

Findley and Owens discuss the legislative session

One bill retools how wildfires are fought in the state

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

As the legislative session wrapped up, state Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, and Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, held a virtual town hall and had a lot to discuss.

One of the items at the top of the list for both lawmakers was the drought.

Findley said one of the most significant "side effects" of drought are the wildfires. He touted Senate Bill 762, which Gov. Kate Brown dubbed as her "going home bill." He said it was one that she wanted passed before the end of the session.

After several amendments and work in committee, he said the governor signed the legislation on June 26. He said the bill retools how wildfires are fought in the state.

One component, he said, is that it gives the Oregon State Fire Marshal proper additional authority to go in and work with districts and tap into assets at both federal and state levels.

He said two years ago fires in and around Sherman, Wasco and Gillam counties could not get support because it was considered a "no man's land," a territory where no one is responsible for responding to wildfires. As a result, it burned nearly 100,000 acres.

After the governor signed the new legislation, agencies started enacting it immediately because Brown had full support for the bill.

Over the last seven days, Findley said, many fires in his district have been provided additional resources because of that bill. He said they put aviation, air tankers and large helicopters on those fires almost immediately. He said it kept similar fires at less than 1,000 acres, where they likely would have burned 50,000 acres in the past.

The bill did not come cheap, he said. Findley said the price tag was



Eagle file photo

Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, during an October session of Grant County Court.

\$150 million. He said the legislation improves fire detection and suppression resources and upgraded air tankers to modern aircraft — from the old 75-year-old turbine to a jet-powered aircraft.

Findley noted that there are some issues that they ironed out at the last minute. One, he said, was agreeing on which properties would be in a wildland-urban interface. He said houses or structures that intermingle with wildland vegetation would be tagged as in the wildland-urban interface. To lower wildfire hazards, there are defensible space requirements. He said they were able to take some of the most egregious conditions out of the final bill.

For instance, he said a ranch in Diamond in the middle of nowhere would have been considered in the interface and would have had to meet a host of requirements.

"Some of that stuff did not make any sense," he said. "We were able to inject some common sense into it."

He said he was not happy with land use provisions in the bill. According to Findley, the bill would place restrictions on the size and type of roads. For example, the legislation would likely require a 20-foot all-weather road, while anything over 1,000 feet would require turnouts.

Additionally, he said there would be building codes in high and extreme fire danger areas, and electric companies would be required to protect their grids.

The most significant portion, he said, is the reduction of wildfire risk. Findley noted that homeowners in



Eagle file photo

Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale

the wildland-urban interface areas with ladder fuels and fuel up into the communities would be required to increase resiliency efforts. He said there is no funding to assist them, and he plans to pick up the bill in the following legislative session to address those "holes in the bill."

Findley said there is also some additional funding for the range-land fire districts in north Central Oregon.

"This is the tie that puts fire suppression tools, all the tools in the toolbox available throughout the state," he said, "which is a pretty good thing."

Findley said, while he voted yes, it took a long time to get to yes.

"This is not the end point for this bill," he said. "We have a lot of work left to do on this bill. We can only make it better."

Owens' report from the session

Owens said most of the bills in the Education Committee that he introduced were around educational choice and did not make it out.

He said three funding bills include \$1.2 million for the John Day Wastewater Treatment Plant, \$2 million for an aquatic center in John Day another \$1 million for the planned Kam Wah Chung Interpretive Center, as well as additional funding for the Grant County Public Safety Network that will go to communications.

Owens said he opposed a bill that dropped the essential skills requirement allowing high school students to receive their diplomas.

"I do not believe you can get rid of essential skills without replacing

it," he said.

He said he could support a different type of diploma, but the Legislature threw out the essential skills requirement until 2024.

Move Oregon's Border

The lawmakers were asked about a grassroots effort looking at flipping Eastern Oregon's counties to Idaho.

Voters in Grant County were among five that told their commissioners to hold meetings to discuss the county joining Idaho as part of the "Move Oregon's Border" movement.

"Citizens for Greater Idaho" is a political action committee that advocates adjusting the current state boundaries of Idaho, California and Oregon, thereby increasing Idaho's size to encompass several rural counties in California and Oregon.

Owens said he wants to figure out how to make Oregon more conservative to stay in Oregon.

"We're struggling a little bit with that," he said. "We're getting a little bit more liberal than we are conservative, and that's making people frustrated."

He said the odds of getting the border moved are slim. Owens said he knows people say that they will not know until they find out.

"I'll educate myself, and learn more about it and move forward," he said, "but I still want to spend the vast majority of my effort trying to make Oregon a place that we want to stay."

Findley said he mentioned it four times on the Senate floor throughout the session.

"I said if you're not going to leave them alone and let them live like rural Oregonians, then please support secession to the state of Idaho, because the frustration level is just too high," he said.

Findley said moving the state borders would be a "heavy lift," however, and would require the approval of the Oregon and Idaho legislatures, as well as Congress.

"It's a grassroots effort," he said. "It's not a top-down effort. It's not something that we in the state legislature can and should do. It has to come from the ground up."

Ontario man indicted on 15 charges related to kidnapping, sex crimes in Grant County

Blue Mountain Eagle

An Ontario man has been arrested on sex crime and kidnapping charges in Grant County.

James W. Eaton, 44, is accused of three counts of first-degree kidnapping, three counts of first-degree sodomy, three counts of first-degree sexual abuse, three counts of incest and three counts of coercion with a single victim younger than 12, according to a July 6 indictment filed in Grant County Circuit Court by District Attorney Jim Carpenter.

