

# Community college issues aired

By DAKOTA CASTETS-DIDIER  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Challenges facing Oregon's community colleges were hot topics Thursday, Oct. 6, in Pendleton.

Presidents of the colleges gathered at Blue Mountain Community College for the Oregon Community College President's Council.

"We meet monthly, sometimes in person, sometimes via Zoom," Oregon Coast Community College President Birgitte Ryslinge said. "There is a lot of history with the 17 community colleges in Oregon doing this through the years. We're all independent colleges, governed by our local board of directors, but we really look for the places we can work together. Every year

we do a retreat and spend some time looking at goal setting, or the big issues coming at us in a year or longer term, touching base on those. What are those common issues that are meaningful to all of us?"

Enrollment, workforce education and ongoing challenges with distance learning in a post-pandemic era were at the forefront of discussions.

"Enrollment has dropped during the two years of the pandemic, and we're only really just coming out of that," Ryslinge said. "At my college we're just 3 or 4% lower than the pre-pandemic era, but we're going to need a couple more years to see exactly what's going on with that trend."

Rogue Community College President Randy Weber said enrollment traditionally



Howard Yera Cronin Ryslinge Weber

gets a boost during periods of high unemployment as people enroll in community college to get job skills and training.

"Right now there's so much labor demand that people do not need to go to a community college in order to get that job," he said. "We're seeing employers hire under qualified applicants at record paces."

One area of education facing consistent increased demand is workforce education.

"A big issue for all of us across the state comes out of the coronavirus pandemic is

workforce education, it's such a key part of what we do at community colleges," Ryslinge explained. "This is where older adult students are coming, oftentimes they haven't completed a degree or certificate. They left high school and often waited quite awhile, now they're back and they're interested in the next career step that's going to help them. Those are jobs Oregon needs, whether advanced manufacturing or health care. The challenge for us there is always asking, how do we

make that affordable?"

Chemeketa Community College President Jessica Howard said health care education has proven to be a big issue in 2022.

"We've known for a long time that we'd have an incredible pinch in terms of health care, health care needs and all the advancements in health care technology that have been expensive to keep up with," she said. "Then you add the pandemic in that mix and you see not only the burnout, but the whole sense of what it means to go into health care has changed."

While the perception around what going into health care has changed, so has the perception of what it means to be in a collegiate classroom with community colleges realizing they must play

a balancing act between using distanced learning to help students and encouraging students to return to the classroom.

"For some students, learning styles, and life circumstances, distant learning is great," Weber said. "One of the things we've been finding for years is trying to get students to progress to a degree in a timely manner, with these learning tools it's going to help some students. What we're learning is that distance learning is just another tool in our toolbox for the future."

Flexibility has become the No. 1 demand from students, Ryslinge said.

"It's gotten more complicated how we serve students and determine what's sustainable," she said "It's an interesting time to be in education leadership."

## Easterday fraud called staggering

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

YAKIMA, WA — Cody Easterday's 11-year sentence for fraud was largely based on the amount he stole, a sum U.S. attorneys called staggering.

But his lawyer said that sum reflected the scale of his cattle business.

Easterday, 51, was given a prison term Oct. 4 in Yakima, Wash., based on standardized sentencing guidelines. Even without prior convictions, Easterday was subject to a long sentence because the \$244 million he stole pushed up his offender score.

Defense attorney Carl Oreskovich did not dispute the Justice Department's calculation. But, seeking leniency, he asked the court to consider other factors, including the size of Easterday's transactions with Tyson Fresh Meats.

Over the previous decade, Easterday and Tyson had done \$2 billion worth of business. On one day alone, Easterday billed Tyson \$5.3 million to care for 6,312 head of "phantom" cattle.

Easterday wasn't greedy or living lavishly; he was in a hole and trying to gamble his way out, Oreskovich said. "It's easy to understand why the loss was as large as it was."

Easterday pleaded guilty last year to taking \$233 million from Tyson and another \$11 million from Segale Properties of Tuk-

wila, Wash., a real estate developer that invested in cattle.

After helping sell his farms and feedlots in bankruptcy court, Easterday returned to court for sentencing. Oreskovich pleaded for home detention.

Otherwise exemplary throughout his life, Easterday was taken down by an addiction to gambling on the future prices of commodities, Oreskovich said.

