

<b>DOW</b> 35,061.55 +238.20	<b>NASDAQ</b> 14,836.99 +152.39	<b>S&amp;P 500</b> 4,411.79 +44.31	<b>30-YR T-BOND</b> 1.92% +0.2	<b>CRUDE OIL</b> \$72.07 +1.16	<b>GOLD</b> \$1,801.40 -3.60	<b>SILVER</b> \$25.22 -.15	<b>EURO</b> \$1.1772 ...
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**BRIEFING**

**EPA gives pesticide company penalty**

The J.R. Simplot Co. will pay a penalty of \$65,250 after the Environmental Protection Administration accused it of pesticide safety issues just south of the Columbia River.

The penalty covers problems cited by EPA at both its Umatilla and Moreland, Idaho, facilities where large amounts of pesticide are stored and sold, the Tri-City Herald reported.

Simplot did not respond to a request for comment.

Simplot has a warehouse about 1,000 feet from the Umatilla River, just upstream from where it enters the Columbia River. EPA said the warehouse had a 12-inch hole in the floor for piping that could allow liquid pesticide that spills to contaminate the ground under the warehouse.

The Idaho facility that was included in the settlement had pesticide spills that had solidified on the ground, creating a possible exposure for workers, according to EPA.

Federal law requires structures used for containment to have discharge outlets and gravity drains sealed to prevent pesticide from leaking and contaminating the environment.

**2 employees sue Hermiston firm**

Two former employees of a home-manufacturing company in Eastern Oregon have filed a lawsuit saying they endured anti-Black racism and discrimination, and then were fired after reporting the incidents to managers.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court by two Black women who worked for Marlette Homes in Hermiston between 2018 and 2020, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.

Twin sisters Lisa Williams and Angela Pierce accuse the company's Hermiston branch of a hostile work environment, sexual harassment, race-based discrimination, wrongful termination and whistleblower retaliation.

Marlette Homes Human Resources Manager Erinn Gailey-Genack said Wednesday that the company had no comment at this time.

**Rivian to build second factory**

Rivian, which pushed the production launch of its Illinois-built electric truck back to September, is already scouting locations for a second assembly plant down the road.

The startup EV truck manufacturer confirmed it is looking to build a second factory, with multiple states bidding for the project, but said Friday the Normal plant remains at the center of Rivian's production plans.

Headquartered in Irvine, California, Rivian has more than 2,200 employees working at its sole production facility, a converted Mitsubishi plant in Normal.

Already behind its original schedule, Rivian's first production vehicle — a launch edition of its R1T electric pickup truck — was supposed to roll off the line this month, but CEO RJ Scaringe told preorder customers last week the semiconductor chip shortage has pushed the launch to September.

— Bulletin wire reports

**VANCOUVER**

## Biotech startup valued at \$2B after IPO

BY MIKE ROGOWAY  
The Oregonian

Vancouver startup Absci debuted Thursday on Wall Street, with investors pouring money into the biotech company at its initial public offering.

Absci raised about \$200 million in Thursday's IPO to spend in pursuit of its technology for using artificial

intelligence to create drugs faster, and less expensively, than through conventional means. It's a technique with enormous promise — but tremendous uncertainty.

The jump in Absci's market price gave the company a market value of nearly \$2 billion, instantly making it the seventh most valuable public company in the Portland area

**RELATED**

• Portland online learning company raises \$50 million, **A6**

with a market capitalization greater than NW Natural, nLight, Schnitzer Steel or Greenbrier.

"I firmly believe that we can make this region a successful synthetic biology

hub," Absci CEO Sean McClain said in an interview Thursday from the Nasdaq exchange in New York. He started the company a decade ago after moving back to his parents' home in Sherwood, then used basement lab space at the Portland State University to demonstrate the technology's feasibility.

See **IPO** / A6



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Head chef Trevor Olson reaches for a newly printed ticket order June 26 at Nookie's Restaurant & Brewery in Hermiston. As tickets pour in, so does the stress of running an understaffed kitchen.

# Eastern Oregon feels the shortage of labor

BY ALEX WITTWER • EO Media Group

**L**A GRANDE — The number of Eastern Oregon residents receiving unemployment benefits is lower now than it was before the pandemic started, according to the Oregon Employment Department.

But that makes no difference at Nookie's Restaurant & Brewery in Hermiston, which has struggled to find workers.

"I don't have a single cook that's not in overtime right now," said Trevor Olson, the head chef at the restaurant and brewery.

Before his shift started that day, Olson had already clocked 60 hours for the week.

In John Day, nearly every business in the town is struggling to fill positions.

"My crew is having to work seven days, long hours, because we're so short staffed. A couple weeks ago, we had to close down just to give people a day off," said Heather Rookstool, a manager at Outpost Pizza Pub & Grill in John Day.