In three alleged incidents between June 1 and June 30, the indictment accuses Eaton of secretly confining a minor relative to forcibly engage in oral intercourse while instilling a fear he would otherwise engage in anal intercourse.

Eaton is scheduled to enter a plea at 1:15 p.m. July 29 in Grant County Circuit Court.

In 1997, Eaton was accused of five sex crimes including incest in Jefferson County, according to court documents that list his city of residence at the time as John Day. He pleaded not guilty to the charges but was found guilty except for insanity on one count of first-degree rape and was placed under the jurisdiction of the Oregon Psychiatric Security Review Board for a maximum of 20 years, according to court documents.



James W. Eaton

COPS AND COURTS

Arrests and citations in the Blue Mountain Eagle are taken from the logs of law enforcement agencies. Every effort is made to report the court disposition of arrest cases.

Grant County Circuit Court

Aaron M. Roseberry was found not guilty by a jury June 22 on a count of harassment constituting domestic violence allegedly committed June 12, 2020. In the judgment of acquittal, Circuit Court Judge Lung S. Hung ordered security posted in the amount of \$5,500 be returned.

Brandie B. Woodward, 45, of Long Creek pleaded guilty July 9 to two counts of possession of methamphetamine committed on Jan. 19, 2017. She was sentenced to 10 days in jail, 18 months of supervised probation and 240 hours of community service. She was fined \$400 and ordered to pay \$100 in attorney fees. A charge of failure to appear was dismissed based on a motion by Grant County District Attorney Jim Carpenter stating plea negotiations in multiple cases warrant the matter being dismissed.

Grant County Sheriff

The Grant County Sheriff's Office reported the following for the weeks ending June 30 and July 7:

Concealed handgun licenses: 6, 6
Average inmates: 9, 9
Bookings: 6, 11
Releases: 10, 10
Arrests: 0, 2
Citations: 3, 3
Fingerprints: 7, 1
Civil papers: 13, 4
Warrants processed: 11, 3
Assistance/Welfare check: 1, 0

Search and Rescue: 1, 0
June 28: Cited Charles Brown, 62, Baker City, for speeding, 87/65 zone.

June 28: Cited Beula Bullard, 99, Mt. Vernon, for speeding, 54/30 zone.

June 30: Cited John Dipold, 18, Imbler, for speeding, 81/55 zone.

July 7: Cited David Kodesh, 26, John Day, for failure to obey a traffic control device.

July 7: Cited Jacob Gonzales, 35, Prineville, for speeding, 50/30 zone.

July 7: Cited Kevin Lewis, 36, Spokane, Washington, for speeding, 81/65 zone.

Oregon State Police

July 4: A trooper responded

to a single-vehicle crash near milepost 165 on Highway 26. Investigation revealed a vehicle was eastbound and went of the westbound shoulder when attempting to pass a turning hay truck. The vehicles did not hit each other. The driver was transported to the hospital for evaluation of injuries.

July 5: A trooper contacted a registered sex offender on West Main Street in John Day. Travis J. Friere, 34, of John Day was out of compliance on sex offender registration for failing to report a change of address. He was taken into custody without incident and transported to Grant County Jail.

July 5: A trooper issued Brett A. Nelson, 58, Mt. Vernon, a citation in lieu of custody for a cite and release warrant for a probation violation out of Josephine County.

Dispatch

John Day dispatch responded to 148 calls for service during the week of July 5-11, including:

John Day Police Department

July 5: Somer Robinson, 32, Dayville, was arrested on a Grant County warrant.

July 6: Arrested Timothy

Edwards Jr., 29, John Day, for assault.

July 6: Arrested Christopher R. Woodell, 37, John Day, for assault and disorderly conduct.

July 9: Responded to a burglary on Northwest Second Avenue.

July 9: Responded to an unattended death on West Main Street.

July 11: Responded to a domestic dispute on West Main Street.

July 11: Arrested Jeremiah J. Alsop, 51, John Day, on a Grant County warrant.

Grant County Sheriff's Office

July 6: Fraud was reported on Picnic Creek Road.

July 8: An unattended death was reported on South Bridge Street.

July 8: Theft was reported

on Patterson Road.

July 9: Cited Mantas M. Enrique, 33, Gainsville, Florida, for speeding, 53/30 zone.

July 11: Arrested Melinda Moss, 42, Mt. Vernon, on a Grant County warrant.

Oregon State Police

July 11: Arrested Olle L. Starnes, 51, John Day, on a Grant County warrant.

John Day ambulance

July 5: Responded with Prairie City ambulance for a woman with difficulty breathing on North McHaley Avenue.

July 6: Dispatched for a woman possibly not breathing on Hall Avenue.

July 9: Dispatched with Seneca ambulance for a 71-year-old man who had fallen.

July 9: Dispatched for a 69-year-old man not feeling well on Northwest

Third Avenue.

July 10: Responded for a man who collapsed on Third Avenue.

July 10: Responded for a woman who was unconscious behind a business on Main Street.

July 11: Responded for an unconscious woman on West Bench Road.

John Day fire

July 9: Responded to a report of a hay trailer on fire on Highway 395 near milepost 5.5.

Prairie City fire

July 7: Responded to a fire on North Cozart Avenue.

Mt. Vernon fire

July 8: Responded to a pole on fire on Highway 26 near milepost 144.

U.S. Forest Service

July 8: Received a report of a fire on Rainbow Road.



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