

Pot

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desirous to give back to the community per the earlier campaign to allow recreational marijuana sales within the county," Carpenter said.

The county needed an ordinance to receive those taxes, and "as the year was coming to a close, time was of the essence," Carpenter said.

State law, however, establishes how taxes may be imposed, Carpenter said.

"By statute, an emergency may not be declared to pass an ordinance which imposes a tax," he said. "Any ordinance which imposes a tax must be ratified by the voters before it can take effect. Further, any tax on marijuana must be ratified by the voters at the next statewide general election."

Carpenter speculated that the 3 percent tax approved by emergency ordinance Dec. 19 "would have remained undisputed until the next general election, in which it, in all likelihood, would have been ratified by the voters."

"The local retailer was willing to charge, collect and remit the tax to the county, and the county was prepared to accept the tax," Carpenter said. "But for the three percent paid by purchasers of recreational marijuana, there appeared to be little downside."

However, once questions about the ordinance were made public by the Eagle, the county needed to reconsider the ordinance, Carpenter said.

When questioned about the matter by Frances Preston near the end of the court's Jan. 9 meeting, Myers said he wouldn't attach blame for the error in drafting the tax ordinance. He said he wasn't sure how the mistake was made and suggested that somehow wires were crossed.

Oregon counties also receive a share of the 17 percent tax on recreational marijuana collected by the state. The county received \$1,556 from the state as its share for the fourth quarter in 2018, according to the county Treasurer's Office.

Findley

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supported the establishment of an Oregon Broadband Office by Gov. Kate Brown in December. The office is not yet funded, and Brown has proposed \$5 million in broadband infrastructure funding for the next biennium.

Findley attended Rep. Greg Walden's meeting with the Grant County Digital Network Coalition in John Day in October. He's a big supporter of improved internet access in rural communities and said he was disappointed that the coalition failed to win a \$3 million federal broadband grant to improve internet access in Grant County.

Findley said he will champion a bill that will raise the tax on phone bills used to support emergency dispatch services from 75 cents to \$1.50. The bill will also change the formula that allocates the revenue so a larger share will go to counties with fewer than 40,000 residents.



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Oregon Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, addresses the Grant County Court April 11.

The additional revenue will help rural communities that struggle to fund 911 dispatch. Findley said the bill has been introduced and is gaining bipartisan support in the legislature.

While the state faces an estimated \$800 million budget shortfall for health care,

the legislature continues to kick the liability for the Public Employees Retirement System down the road. More work is needed to address the impacts of PERS on local and state budgets, but Findley said he has never seen a "silver bullet" solution.

Gov. Brown announced in

November her goal of appropriating an additional \$2 billion for education, but Findley said the numbers aren't solid and depend on ideas such as extending the length of the school year to 180 days and reducing class sizes.

Meanwhile, 14 legislators on the bipartisan Joint Com-

mittee on Student Success have been studying Oregon's low high school graduation rates and other education issues. Findley said the 180-day school year idea is not backed by good science.

Findley said there's no lack of bipartisan support for improving education, but the important thing is to get the best bang for the buck, not just throwing more money at the problem.

As a member of the House committee overseeing veterans issues, Findley said he understands the need for more housing opportunities for vets. State housing programs often include provisions for veterans, but the programs have failed to live up to their goals.

Supporting attainable housing will require money, Findley said, but that shouldn't mean additional taxes. Oregon doesn't have a revenue problem, he said, it has a spending and accountability problem. One study found the state could have saved \$1 billion in the past biennium by spending tax money more wisely.

Bentz

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Bentz said, based on his experience, these committees will be working on much of the most interesting and meaningful legislation in 2019. His committee assignments "provide a chance for me to help protect and advance the interests of our part of the state," he said.

A fundamental question facing the Legislature is whether Oregon should put a price on carbon emissions to address climate change.

Most Oregonians tell pollsters yes, Bentz said.

There are three ways to reduce carbon, he said: cut emissions, tax emissions or create a tax and cap market for carbon. After traveling thousands of miles speaking to experts and the public and reading piles of reports, Bentz said he is convinced taxing carbon is the most effective way to change behavior.

The Democrats, however, prefer cap and trade, he said. The result could be significant negative impacts to rural residents — including a 14-16 cent per gallon increase for gasoline and rising freight costs. He calls carbon the most challenging issue in his legislative



The Eagle/Richard Hanners

Oregon Sen. Cliff Bentz

career.

