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Oregon needs 150,000 jobs to put people to work

State Labor Commissioner says work force getting older

By David Sykes

The Oregon Labor Commissioner told the Heppner Chamber of Commerce last week that younger apprentice workers are not moving up the ranks to be able to fill the jobs of an aging Oregon work force. At the same time he says there are plenty of workers but the state is "short" 150,000 jobs.

Brad Avakian, Commissioner Oregon Bureau of Labor & Industries

Commissioner Brad Avakian from Portland told the weekly chamber luncheon that the average age of construction workers in Oregon is now a person in their late 40s. Also as an example of an aging work force, he said the average age of a Pacific Corp. electrical lineman is 53 years old. "The people are not coming up through the ranks to fill jobs," Avakian said. He said part of the reason is that schools no longer offer shop classes to begin teaching students the skills needed to fill these journeyman jobs. Later he said the state is not lacking workers, but instead is lacking jobs. "We are lacking jobs. We need 150,000 new jobs to put people to work in this state," he said.

Avakian said his department would go to the next session of the legislature and ask for $25 million so 10 middle schools around the state could reinstate wood and metal shop.

Heppner resident and Chamber member Cliff Green, who was at the luncheon, told Avakian he didn't think schools without shop classes should get all the new money. "We have shop classes here and we don't think a new program should get all the resources and money over those who already have a program and will get nothing," Green said.

Avakian also told the Chamber that his department fields over 25,000 calls per year with civil rights complaints. He said they have prosecuted 2,800 cases. The Labor Department covers state and federal housing discrimination, discrimination in public places, and investigates civil rights complaints.

New legislation dictates that an employer cannot use credit history or information when making a decision on hiring people. He said the law also expanded the discrimination laws to cover veterans' status, and made veterans a new protected class of workers. Avakian said the new law says an employer must provide the spouse of veteran with a reasonable amount of time off from the job when their spouse is being deployed.

Ione School Board changes meeting date, time

The Ione School Board, at its regular meeting Monday night, unanimously voted to change its regular meeting date to the fourth Tuesday of the month from 3 to 5 p.m. Starting with the August meeting, the board's work session will be held from 3 to 4 p.m., with the meeting from 4 to 5 p.m.

The board had met on the third Monday of the month starting at 7 p.m. since the district was formed following its split from the Morrow County School District in 2004 after a group sought to shut down the Ione schools as a cost-saving measure. At that time, the Ione Community charter school was formed.

Dr. Mark Mulvihill

The board is moving its meeting date and time to accommodate the Umatilla Morrow Education Service District staff and Dr. Mark Mulvihill, UMESD superintendent, who has just been hired as the Ione School District's superintendent. ISD had previously contracted with UMESD to provide administrative and educational services for the district, but following the resignation of former principal/superintendent Karl Ostheller, opted to hire Mulvihill as the superintendent and Jerry Archer as the on-site principal only, rather than as a principal/superintendent.

When the Gazette-Times asked about working parents who may not be able to attend the daytime meetings, Vice Chair Anne Morter waved toward the Monday night crowd, indicating that the meeting was not well attended by parents. The crowd consisted of one teacher, one UMESD staff member and the reporter from the Gazette-Times, although meetings during the regular school year are generally well attended.

Four out of five of the board members, Joe McElligott, Lisa Rietmann, Anne Morter and Bill Jepsen, operate family farms. Board member Bink Ramos is employed with Agri N.W.

Board member Lisa Rietmann later told the Gazette that the board is not able to accommodate everyone's requests concerning meeting times and that the UMESD staff had conflicts with the previous meeting date and time.

Also at the meeting, the board re-elected Joe McElligott as board chair and Anne Morter as vice-chair.

The board also voted to dismiss a $15,000 late completion penalty for Knerr Construction concerning the district's capital improvement project because of extenuating circumstances as presented by project manager John Eckhardt and owner David Knerr.

In other business the board:

-approved the Mid Columbia Bus Company pupil transportation bid, which was not divulged during the regular meeting. Mulvihill said that Mid Co's bid had not increased over the previous year.

-approved the 2010-2011 board meeting schedule "as discussed in the work session" which was held prior to the regular meeting.

-recognized Joe and Darla Vandever for their service to the district.

