficult than normal, said Ellingson, who has a 30-acre farm just east of Bend. His grandfather homesteaded there in 1906.

The necessity of petroleum, or oil, pervades almost every aspect of farm life, Ellingson said. Anything from PVC piping for farm improvements to chemical fertilizers and herbicides that become vital for growing crops in a drought to replacement parts for sprinkler heads comes down to oil.

“I think it’s a really good idea that we stand up to these oil companies and let them know that they’re killing families,” Mindy Corley, who sits on the board of directors and the lending committee for NeighborImpact, said at the press conference.

“Families are struggling, and they’re being forced to choose between going to work, buying food or taking their kids to school.”

In addition to Ellingson and Corley, Cassie Copeland, a counselor at Oregon State University-Cascades spoke to the ways higher oil prices have affected students’ lives.

Copeland, who offers guidance to low-income, first-generation or disabled students, said at the conference that one student she works with has to pick up extra shifts at work every week, which takes time away from studies, just to be able to afford to drive to class.

Wyden said at the press conference that this bill connects with his colleagues in Washington, D.C., because it’s a “different approach” Taxing profits instead of oil prices, he said, is a way to lighten the wallets of major oil executives.

The Taxing Big Oil Profiteers Act comes just after Chevron and Exxon expressed their intentions this spring to buy back billions of dollars worth of stock by the end of this year and next year.



Several local police and a Pendleton ambulance wait Wednesday afternoon, Aug. 17, 2022, near the entrance to the food court at Wildhorse Resort & Casino, Mission, following a robbery attempt that ended with a police shootout.

Antonio Arredondo/East Oregonian

Suspect, bystander injured in robbery attempt at Wildhorse

BY ANTONIO ARREDONDO AND MARCO GRAMACHO

East Oregonian

MISSION — A robbery attempt Wednesday, Aug. 17, at Wildhorse Resort & Casino turned into a shootout between the suspect and police that left the suspect and one bystander injured.

The Pendleton School District reported the bystander was one of its staff members.

“There were some PSD staff onsite for a school event,” the district reported on its Facebook page.

“Several members of our staff witnessed the incident and one staff member was injured.”

The district did not identify the staff member, and authorities have yet to identify the suspect.

Wildhorse is on the Umatilla Indian Reservation several miles east of Pendleton. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation reported the Umatilla Tribal Police Department at 1:04 p.m. responded to a report of a robbery in action at Wildhorse.

Matt Waggoner was one of the people standing by the entrance to the casino on a video call with his son when he saw a police car roar up to the entrance of the food court hundreds of feet away. He said an officer stepped out of the vehicle and began yelling for everyone to get down and put their hands up.

“It was all so sudden,” Waggoner said. The Athena resident then said he saw the robber emerge from the doors, fir-

ing away at the officer. After exchanging gunfire, Waggoner said the gunman appeared to be hit on his right side before crumpling to the ground.

A woman sitting nearby also was injured in the shootout, he said, and he captured about 20 minutes of footage of the shooting and subsequent action on his phone.

Danielle McClelland said she was on her way to an afternoon work retreat when she witnessed the shooting. At the time, she was waiting for her father to pick her up.

“The shooting happened so fast. I couldn’t see much. I heard so many shots,” she said.

There were 13 bullet cartridges in the area behind the officer’s car and at least three bullet cartridges on the gunman’s side.

McClelland, who works for the school district, at the scene said she believed the wounded bystander was a coworker.

Along with Waggoner, other bystanders filmed the shooting. Police asked one to stay back to provide evidence. The man, who wanted to remain anonymous, said he was waiting for a transfer bus to Hermiston for an appointment when the shooting happened. His statement corroborated at least part of Waggoner’s recount.

“(The gunman) came towards the officer shooting,” the man said. “It was surreal to see that and being able to film it. Luckily I had my phone in my hand because I was shaking.”

The man also he posted the video to

Facebook.

All three witnesses commented on how quick the violent encounter was and how fast police arrived. Waggoner said three police cars were at the scene in quick order and Umatilla County Sheriff’s Office and Oregon State Police also arrived.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation reported approximately 20 police were on site after the shooting, including tribal police and FBI.

Wildhorse in a statement reported ambulances took both the suspect and the bystander to St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton. CTUIR in an update reported their conditions were unknown.

“We are grateful no one else was physically injured with all that took place,” according to Wildhorse CEO Gary George. “Security personnel and Tribal Police were quick to act and the situation was controlled in a swift manner.”

Wildhorse reported the resort and casino are open but the food court was closed until the investigation is complete.

George also credited Wildhorse staff. “Wildhorse employees are the best,” he said. “The way the cashiers and everyone handled the situation was exemplary.”

CTUIR reported Umatilla Tribal Police is leading the investigation with the assistance of the FBI and local and state law enforcement agencies.

— East Oregonian news editor Phil Wright contributed to this report.

COLORADO RIVER

How new cuts will impact states, residents

BY SUMAN NAISHADHAM

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Arizona and Nevada residents won’t face bans on watering their lawns or washing their cars despite more Colorado River water shortages.

But U.S. officials announced Tuesday there will be less water available next year for them from the river that serves 40 million people in the West and Mexico

and a farm industry worth billions of dollars. Observers warn that a reckoning is still coming for the growing region because the water crisis is expected to generate future cuts.

WHY IS THE COLORADO RIVER THREATENED?

There are two Colorado Rivers in the U.S. — the 1,450-mile powerhouse of the West and the over 800-mile river that starts and ends in Texas.

The river that faces cuts is the longer one. It supplies seven states plus Mexico but its flow has dropped drastically over time because of water overuse by farming and growing populations, hotter temperatures, evaporation and less melting snow in the spring to replenish the river.