**Why the labor shortage**

Most restaurant owners point to supplemental unemployment benefits as not only a principal cause of the labor shortage but also a cause of lowered morale among employees.

The shortage has prompted employers to offer increased benefits, signing bonuses and higher wages to entice workers back. In La Grande, the McDonald's restaurant on Island Avenue for months had a banner advertising up to \$14 an hour to new employees. That later increased to \$15.

"When our McDonald's is paying \$15 and needs workers, our unem-

ployment should be zero percent," said Matt Scarfo, a Union County commissioner and business owner in La Grande.

But ending those benefits, according to economists, would not fix the economy's woes.

Scott McConnell is an economics professor at Eastern Oregon University and also runs Side A Brewing in La Grande, which has given him close-up experience with the labor shortage.

"The research says no," said McConnell, regarding whether ending expanded unemployment benefits would resolve the labor shortage. "I think it's easy to point at that as being the sole reason."

A large portion of the workforce has returned to the labor market, McConnell said.

It's the ones who haven't returned that confound economists and state leaders alike.

"This last group of people," McConnell said, "what do we do for them?"

**What happened to the workforce?**

Across the region, unemployment claims are lower than in February 2020, before government shutdowns over the pandemic halted the economy. The Oregon Employment Department reported unemployment claims for Eastern Oregon in May 2021 were 1,468. In February 2020, before the pandemic, they were 1,605.

According to Oregon Employment Department data, the leisure and hospitality industry saw a significant chunk of workers leave the field altogether over the course of the pandemic. Many, it seems, were able to find work in their professional careers — ones that matched their college degrees or training.

"I did have a few employees who have degrees, and (the pandemic) actually gave them time to go look for better jobs that would fit their degrees instead," Scarfo said.

"That economic theory is backed up anecdotally. The Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association polled a number of restaurants across the state. Out of the dozens of responses that were published, approximately 20% mentioned employees not returning because they had found or were looking for a career change.

**Other factors**

"There's not just one thing going on right now," said Chris Rich, the state's regional economist for Eastern Oregon. "There's a bunch of different pieces that contribute to what we would really term more of a tight labor market than a labor shortage."

One of those factors has been a problem in Oregon for several years.

"The big one that everyone points to right now is actually child care," McConnell said. "They've had a lot of closures of child care places permanently. It's not so easy to take an economy, shut it down and then just expect it to wake back up."

A January 2019 report from Oregon State University found much of Oregon remains a child care desert, meaning there were three children for every available slot at child care centers.

See **Shortage** / A6

# Stocks hit high, and Dow breaches 35,000

BY TAYLOR TELFORD AND HAMZA SHABAN

The Washington Post

U.S. stock markets capped the week in record terrain — with the Dow closing above 35,000 for the first time — with strong corporate earnings lifting investor spirits after fears of the delta variant's tightening grip sent the blue-chip index sliding to its worst single-day loss of 2021.

The Dow Jones Industrial average rebounded from Monday's 725-point dive with four days of gains, surging 238.20 points, or 0.7%, on Friday to 35,061.55. It added nearly 1.1% on the week.

The S&P 500-stock index climbed 44.31 points, or 1%, to a record 4,411.79, bringing it up nearly 2% for the week.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq added 152.39 points, or 1%, to end the trading day at 14,836.99, also a record. It gained nearly 3% on the week, boosted by strong earnings: Snap and Twitter walloped expectations with robust revenue and user growth, powering their shares; Twitter shares climbed 3%, while Snap sailed nearly 24%.

See **Stocks** / A6

## Plans for largest U.S. solar field scrapped

AP, KLAS-TV, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The push to transition from carbon-emitting fuel sources to renewable energy is hitting a roadblock in Nevada, where solar power developers are abandoning plans to build what would have been the United States' largest array of solar panels in the desert north of Las Vegas.

"Battle Born Solar Project" developers this week withdrew their application with the federal Bureau of Land Management, which oversees the Moapa Valley hilltop where the panels were planned, KLAS-TV Las Vegas reported.

California-based Arevia Power told the television station that its solar panels would be set far enough back on Mormon Mesa to not be visible from the valley. But a group of residents organized as "Save Our Mesa" argued such a large installation would be an eyesore and could curtail the area's popular recreational activities — biking, ATVs and skydiving — and deter tourists from visiting sculptor Michael Heizer's land installation, "Double Negative."

Solar Partners VII LLC, another California firm involved in the project, submitted a letter to the Bureau of Land Management saying it intended to withdraw its application "in response to recent communication" with the agency, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

The proposed plant would have spanned more than 14 square miles atop the scenic mesa and had an 850 megawatt capacity — roughly one-tenth of Nevada's total capacity and enough to provide daytime energy to 500,000 homes, according to the company.

The stalled project presents a setback for the Western state, which aims to transition to 50% renewable energy by 2030 and currently generates roughly 28% of its utility-scale electricity from renewables.