

SCHOOLS

Continued from Page A1

Executive Director Jim Green said he did not believe any legislators would try to cut the roughly \$7.5 million in funding for the correction during the session.

The educators also agreed Measure 98, despite great intentions, would cause problems, especially for small districts, without legislative fixes. The measure, approved by voters in November, requires districts to spend \$800 per ninth- through 12th-grade student on new programs to improve graduation rates, college preparedness and career and technical education. Districts were supposed to



The Eagle/Sean Hart

From left, Rep. Greg Baretto, R-Cove, Sen. Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, and Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, listed to feedback from education officials from across Eastern Oregon at an education forum in the library at Grant Union Junior-Senior High School in John Day Jan. 24.

receive \$800 per student in additional funding for the programs, but with the state facing a \$1.8 billion budget shortfall to maintain current government service levels,

Shelley said the Measure 98 requirements would amount to an "unfunded mandate."

Shelley said the district has already invested in career and technical education but could

not use the funds to maintain a current program.

"The million dollar question in our district is how do we create a new program when we've already got a program," he said.

He said the district also has high graduation rates, and the requirements for new programs for ninth- through 12th-graders would require cuts to lower grade funding. He said, if new programs must be created, the programs should be able to be created at lower grade levels because improving third-grade reading levels, for example, improves students' graduation rates.

Julie Gurczynski, superintendent of Prairie City School, said the law "has a great purpose," but with only

12 full-time staff members in the district, implementing such programs is difficult.

"There's got to be built in some flexibility," Witty, the Baker superintendent, said. "... What happened to local control? It's not as if the school boards don't understand their situations and recognize where they need to invest money to get the best bang for their buck."

Ferrioli said educators and education advocacy groups should push the Legislature to allow smaller schools more flexibility in implementing the measure and for caveats, such as an exemption from graduation rate program requirements for schools that already have high graduation rates.

Similar to Measure 98, the educators said a law meant to improve educational support for children with dyslexia also has unrealistic requirements for smaller districts. Shelley said the district wants to provide the best education possible for students with dyslexia, but a requirement to have a half-time dyslexia specialist in each school does not make sense for schools such as Seneca with only 29 students.

"No doubt we should service kids if they have dyslexia in all our schools, but we need to do it within reason," he said. "In a small district, maybe one employee to service the district, or perhaps one employee of an ESD to service a county."

SESSION

Continued from Page A1

Gov. Kate Brown

Brown, a Democrat, said she's focused on the next two-year budget cycle but is willing to discuss changes to stabilize the state's revenue system for the long term.

"We are working on a number of levels," Brown said. "I am continuing to have informal conversations with the business community as well as labor about how we close the deficit gap for the short term. I am also committed to having longer-term conversations about how we close the structural deficit."

She said maintaining access to health care for everyone — despite the high costs of expanding the Oregon Health Plan — was "fundamental and foundational to creating a thriving Oregon."

To address the state's housing crunch, Brown said rent control — not currently permitted in the state — needed to be discussed at the Legislature.

Oregon Senate Leadership

Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, predicted the 2017 session will be the most difficult in several years.

"We have a huge budget challenge, a huge challenge with the transportation package we are trying to get through," Burdick said. "This is my 10th term, and I can't remember a more difficult session than the one we're going into."

With a three-fifths majority required to pass tax measures, Democrats will need Republicans to push through priorities for revenue reform and passing a transportation package.

Senate Minority Leader Ted Ferrioli, R-John Day, reminded Democrats Thursday that his party is urging certain concessions for their votes. Specifically, Ferrioli wants to curtail costs associated with the Public Employees Retirement System and to roll back the state's low-carbon fuels standard.

"Republicans are willing to help, and we have been reaching out, and so far, we haven't heard anything positive from the Democrats on partnering on Oregon's problems of PERS, transportation, low-carbon fuels standard and getting a handle on spending so we can have real conversations on revenue," Ferrioli said.

"We do not think kicking the can down the road for another legislative session is prudent," Ferrioli said.

MEETING

Continued from Page A1

picketers were lined up outside. No one trying to attend was harassed at the door. The atmosphere was calm, orderly and peaceful.

The crowd at the 2017 meeting was a mix of veterans, former law enforcement, ranchers and residents from across the country who came to hear speakers on the Constitution, media and LaVoy Finicum's beliefs.

Burns resident Hunter Davis said he attended the meeting to learn about the Constitution and the rights it granted him.

"The government doesn't want you to know about the rights you have and what powers you have and how much control you actually have over them," he said.

Grant County resident and event organizer Jim Sproul said 470 tickets were sold before the event and another 218 at the door, at \$15 each. He estimated there were 650 in attendance, including 250-300 locals.

"It was a fantastic event," he said. "We didn't have any problems whatsoever. It was well handled, well attended, and I thought those folks did a really good job of putting their point across."



The Eagle/Rylan Boggs

More than 500 people attended "The meeting that never happened" at the Grant County Fairgrounds Saturday, Jan. 28. Speakers talked about the Constitution, property rights and LaVoy Finicum's life and beliefs.

Speakers presented information on a variety of topics related to the role of government.

Former Fox News radio show host and investigative reporter Kate Dalley said the "mainstream media" lies and is heavily influenced and infiltrated by the federal government. The federal government is overreaching and using the media to "keep the masses asleep," she said.

