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Gazette Times

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Ione Community School named 'outstanding' by U.S. News & World Report

The Ione School District, at their Feb. 16 meeting, learned that the Ione Community School was named an "outstanding" school by U.S. News & World Report.

The board also heard an update from Randy Hinrichsen, project manager in charge of the district's capital improvement project through Willamette ESD.

Hinrichsen presented a $2,465,495 updated capital improvement project budget which included the following newly approved projects: the high school gymnasium bleachers at $48,735; playground softfall at $125,738; carpet in the library and two classrooms, $18,154; library blinds, $267; and the shop roof, $14,250. The original budget, without the recent inclusions, was $2,012,162. The project revenue, originally estimated at $2,839,342, was updated to reflect additional revenues for a revised amount of $3,171,354. Additional revenues include the bond premium at $140,183; Business Energy Tax Credit at $31,457; Bonneville Power Administration incentive-$12,390; insurance claim estimate for the original gym floor which was damaged in a storm-$126,000; and an Oregon Department of Education Facility Grant-$43,543. Board member Lisa Rietmann, however, said that she believed that the ODE facility grant was not guaranteed, but rather determined by the amount of funds available on a first-come, first served basis.

Total budget for the project, including administrative, site, planning and miscellaneous costs, and Phase II contingencies (the bleachers, playground softfall, kitchen breaker panel replacement, carpet replacement in the library and two classrooms, a site fire alarm, library blinds, a high school lighting retrofit and woodshop roof upgrade), was increased from $2,799,640 to $3,165,456.

In other business at the meeting, the board:

-heard the following financial report for January from Chief Fiscal Officer Beth O'Hanlon:

*the district collected $121,609 in basic school support, $3,604 in property taxes, $21,192 in State Fiscal Stabilization Fund money (federal stimulus monies); $35,700 from the Morrow County Unified Recreation District; $4,173 in ARRA IDEA money (stimulus). O'Hanlon said that the primary, intermediate and Talented and Gifted cost centers remained over budget due to the reallocation of salary and benefits noted in September. She added, "Although the district received reimbursement from grants in January, additional expenditures cause deficit ending fund balances. All funds continue to be reimbursable with grants and should be whole by June 30, 2010."

-approved the following licensed contracts as follows: one-year contract for 2009-10 second year licensed probationary teacher: Gail Pratt; one year contract for 2009-10 third year licensed probationary teachers: Lea Mathieu and Becky Wagenblast; two-year contract extensions for 2011-12 and 2012-13 (with the exception of Dean Robinson who has retired) for: Barbara Collin, Dale Holland II, Jim Raible, Ryan Rudolf, Thomas Shear, Brandi Orem, Erin Hansell-Heideman, Karen Holland, Linda Neiffer, Steve Schaber and Stephanie Spivey.

-accepted the 2010-11 budget calendar as follows: March 2-teacher/staff budget requests due to superintendent; March 24-publish first notice of budget committee meeting; April 7-publish second notice of budget committee meeting; April 12-budget committee meeting at 7 p.m. with election of officers, presentation of budget message, presentation of budget document, citizen input and review of budget document; May 25-final meeting target date for approval of budget by budget committee; June 9-publication of notice of budget hearing and summary of budget and funds; June 21-budget hearing, 6 p.m., regular board meeting and adoption of budget with appropriations and levying of tax.

-approved a resolution renewing cooperative agreements with Heppner for boys' and girls' golf, tennis, baseball and softball for a two-year period.

-approved the 2010-2011 Umatilla-Morrow Education Service District local service plan.

-learned that the next meeting will be Monday, March 15, 7 p.m.

Wyden would dump filibuster rule to pass health care bill

By David Sykes

Oregon Senator Ron Wyden said he would be willing to do away with the filibuster rule and use a procedure called reconciliation, also nicknamed "the nuclear option", to see a health care bill get passed through the Senate. Wyden made the comments at a town hall meeting in Boardman Sunday.

Ron Wyden

Generally reconciliation is only used for budget matters, and it allows the Senate to pass bills with only a simple majority instead of the 60-vote margin required under the filibuster rules, which have been in effect in the Senate for many years.

"I am open to using reconciliation," Wyden told the crowd of around 50 people gathered at the Port of Morrow building, "to pass the health care bill. If the president puts up a bill that is acceptable then I am open to reconciliation."

Wyden covered a wide range of topics at the town hall meeting, taking questions at random from the audience. In response to a question from Don Russell of Boardman, who wanted to know why the country cannot drill for oil and mine the coal we have in a reasonable amount of time, Wyden said he was glad to see President Obama put nuclear power back on the table for use by the United States. (The president recently proposed large loan guarantees by the government for the nuclear power industry.) Wyden said he thinks America should pursue more energy sources. "We need energy from every source that is safe," he said. He said he was in favor of speeding up the process to obtain new energy.

Don Russell

On questions about health care, Wyden said he wrote the only bipartisan bill out there on health care reform, but the Senate has not considered it. He urged people to go online and read his bill, called the Healthy Americans Act, which, he said, had support from both Democrats and Republicans. He said free market forces should be used to bring down the cost of health care, and that he thought Medicare could be cut without hurting seniors.

