

▼ DOW 31,270.09 -121.43	▼ NASDAQ 12,997.75 -361.04	▼ S&P 500 3,819.72 -50.57	▲ 30-YR T-BOND 2.25% +0.4	▲ CRUDE OIL \$61.28 +1.53	▼ GOLD \$1,715.30 -17.80	▼ SILVER \$26.36 -49	▼ EURO \$1.2066 -0.019
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BRIEFING

Democrats tighten virus-aid benefits

President Joe Biden and Democrats agreed to tighten eligibility limits for stimulus checks Wednesday, bowing to party moderates as leaders prepared to move their \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill through the Senate.

At the same time, the White House and top Democrats stood by progressives and agreed that the Senate package would retain the \$400 weekly emergency unemployment benefits included in the House-passed pandemic legislation. Moderates have wanted to trim those payments to \$300 after Republicans have called the bill so heedlessly generous that it would prompt some people to not return to work.

The deal-making underscored the balancing act Democrats face as they try squeezing the massive relief measure through the evenly divided, 50-50 Senate. The package, Biden's signature legislative priority, is his attempt to stomp out the year-old pandemic, revive an economy that's shed 10 million jobs and bring some semblance of normality to countless upended lives.

Fed reports modest gains

A Federal Reserve survey of business conditions across the United States has found that economic activity was expanding at a modest pace in February.

The Fed survey released Wednesday shows that the central bank's business contacts were expressing optimism last month about a stronger rebound as more COVID-19 vaccines are distributed.

Reports on consumer spending and auto sales were mixed, while overall manufacturing showed moderate gains despite supply-side constraints, according to the Fed survey.

The report, known as the beige book, is based on surveys conducted by the Fed's 12 regional banks. It will form the basis for discussions when central bank officials meet on March 16-17 to mull their future moves on monetary policy.

U.S. services sector growth slows

Growth in the services sector, where most Americans work, slowed sharply in February with hurdles related to the pandemic hindering growth.

The Institute for Supply Management said Wednesday that its index of service-sector activity dropped to a reading of 55.5% in February, down 3.4 percentage-points from January when activity neared a two-year high.

Even with the decline, it was the ninth straight month of growth in the services sector. Any reading above 50 signifies growth.

Economists had expected some rollback from the January high but the size of the February drop was much bigger than expected, driven by a sharp decline in the new orders index.

— Bulletin wire reports

LES SCHWAB TIRE CENTERS

New owners to stop paying employee dividend

BY MIKE ROGOWAY
The Oregonian

Les Schwab liked to talk about how his company's unusual profit-sharing and bonus plans could build a nest egg for his employees, from managers overseeing his shops to the front-line workers swapping out tires on a hydraulic lift.

"That's why I don't like to

talk about how successful I've been," Schwab told The Oregonian in 1997. "I prefer to talk about how successful my employees are."

Schwab died in 2007, though, and his descendants sold the company last year to a California investment firm, Meritage Group. Meritage initially said Les Schwab Tire Centers would continue op-

erating as it always had, but recently notified employees of one major change: It will stop paying an annual employee dividend that workers had long depended upon.

In recent years that amounted to an annual payment of more than \$3,000, with all 7,000 workers getting the same amount regardless of their rank within the company.

"As you know, the dividend was a discretionary gift made by the family and paid outside of our company programs," current Schwab CEO Jack Cuniff wrote in a January note to employees, obtained by The Oregonian. "With the change in ownership, the dividend program will not continue for the 2021 calendar year."

Employees will receive their

2020 dividend this month, Cuniff said, and a separate bonus that is also paid annually based on their own store's performance.

"Going forward," he concluded, "we'll continue to look for additional ways to thank employees for their incredible contribution to our company's success."

See **Les Schwab** / A12

Clatsop County

Tackling vacation rental rules

BY NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Clatsop County is tackling rules around vacation rentals, considering some big-ticket policy items that could increase restrictions.

During a county Commission work session in February, the county set the table for discussions, laying out ways to tighten short-term rental ordinances as well as potential policies to consider down the road.