"They are crafting the mainstream media to turn patriots into terrorists. They seek to discredit anyone who stands up for their property rights. They will turn the nation against you. They will imprison you. They will kill you," Dalley said. "Why? Be-

cause the government has to control the land to control the people."

She applauded the Bundys and the Malheur occupiers. Dalley praised the occupation and said the refuge occupiers were peaceful.

"If you want to fear someone, if you want to fear a movement, fear those seeking to undermine your rights that reside in the highest positions of power in this country, fear those that conspire to keep the masses asleep, fear those that seek to imprison patriot-loving Americans."

Author Bill Norton and his 15-year-old daughter, Laine Norton, spoke on the importance of property rights. Bill Norton said the reason personal property is so important

is that it is purchased with an individual's life and liberty.

"We are not anti-government," he said. "We love government. We love very clearly defined boundaries, very clearly limited government with separation of powers. ... It's others who are trying to break those boundaries down that are truly the anti-government folks."

Attorney Garret Smith spoke on the role of a constitutional sheriff and claimed, if one had been involved in the events last year, the outcome could have been drastically different. He asserted the sheriff's job is to represent the people who elected him and stop federal overreach.

Federal and state agencies had become outlaws, Smith said, and it fell to constitutional sheriffs with the support of the people to keep them in check.

He warned of the government indoctrinating students and advocated for those in attendance to remember what they learned during the meeting and to study documents such as the Constitution themselves.

"We need a revolution," he said. "Not a revolution of arms, a revolution of thought, a revolution of morality, a revolution of community standing up and supporting each other."

ROADS

Continued from Page A1

Bentz said he hopes to develop "a more thoughtful" long-term plan to maintain the state's roads and bridges. He said, in preliminary discussions, the committee leaders have identified possible components of the package, including how "mega projects" are planned, how state taxes and fees are allocated and how projects are prioritized, as well as how the package may be funded, including gas tax increases, tolling and targeted tax and fee increases.

Last week, Bentz attended John Day City Council, Grant County Court and Southeast Area Commission on Transportation meetings to gauge community needs from such a package.

"At the end of the day, I represent you," Bentz said. "What do you want me to do?"

County concerns

Members of Grant County Court said they were open to

an increase in infrastructure funding, but County Judge Scott Myers said he would like the Oregon Department of Transportation to use funds more responsibly and eliminate waste.

Roughly half of all funds raised by transportation taxes and fees go to ODOT, while 30 percent goes to the counties and 20 percent goes to the cities, based on population.

Grant County Commissioner Boyd Britton encouraged Bentz to pursue a higher gas tax. The last increase in the gas tax was 6 cents in 2009.

City concerns

John Day City Manager Nick Green said he is not opposed to a gas tax hike to generate more funding for necessary road projects, but he said the impact would be minimal for John Day.

In fiscal year 2015, the city received \$100,779 from the current 30-cent tax on each gallon of fuel sold. A 10-cent increase to the tax would net John Day an additional \$33,000 annually. With this additional funding, however, the city would only be able to chip seal one mile of its 13 miles of city roads, Green said.

In 2009, John Day laid out 41 street improvement projects, but only one has been completed. The next project, scheduled to be completed in 2019, will add sidewalks to Canyon Boulevard, where some children currently walk on the shoulder of a state high-

way to get to school.

At the end of the 2015 fiscal year, John Day had \$217,000 in net working capital in its street fund. Green said current funding allows the city to complete about two projects every 10 years.

Other concerns

While raising taxes is never popular, additional pressures make raising the gas tax even less palatable.

The Low Carbon Fuel Standard — requiring distributors to reduce the carbon content of vehicle fuels by 10 percent over the next decade — is anticipated to increase the cost of gas between four and 19 cents per gallon, according to Bentz, who cited figures from the Department of Environmental Quality.

He said Democrats might also try to implement a cap and trade program for carbon emissions — where emissions would be limited and allowances could be bought and sold — which could drive up fuel costs by another seven to eight cents per gallon.

The combination of these factors would leave little room to increase the gas tax, Bentz said.

Other considerations

Bentz said the average Oregonian drives 12,000 miles per year and gets 21 miles per gallon. This equates to each Oregonian paying an average of \$153 a year in gas tax, which Bentz said is a good deal for the eastern part of the state.

Bentz said rural communities can most effectively use funds by maintaining roads, rather than letting them deteriorate to the point where they must be rebuilt, which is far more costly. In his district in Eastern Oregon, however, Bentz said 30 percent of city streets are already beyond repair in need of replacement and the other 70 percent are in danger of being lost if not properly maintained.

Green said The League of Oregon Cities, an organization representing cities across the state, is calling for a substantial increase in the gas tax, additional funding for capital improvement projects and an increase in funding to the Special City Allotment program. The Special City Allotment program distributes \$1 million set aside by ODOT specifically for city street projects in communities with populations under 5,000, and Green said a substantial increase could have a more significant impact on the city than a gas tax increase.

Increasing funding for the program, however, will face the same constraints as any other program as legislators begin work to try to overcome the shortfall to balance the budget. Bentz and other Republicans have indicated they are willing to discuss additional revenue, through additional taxes, but only if Democrats are willing to discuss cost-saving measures as well.

The legislative session begins today.

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