"We need to put competition and choice into a program that has none," he said about health care. He held up a plastic health care card and said he favored a national insurance exchange like members of congress have for the whole country. Wyden said he also favored medical malpractice reform, a feature most Democrats oppose, and shopping for insurance across state lines, which Republicans favor.

Wyden was asked about the national debt by another Boardman resident, Art Kegler. "This out of control spending is destroying our country. We are broke," Kegler said. Wyden said he agreed and felt we should be getting the government out of some of things it has become involved in. "I voted against the bank bailout three times," he told the crowd. "I do not believe in 'too big to fail'." He said many of the lawmakers from back east voted in favor of the government bailing out banks because they felt if allowed to fail the banks, could bring down the entire US financial system.

Art Kegler

Another woman told Wyden the government was like an unruly teen ager with a credit card and that since Wyden had spent the last 30 years in congress (16 in the House of Representatives and 14 in the Senate) he was partly responsible for getting us into this financial mess. "I have focused on spending less and getting the government out of some of this," he said in response.

When asked "where in The Constitution the government had the right to buy car companies, bail out banks, and try and run the health care system," Wyden said a legal case could be made that those actions fell under the general welfare section of the constitution.

On the subject of illegal immigration, Wyden said that the country must first secure the border and then deal with the illegals now in the country. "We have to secure the borders and then enforce the law that is on the books. After all we are a nation of laws," he said. He said that after the borders are secure then businesses that employ illegals should be punished. "There are currently 12 million undocumented in the country," he said. "That is not an ideal situation but what do we do with them? I don't see how the government is going to make that work," Wyden said. He said there should be a period of time when anyone who came forward who was in the country illegally paid a fine, mastered English and had not broken any other laws, should be considered for citizenship. "Some say that is amnesty," Wyden said.

Also discussed was a possible road between Ione and Boardman in the north end of the county. Port of Morrow Commissioner and Ione resident Marvin Padberg asked Wyden to work on a solution to getting a road pushed through, maybe on the Western edge of the bombing range. He said Ione needs the access to the north especially with all the wind farms now going in around south Morrow County. "We would be very willing to get to the bottom of this (the road request)," Wyden said.

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:
MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

Rep. Smith takes issue with pharmacy management company that cuts out local pharmacies

Oregon Representative Greg Smith, R-Heppner, is taking issue with a pharmacy management company that handles many state health care programs in Oregon, including the Morrow County School District.

Smith says MedImpact Healthcare Systems, Inc. is not cooperating with an Oregon law passed last year that requires health care administrators in Oregon to negotiate rates with critical access pharmacies. Smith has contacted the company, but they have not responded.

The end result is that "critical access" pharmacies, serving remote areas and small populations, including the Heppner and Boardman areas, are not being reimbursed at sustainable rates.

Boardman pharmacist Ray Michael and Heppner pharmacists Ann and John Murray say that because MedImpact reimburses at such a low rate, they cannot afford to carry contracts with the company. Since the Morrow County School District, by state mandate, joined a statewide insurance pool, the Oregon Educators Benefit Board, John Murray says that he has lost between 75 and 100 customers.

Since Murray's Drug does not have a contract with MedImpact, it charges customers the full price and, as a service, sends in the receipts for the customers so that they may be reimbursed. MCSD Superintendent Mark Burrows said at the last MCSD Board meeting, that he has seen the reimbursement on one of his prescriptions, which generally costs around $10, drop to the point that he recently received a check for 50 cents.

The pharmacists say that because they are small, they cannot supplement their income with non-drug items, such as large chain pharmacies do. Instead they have to cover their pharmacy costs. Murray said he could not accept a cut rate insurance plan that pays below his cost of dispersing medications and still stay in business.

Smith said that if MedImpact does not comply with the law, he plans to hold a public hearing that includes all the stakeholders and demand to know what it is doing to comply with the law.

Area teams participating in state competitions

Basketball teams from Heppner and Ione will compete in state playoff games this week. Also, Chance Day and Wacy Coil from Heppner will wrestle in state competition this weekend beginning Friday morning at Memorial Coliseum.

Ione boys' basketball team will play Hosanna Christian tonight, Wednesday, at 6 p.m. in Ione.

HHS boys' basketball team will travel to play De La Salle N Catholic on Saturday, February 27, at 4 p.m. at the Salvation Army Community Center.

HHS girls' basketball team will travel to play Riddle on Friday, February 26, at 6 p.m.

Annual Walk MS Heppner to be held

The annual Walk MS 2010 will be held in Heppner on April 17.

The day will begin with on-site registration at 8 a.m. at All Saints Episcopal Church on 140 NW Church St. in Heppner. The walk will begin at 9 a.m. at the city park. After the walk, people can return to the church for a free pancake meal and raffle.

Join the walk and sign up today by pre-registering online at www.walkMSoregon.com, or by phone at 1-800-344-4867. Walkers may register at any time, including the day of the event. MS Walk brochures with registration information will be located in local businesses.

For more information contact Co-Chair Merilee McDowell at 541-676-5238 or Joan Basile at 541-676-5832.

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