Cities on the North Coast have struggled to balance the growth in vacation rentals as the region becomes a more popular tourist destination. Pockets of the county have also felt the same pressures.

Many of the questions and policy suggestions came out of quarterly community discussions the county started hosting last summer.

Gail Henrikson, Clatsop County's community development director, said the meetings were an opportunity to explain how the code compliance process works and how they prioritize and

address complaints.

During the community meetings, residents explained how short-term rentals have impacted their quality of life. Many of the complaints deal with noise, parking and overcrowding. Other complaints are out of the county's control.

Vacation rental owners have described their efforts to be good neighbors and encourage their guests to do the same.

"And they also have concerns about possible changes to the ordinance that may impact how they do business or even possibly eliminate the possibility of them doing business," Henrikson said.

There are two county ordinances that regulate vacation rentals. One is specific to Arch Cape, while the other covers the remaining unincorporated parts of the county.

Both are similar, but have a couple of key differences regarding parking and length-of-stay requirements.

See **Rental rules** / A12

 Clatsop County is considering more restrictions on vacation rentals. Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian



OREGON LEGISLATURE

Democrats float \$17-an-hour minimum wage

BY MIKE ROGOWAY
The Oregonian

Five Democrats in the Oregon Legislature have filed a bill that would increase the state's minimum wage, from as low as \$11.50 an hour in some places to \$17 an hour statewide.

That works out to a little more than \$35,000 a year for someone working 40 hours a week, beginning next year. The bill would do away with existing regional differences in Oregon's minimum wage that were created to insulate businesses from higher expenses in rural areas where the cost of living is lower.

Although the proposed minimum wage hike has five co-sponsors, they are all in their first year in the Legislature, and Democratic leaders have not listed the bill among their priorities. That probably means it has little chance of passing — especially if Republicans were to threaten another walkout to block it.

Just 1 in 15 Oregon jobs pay the minimum wage, according to the latest state data.

See **\$17-an-hour** / A11

Bend vacation rental company sues Vacasa

Suit alleges 'smear campaign'

BY MIKE ROGOWAY
The Oregonian

A small rival company based in Bend filed a complaint against Portland vacation rental management giant Vacasa on Wednesday, alleging that Vacasa had embarked on a "smear campaign" in an effort to poach clients.

The court case spotlights the increasingly competitive market to manage vacation getaways. Privately held Vacasa has grown enormously since its founding in 2009, primarily by acquiring small management companies in vacation destination communities and by winning clients away from other businesses.

Vacasa is one of Portland's largest companies and one of the few sizable, Oregon-based companies to emerge in the past several decades. It manages more than 25,000 vacation rentals across the nation — and in several foreign countries — providing housekeeping, maintenance and online rental listing services.

See **Vacasa** / A12

Robot waiter minimizes human contact at Portland-area bistro

BY GABBY URENDA
Beaverton Valley Times

At Bistro Royale in Beaverton, you can thank Milo for bringing and taking away your food by pushing his buttons.

Most servers wouldn't like that, but Milo is different — some might call him "futuristic."

The restaurant — with cuisine from Myanmar, formerly known as Burma — uses autonomous robots like Milo to

limit contact between staff and customers.

People have reacted favorably to Milo, said Calvin Myint, who is a co-owner of Bistro Royale. The restaurant began using the robot in August.

"I love to actually play with all these new technologies," said Myint. "So, when we were looking for a solution, in terms of providing a safer dining experience, my tendency is actually to lean towards technology and

see what's available out there."

Myint and his wife, Poe, first opened Bistro Royale in March 2020. The couple also owns Top Burmese in Portland.

When the coronavirus pandemic began, Myint and his wife decided to open their new Beaverton location despite the restrictions on dining due to the virus. The couple then divided their staff between the two locations to minimize layoffs.

See **Robot** / A12



River, a server at Bistro Royale in Beaverton, demonstrates how the restaurant's robot carries food to a table.

Portland Tribune