That would make health care the second most challenging. With one out of every four Oregonians expected to be using Medicaid, the state is facing a \$600 million budget shortfall for the program, he said.

In the past, taxes on hospitals raised funds for Medicaid, he said, but new legislative proposals include taxes on insurance premiums. What's needed are cost

controls, Bentz said, but prior efforts failed, and he's seen no new proposals for controlling the cost of health care.

Bentz said he also hasn't seen any new proposals for controlling the state's Public Employees Retirement System. He blamed a lack of enthusiasm by the governor's office and the need for significant structural reform to the program to prevent past mistakes.

The impact of PERS on education can't be understated — about 25-35 percent of educational funding goes to PERS, he said. As a result, local schools find it difficult to hire good teachers.

Bentz, who has served on local school boards, said he wants to know why the majority party hasn't been held accountable for the PERS issue. The answer may lie in the lobbying powers of teachers unions, which makes it nearly impossible to pass effective education legislation.

Providing attainable housing is another complex issue. Bentz advised communities to protect their existing housing stock and hire experts to analyze local conditions and provide a plan. Rural homes typically range from 60-70 years old, and they were never built to last a century, he said.

In the end, providing more attainable housing will mean more taxes. Bentz said he was glad to be back on the Revenue Com-

mittee where he can have a voice. The housing issue also needs more public discussion, he said.

It was Bentz's predecessor, Sen. Ferrioli, who helped Grant County get a \$1.8 million appropriation to improve internet access. Bentz expects to see further support debated in the legislature. Broadband supporters want users to raise needed funding through taxes on phone bills, Bentz said, but he was concerned about how the money would be used.

Bentz is also willing to take on an old issue that hasn't been resolved — increasing the tax on phone bills used to help fund 911 dispatch. The proposal divides rural communities that struggle to pay for emergency dispatch and metropolitan areas where funding is less of a problem, he said. But effective 911 systems also help tourists from metropolitan areas as they pass through rural areas. Raising the phone tax is a necessary safety issue, he said.



Meeting Notice

The 2019 Biennial Review of the Upper Mainstem and South Fork John Day River Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plan will be held from 3:30 – 6:00 pm, Wednesday, January 30, 2019 at the Oregon Department of Forestry conference room located at 415 Patterson Bridge Rd. in John Day. For additional information, contact Jason Kehrberg or Pat Holliday at the Grant Soil & Water Conservation District office at 541 575-0135, ext. 101.

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Hello Grant County,
I hope you all enjoyed the holidays and are off to a great start for the New Year.
Our January Chamber meeting will be Thursday, January 17th. The Board meets at 10:30 a.m. at the Chamber office, and the no-host luncheon is at noon at the Outpost.

We have two guest speakers scheduled that I think you will find very interesting.

Greg Swanson from Itz on Target will be sharing some exciting information about digital display campaigns; come and listen to his presentation. He will be discussing geotargeting, keyword search targeting, contextual targeting, geofencing and retargeting. Lea Gettle, from Oregon Trail Electric Co-op, will be sharing exciting information about some things OTEC is going to do that will promote economic development and tourism in the communities in their region. She will tell you about a virtual reality tour that is going to start filming here in Grant County very soon and how you and your business can be a part of it. Please plan to join us; this is exciting stuff!

Also, if you are interested in using Facebook for your business, there is going to be a class January 23rd that will help you get going with it. The class is going to be at the OSU Extension Classroom at 116 NW Bridge Street on Wednesday, January 23rd from 6-8 p.m.; Chris Gibson is the instructor. For more information, call Didgette at 541-575-1911 or email her at mccrackend@oregonstate.edu

I want to give a shout out to Angie Jones of the People Mover for the fantastic job she is doing. Grant County is very lucky to have her! The People Mover will be starting their deviated fixed route on Monday, January 14th. It will loop John Day-Canyon City every 45 minutes from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Another route will loop between Prairie City and Mt. Vernon three times a day – 7 a.m., noon, and 6 p.m. And best of all, these rides are FREE.

If you travel between John Day and Boise, be on the lookout for our new billboard in the Ontario area! We are hoping it will encourage travelers to take "the best road trip through Oregon – On Hwy 26 to Grant County, where the high desert meets the mountains." We are very excited about it! Let us know if you see it. We are hoping to get one on the west side of the state also.

We hope to see you all on January 17th at our monthly Chamber meeting. Enjoy the great weather while it lasts!

Tammy Bremner
Manager, Grant County Chamber of Commerce

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