

# Committee

Continued from Page A1

"I thought that was the end of it," he said. "I've never once seen the position advertised publicly."

Myers said Dec. 30 that the court appointed roughly 20 volunteers to various boards and committees in its Dec. 9 session. He said the court did not require those volunteers to reapply for their seats.

"Those were not declared vacancies," he said. "They were not put out for new members because the current standing and/or sitting members on those committees agreed to stay on."

Myers said the county's policy has always been that those incumbent members of those committees keep their seats unless the number of terms limits them.

## March 13 Budget Committee meeting

Quinton said he believes County Commissioners Hamsher and Sam Palmer want him off the committee because he and the other two at-large committee members opposed increasing the number of hours the county pays them during a March 13 Budget Committee meeting last year.

According to the approved meeting minutes, the committee discussed the court's request to change the county commissioner position to half-time instead of one-third time.

According to the minutes, the three public members that sit on the Budget Committee, which include Quinton, Long Creek resident Amy Kreger and Rob Stewart, said the voters — not the Budget Committee — should decide to increase the commissioners' hours and pay. The two commissioners and county judge are also on the committee.

Quinton said that is his "personal opinion of the matter" and that he ultimately does not know why the county commissioners are considering another applicant.

According to the Budget Committee meeting minutes, Myers — on two occasions — said both Palmer and Hamsher should declare a potential or actual conflict of interest

and recuse themselves from the discussion.

"Scott advised the commissioners should not be offering input because this would be a direct conflict of interest for them," according to the approved minutes.

Both Palmer and Hamsher recused themselves from the vote.

"I don't know if it did not sit well with them," Quinton said. "I'm not sure."

According to the meeting minutes, increasing the commissioners' hours to half-time would have been a roughly six and a half hours a week increase in paid commissioner hours.

Quinton said he remarked at the meeting to both Hamsher and Palmer — with no disrespect to either of them — that they knew the number of hours for which the county would pay them before they ran for office.

He also said Kreger told the commissioners they both receive full-time health benefits.

In the minutes, Kreger also mentioned that raising the commissioner's paid hours came right after the filing deadline for the open commissioner position. The committee stated that maybe there would have been other people who would have filed for the primary if the pay was different.

"The bottom line is we felt it was more the voting public's decision than the Budget Committee's decision," he said. "And I would stand by that decision."

Quinton told the Eagle he does not know if that is why the court "mysteriously" has another applicant for the seat.

Hamsher and Palmer both said that is not the reason why they are considering Camarena for the position.

"When you get appointed to a committee or board, it's not a lifetime appointment," Hamsher said Dec. 30 after a County Court session.

Palmer said Thursday that someone he did not name went to the courthouse to apply for the Budget Committee and was told they could not.

"If you're a taxpaying citizen in this county and there's an opening on a board, you should have the right to apply for it, just like everybody else," he said. "And if nobody

applies for it, we'll look at the reappointment."

Hamsher said he thought the county advertised all open positions on boards and committees to the public. He said he also thought all of the people on the board had an opportunity to apply for reappointment.

## Predator Control Program

Palmer said Dec. 30 that he is "struggling" with who to appoint due to the county's Predator Control Program's demise.

Last month, predator control officer Nick Lulay accepted a full-time position in Wallowa, according to USDA Wildlife Services District Supervisor Shane Koyle.

Palmer said he received phone calls from unhappy residents saying they wanted the Budget Committee replaced for not increasing the funding for the predator control officer position.

Quinton said that Palmer sits on the Budget Committee as well.

Palmer said there was roughly \$9,100 left in the predator control program budget, and the committee cut the \$40,000 allocated by \$5,000.

Myers said that other matters precipitated cutting the program's budget by \$5,000.

Myers said, as the budget came forward last year, there was money "left on the table."

"So when you look at a budget and the expenditures, and you're trying to reduce your spending, you're looking at programs that had money leftover," he said. "Is there a way to pay for wiggle room? What we did then was we worked on \$5,000 out of the \$40,000 budget."

Myer said he would "hate" to lose a committee member and potentially others over the decision. He told Palmer that the three committee members are all property owners and can identify with the unhappy constituents who called to complain.

According to Grant County Treasurer Julie Ellison, the county spent \$36,055.64 on the program last year. She said Thursday that, since the program started in 2017, the county has spent roughly \$116,000 on the position.

According to Budget Committee meeting minutes, Ellison estimated high costs for the program unless the county received more contributions. She said the county received a little over \$12,000 in total donations for the program from various organizations.

Palmer said he is trying to do what his constituents elected him to do.

"We don't represent our personal thoughts," Palmer said. "We represent the people and what the people want us to do."

Quinton said the committee discussed the predator control program nearly a year ago. He said the county addressed the possibility of bringing Lulay on as a county employee and additional costs, including a county-owned vehicle and what the county's liability would be if an employee were to mistake a per-

son's pet with a coyote.

Ellison said she remembered the meeting but did not know why there was not a more extensive record of the discussion in the minutes.

The court intends to meet in early spring to discuss increasing the position's funding to full time.

## Potential conflicts of interest

Hamsher and Palmer both said that Camarena serving on the committee presents no more potential conflict of interest than Quinton's wife, Amber, who serves as the county's deputy treasurer.