Afterward, he said Judge Stanley Bastian's sentence was harsh. Easterday walked briskly past reporters, free until he self-reports to prison officials. His family and friends, who packed the courtroom in silent support, quietly and slowly filed out.

Bastian said it was the largest fraud case he had ever seen, or hoped to see. He asked John "Fritz" Scanlon, assistant chief of the Justice Department's fraud division, to compare it to other cases.

Finding a comparable case is hard, said Scanlon, who referred to a crime he prosecuted this year involving an ex-pro football player.

The frauds were similar, he said, but the losses weren't. The ex-pro submitted fraudulent medical claims totaling \$2.9 million. The Easterday fraud was "massive," Scanlon said. "Your honor, this is a serious, serious crime."

Bastian said he was puzzled. Easterday took over a

family farm of 1,000 acres in southeast Washington and built it into 22,000 acres of potatoes, onions, corn and wheat. After building an empire, he destroyed it, the judge said.

Easterday also fed cattle and Tyson was his biggest customer. Easterday reported in November 2020 that his feedlots and grow yards held 296,535 head of cattle belonging to the company.

Tyson was curious about his cattle investment, according to court records. The company flew drones over Easterday's lots and saw far fewer cattle than in Easterday's inventory report.

When confronted, Easterday said he had lost the money from his scheme — "pissed it away on the merc," according to a Tyson executive, a reference to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

"I'm truly sorry to Tyson," Easterday said during the sentencing hearing.

Easterday still faces charges by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission that he submitted false cattle inventory reports to increase the amount he could bet on commodity futures.

The case, also pending in U.S. District Court for Eastern Washington before Judge Bastian, has been on hold until the fraud case was settled.

U.S. attorneys portrayed Easterday as a sire of "extreme privilege," a well-heeled white-collar criminal who shouldn't get less time than a street-level crack cocaine dealer.

Oreskovich disputed the characterization. He said Easterday was a farmer who bought animals at the fair raised by 4-H kids and paid for immigration lawyers to help employees.

"He didn't enjoy extreme privilege. He built an empire," Oreskovich said.



James Thomas/Contributed Photo, File

The Amazon data center in Umatilla is one of four sites in Umatilla and Morrow counties that have been completed since 2010. Umatilla, Hermiston and Umatilla County have approved a plan for Amazon to make payments in lieu of taxes on the four new data centers it's building in the county.

## AWS payment deal reached

By JOHN TILLMAN  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners approved a deal for Amazon Web Services Inc. to make payments in lieu of taxes on the four new data centers it's building in the county.

The board signed off on the four enterprise zone agreements at its meeting Wednesday, Oct. 5, joining the Hermiston City Council and Umatilla City Council in approving the plan.

Hermiston and Umatilla are slated for two server farm campuses each. AWS is to make various payments in lieu of property taxes for 15 years.

"It's a big deal," board Chair John Shafer said. "We're pretty excited. Amazon knew the public was looking closely at the deal. They stepped up their offer, and the three entities were pleased with it. They were really wanting to be a good partner. It was very impressive."

The agreements include an annual improvement payment of \$5 per square foot of the buildings, as long as they cover at least 180,000 square feet, Shafer explained.

"They're 210,000 square feet," he said. That works out to \$4.2 million per year. Hermiston and Umatilla should each receive at least \$1.05 million annually and the county

\$2.1 million.

A further \$25 million base payment for each of the four campuses goes to special taxing districts, such as schools and public safety. This payment is scheduled to grow by 3% each year.

In 15 years, when AWS goes onto the tax rolls, the county estimates its tax rate should double.

AWS submitted applications for development of two new campuses within the Greater Hermiston Enterprise Zone, requesting a long-term rural abatement for approximately 204 and 118 acres. The board reviewed and approved terms for the abatements. As a co-sponsor of the zone, the county agreed to the terms of the agreements.

The Hermiston City Council approved the requests at its Sept. 26 meeting, and Umatilla City Council approved AWS' requests at its meeting Tuesday, Oct. 4.

The parcels in the Greater Umatilla Enterprise Zone cover 234 and 212 acres. The agreements for Long-Term Rural Enterprise Zone Abatement require AWS to invest at least \$200 million per campus, hire at least 10 new full-time employees, pay average wages equal to the Umatilla County average wage, provide additional compensation benefits equal to 130% of the county average wage and pay the required fees to the zone over the term of the agreement.

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