And for years, the seven states that receive the river’s water have diverted more water from it than what was replenished by nature.

WHO DO LAKE MEAD AND LAKE POWELL SERVE?

Lake Mead supplies water to millions of people in Arizona, California, Nevada and Mexico.

Cuts for 2023 are triggered when predicted water levels fall below a certain threshold — 1,050 feet above sea level.

Additional cuts will be triggered when projected levels sink to 1,045 and 1,025 feet. At a certain point, levels



Luis Sinco/Los Angeles Times-TNS

The Colorado River flows over rocks along its banks at Lee’s Ferry, a narrow stretch that marks the divide between the river’s upper and lower basins. Measurements of Colorado River water flowing through Lee’s Ferry are used to factor water allocations to the seven U.S. and two Mexican states in the entire Colorado River Basin.

could drop so low that water can no longer be pumped from the reservoir.

Eventually, some city and industrial water users will be affected.

Lake Powell’s levels are also falling and extraordinary steps have been taken to keep water in the reservoir on the Arizona-Utah border.

Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming get water from tributaries and other reservoirs that feed into Lake Powell. Water from three reservoirs in those states has been drained in recent years to maintain water levels at Lake Powell and protect the electric grid powered by the Glen Canyon Dam.

WHAT IS BEING CUT AND WHY?

The federal government started cutting some states’ supplies this year to maintain water levels in the river and its key reservoirs. New water cuts will build on those reductions — which all but eliminated some central Arizona farmers’ supply of Colorado River water and to a much lesser extent, reduced Nevada and Mexico’s share.

federally recognized Native American tribes.

In the Southwest, water stored in Lake Mead and Lake Powell — the two largest manmade reservoirs in the U.S. — is divided up through legal agreements among the seven Colorado River basin states, the federal government, Mexico and tribes. The agreements determine how much water each entity gets, when cuts are triggered and the order in which the parties must sacrifice some of their supply.

Under a 2019 drought contingency plan, Arizona, Nevada, California and Mexico agreed to give up shares of their water to maintain water levels at Lake Mead. This year’s cuts are part of that plan — and as a result, state officials knew they were coming.

WHICH PARTIES WILL BE AFFECTED BY THE CUTS?

Arizona, Nevada and Mexico.

Arizona was hardest hit, again, and will receive 79% of its total share next year. But that’s only 3% less than what it got this year, after federal officials slashed its supply.

Nevada will receive about 92% of its total supply next year. Most residents will not feel the cuts thanks to water conservation, reuse and the state not using its full allocation.

California has been spared because it has more senior water rights than Arizona and Nevada. That means it doesn’t have to give up its water first, according to the hierarchy that guides water law in the American West.

Mexico will get about 93% of its total supply. The water is used in cities and farming communities in northwestern Mexico, which is also enduring a severe drought.

Oregon Public Defense chief is fired

BY ANDREW SELSKY

Associated Press

SALEM — Even as hundreds of people charged with crimes in Oregon remain deprived of legal representation, a commission tasked with fixing the problem fired the leader of the effort on Thursday, Aug. 18.

The action by the Public Defense Services Commission capped an extraordinary week in which Oregon Supreme Court Chief Justice Martha Walters took the unprecedented step of firing all the members of the commission. She then reinstated five of them while appointing four new members.

The commission voted six to two to fire the executive director of the Office of Public Defense Services, Stephen Singer. One member was absent.

“This is what happens in Third World tin pot dictatorships,” Singer told the reconstituted panel Thursday before it took the vote.

“This is when the ... parliament won’t do the bidding of the chief executive and so the dictator then dismisses the parliament and reconstitutes a new parliament that will be more pliable and do the dictator’s wishes.”

Critics for years have said Oregon’s unique public defense system is in crisis, with far too few attorneys to represent defendants who cannot afford an attorney to represent them. A report by the American Bar Association released in January found that Oregon has only 31% of the public defenders it needs.

Singer was brought in to solve the problem, and he said his ouster would make low-income people charged with a crime, who disproportionately are people of color, suffer the consequences.

“In the end, I’m not the loser. You’re not the losers. The chief justice isn’t the loser. The court system isn’t the loser. The real losers here are the clients,” Singer said.

He said Walters had suggested he recruit volunteers, civil lawyers, retired lawyers, retired judges and third- and fourth-year law students to address the backlog of unrepresented defendants. Singer said he refused.

“It’s an extraordinarily reprehensible and unethical way to treat poor people charged with crimes,” he told the commission. “They are not people to be experimented on.”

“Even a misdemeanor criminal case can have significant consequences for the client and can result in deportation,” he said. “It has implications for housing, for jobs, for education, access to loans.”

One of the commissioners who voted against firing Singer was Jennifer Parrish Taylor, a Black woman who is with the Urban League of Portland. She had recommended that an investigation be conducted into Singer’s conduct and effectiveness, and said firing him amounted to a lack of due process, since he wasn’t able to bring witnesses before the panel and almost half of its members are new and unfamiliar with the situation.

She compared Singer’s predicament to low-income defendants who aren’t afforded due process because the court system can’t find attorneys to represent them.

Oregon’s public defender system is the only one in the nation that relies entirely on contractors: Large nonprofit defense firms, smaller cooperating groups of private defense attorneys that contract for cases and independent attorneys who can take cases at will.

Some firms and private attorneys are periodically refusing to take new cases because of the workload. Poor pay rates and late payments from the state are also a disincentive.

Singer, appearing before the commission via video link, appealed to the new commission to allow him to keep his job and said Walters — an ex-officio permanent, non-voting member of the commission — was threatening the independence of the commission by firing the commission and appointing a new one to do her bidding.