Myers said Quinton is not his wife's direct supervisor.

Ellison said Thursday that she disagrees with Hamsher and Palmer's comparison but declined to comment any further.

In an email Monday, Quinton said it was "interesting" that his wife's employment came up because it was never an issue before.

He said he would have declared a conflict of interest and not voted if there had ever been a budget request for the Treasurer's Office.

He said the only increase to the Treasurer's budget was the cost-of-living wage increase that all county employees received, which brought him no "extraordinary" benefit.

"She is not in my direct employ," Quinton said. "She has been employed in her capacity as Deputy Treasurer for the past ten years."

As mayor of Prairie City, Hamsher is Camarena's direct supervisor. Hamsher said he had not spoken to Camarena about his interest in being on the Budget Committee.

Hamsher said that, should Camarena get appointed to the committee, he would not have to recuse himself from discussions on whether the commissioners' paid hours should be increased.

"I don't know how that would have any bearing on anything," he said. "It wouldn't matter to me if he recused himself or not."

Hamsher said asking whether Camarena should recuse himself from such a discussion or vote would be questioning his and Camarena's integrity and suggesting that he would take action toward Camarena based on his decision as a committee member.

He said Camarena voting on whether the commissioners should get paid for more hours does not pose a potential conflict of interest. Hamsher said a conflict of interest would occur if he or a family member were to benefit financially from a decision.

Camarena said he would recuse himself from any discussions or votes that could be perceived as a conflict of interest on anything, including the matter of whether to increase the county commissioners' number of paid hours.

The county will revisit the Budget Committee appointment in its next session.

# "THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE IS FOR THE PEOPLE. IT'S NOT ABOUT A HIDDEN AGENDA. IT IS THE PEOPLE'S OFFICE."

—Todd McKinley, Grant County sheriff



The Eagle/Steven Mitchell  
Todd McKinley, left, is sworn in by Grant County Judge Scott Myers Monday at the county courthouse.

## Ceremony

Continued from Page A1

McKinley said he was surprised at the number of people who showed up for the swearing-in ceremony.

He said he wanted to be careful how he phrased it when he said that it gave him "some new hope" for the county.

"The sheriff's office is for the people," he said. "It's not about a hidden agenda. It is the people's office."

Incoming Circuit Court Judge Rob Raschio took the oath in Burns.

Raschio said he was on the bench "making decisions" hours after being sworn in by outgoing Cir-

cuit Court Judge William D. Cramer Jr.

"I'm excited to finally be on the job. I feel the gravity of the moment," he said. "I'm going to really enjoy doing the work."

Raschio said his biggest goal right now is to make sure that people in both Grant and Harney counties have "access to justice, openly, fairly and quickly and that the Constitution is front and center in all the decisions that are made in our courtroom."

Incumbents also took the oath, including Treasurer Julie Ellison, Surveyor Mike Springer, County Commissioner Jim Hamsher and Assessor David Thunnel.

## Lawsuit

Continued from Page A1

Great Northern applied for a grant through two Oregon-based community organizations designated by the state to review and administer funds earmarked for Black-owned businesses and families, the Contingent and the Black United Fund of Oregon, in early October.

According to the Dec. 6 complaint, the online application asked what percentage of owners of this business identify as Black? Great Northern answered zero.

The complaint goes on to say that Great Northern sued the state on Oct. 29 to "stop them from enforcing their racial exclusionary policy." The complaint states the Contingent denied Great Northern's application on Nov. 9.

The logging company intends to reapply for a relief grant when "the courts enjoin the enforcement of the racial exclusion that renders Great Northern ineligible for relief for the Fund."

Salem-based Dynamic Service Fire and Security saw their business go from

grossing roughly \$40,000 a month to nearly \$10,000 to \$18,000, according to the Dec. 6 complaint.

The business tried to apply for relief from the state's small business grant program in November, but by the time they logged on to the website they could not submit an application as the funds were exhausted, the Dec. 6 complaint stated.

The complaint states: "Dynamic Service wishes apply for relief from the fund, but is disqualified from obtaining relief on account of its race." The complaint goes on to state that the owner Walter Leja is disqualified individually from applying for relief due to his race as well.

According to court documents, the Oregon Cares Fund offered to deposit its remaining \$8.8 million with the court, which, for the time being, has halted the program while the lawsuit continues.

Palmer said in a phone call Thursday that, while he owns equipment and property with Great Northern, he has not been involved in the lawsuit.

Haupt declined the Eagle's request for comment.

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A household is defined for the purposes of the Lifeline program as any individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address and share income and expenses. Lifeline service is not transferable, and only eligible consumers may enroll in the program. Consumers who willfully make false statements in order to obtain Lifeline telephone or broadband service can be punished by fine or imprisonment and can be barred from the program.

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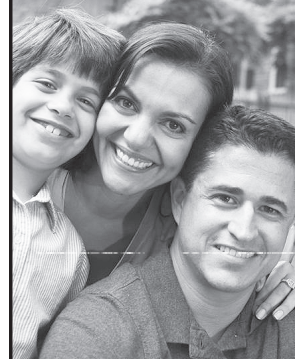
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