-approved the following annual designations: Mulvihill as the superintendent clerk and executive officer, custodian of funds and budget officer; Beth O'Hanlon, UMESD, as the chief financial office/business manager; Mulvihill and O'Hanlon as authorized signers for the district's checks; authorized facsimile signatures; approved the short-term borrowing limit for the custodian of funds at $200,000; approved fidelity bond amounts of $100,000 each for Mulvihill and O'Hanlon; named Fife and Cockburn, LLP, as official auditor; named Corey, Byler, Rew, Lorenzen and Hojem as legal counsel; named the Bank of Eastern Oregon and a government investment pool as depositories of funds; named the East Oregonian and Gazette-Times as official newspapers; established the per diem lodging employee reimbursement for lodging at $35 per day and the per mile amount at .505 cents per mile as per IRS recommendations; established the substitute teacher rate at $159.47 per day or $19.93 per hour for up to 10 days and $187 per day or $23.38 per hour for more than 10 days, as mandated by the state; designated Marla Royal, Michael Lasher and Collette Blakely with UMESD as confidential employees.

-authorized interfund loans.

-authorized Morrow County investments.

-established the Ione School Board as the local contract review board.

-appointed Bill Jepsen and Joe McElligott as members of the Buildings and Grounds Committee.

-reappointed Anne Morter and Lisa Rietmann as members of the Negotiations Committee.

-discussed setting a date for a barbecue and celebration of completion of the construction project.

-discussed what to do with some student body accounts that still contain various amounts of money that have not been used in some time. Mulvihill said the accounts will be examined and he will report back to the board.

-voted to offer the long-term substitute teacher position to Diana McElligott.

-heard a report on a drain that had not been operating correctly. Archer told the board that the drain had been examined and found to be completely blocked. He said the situation will be examined further.

-learned from Mulvihill that the district made a mandatory payment of $8,000 to a consortium concerning the education of special education students. He told the board that $4,000 is still remaining to be paid.

-announced that the August board meeting will be held on Tuesday, August 24, with the regular meeting set to begin at 4 p.m.

Recovery Act funds Morrow County Public Works courthouse window project

The Oregon Department of Energy announced that Morrow County Public Works Department will receive $117,800.00 in federal funds for an energy project. The project is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act awarded through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant. These funds are designated for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects in public buildings. The U.S. Department of Energy administers the funds, approves the projects and reviews the state's progress.

MCPWD will use the funds to replace windows in the Morrow County Courthouse. Bergerson Cedar Windows, Inc. was awarded the contract for the project.

"We are pleased to make this award to the Morrow County Public Works Department," said Shelli Honeywell, manager of the Oregon Department of Energy ARRA team. "Not only will this project save energy, but the funds will be used to put local contractors to work."

The Oregon Department of Energy received more than 1,100 letters of interest, representing a request of over $2 billion in Recovery Act funding.

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Oregon Public Health issues advisory for Willow Creek Reservoir

High algae levels found in Morrow County Willow Creek Reservoir

A health advisory prompted by high algae levels found in Willow Creek Reservoir located near Heppner has been issued by Oregon Public Health.

Water monitoring confirmed the presence of blue-green algae that can produce toxins harmful to humans and animals. These algae levels are likely to be associated with dangerous toxin concentrations in the water, according to World Health Organization guidelines.

Swallowing or inhaling water droplets should be avoided, as well as skin contact with water by humans or animals.

Drinking water from Willow Creek Reservoir is especially dangerous. Oregon Public Health officials advise campers and other Willow Creek Reservoir visitors that toxins cannot be removed by boiling, filtering or treating the water with camping style filters.

People who draw in-home water directly from Willow Creek Reservoir are advised to use an alternative water source because private treatment systems are not proven effective in removing algae toxins. However, public drinking water systems can reduce algae toxins through proper filtration and disinfection. If people on public water systems have questions about treatment and testing, they should contact their water supplier.

Oregon Public Health recommends that people who choose to eat fish from waters where algae blooms are present should remove all fat, skin and organs before cooking since toxins are more likely to collect in these tissues.

Additionally, public health officials advise that people should not eat crayfish or freshwater shellfish harvested from Willow Creek Reservoir while this advisory is in effect.

Exposure to toxins can produce symptoms of numbness, tingling and dizziness that can lead to difficulty breathing or heart problems and require immediate medical attention. Symptoms of skin irritation, weakness, diarrhea, nausea, cramps and fainting should also receive medical attention if they persist or worsen. Children and pets are particularly susceptible.

The public will be advised when the concern no longer exists.

With proper precautions to avoid water contact, people are encouraged to visit Willow Creek Reservoir and enjoy activities such as camping, hiking, biking, picnicking, catch and release fishing and bird watching, said the Oregon Public Health news release. Boating is safe as long as speeds do not create excessive water spray, which could lead to inhalation risk.

For local information contact the Corps' Willow Creek Natural Resource Management Office at 541-676-9009.

For health information, contact the Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance program at 971-673-0400 or www.healthoregon.org/hab; also contact the Oregon Public Health toll-free information line at 1-877-290-6767.