

COMMUNITY

Helping agricultural workers

OHDC hosts forums to identify and address service gaps

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

To address gaps in services for farmworkers, Oregon Human Development Corporation hosted two forums in Hermiston Monday.

OHDC Operations Director Martin Campos-Davis said the nonprofit organization gathers feedback from its clients and partners to determine ways to better provide services to people with agricultural jobs.

Monday, OHDC hosted an afternoon forum attended by agencies that provide services, such as Good

Shepherd Medical Center, Blue Mountain Community College, CAPECO and housing agencies, and an evening forum for farmworkers and their families to determine where improvements could be made. Campos-Davis said OHDC will analyze the data and complete a report within the next couple months and try to develop solutions to problems.

At a previous forum about two years ago, he said participants identified a need for more English classes, so OHDC purchased language software to provide the service.

"There wasn't enough access to English classes," he said. "Most of the community colleges had those, but the hours weren't convenient. ... We have a computer lab in our (Hermiston) office. I think we have 10 or 12 computers, and they all

have Rosetta Stone on there, so people can learn English."

At this year's agency forum, Campos-Davis said a lack of transportation to BMCC, childcare and awareness about available services were identified as areas in need of improvement. At the farmworker forum, he said transportation and childcare were also identified, along with access to higher-paying jobs, services after 5 p.m. and more English classes and better interactions with law enforcement officials.

"Most people are not aware of what services are available and how to access those," he said. "That could end up as an action item in the future, not just for farmworkers, but how do we bridge (awareness) gaps moving forward?"

As one of six OHDC offices in the state, the Hermiston office pro-

vides training and employment services, Campos-Davis said.

"We have been a nonprofit in Oregon for about 30 years or so, primarily working on training and services for those in the agriculture field," he said. "The Hermiston office is really focused more on the employment and training aspect. We offer job-readiness classes, resume classes, interview classes. We do have a lot of short-term training there directly with employers to help them look at our clients in a different way."

He said some clients are unable work because they do not have proper work attire, and OHDC can help. He said OHDC also works with employers to reimburse up to half of on-the-job training expenses for clients.

"We have a good relationship

with several employers in the area," he said. "We recognize it takes time and money to train somebody up, and I think we have a good record of helping employers lower their turnover rate. About 90 percent of the folks we serve that leave the program each year are leaving because they found a full-time job — in the workforce world, that's a pretty high mark — and most of them are still working there a year later. The folks here are really doing a good job not just placing them with any job that comes along, but making sure it's a good fit."

Campos-Davis said, although many of Oregon's farmworkers are Latino, OHDC helps any clients who work in agriculture. For more information, visit ohdc.org or call the Hermiston office, 541-701-0550.

Hansell supports greater education funding

Senator talks proposed bills, other legislation

BY MAEGAN MURRAY
HERMISTON HERALD

Area superintendents have been saying for months that the proposed funding for education in the coming biennium is insufficient, and, during a town hall meeting in Hermiston Saturday, state Sen. Bill Hansell echoed their concerns, arguing that more funding should be allocated to schools.

Hansell was in Hermiston at Stetson's Steakhouse to answer questions and comment on proposed bills currently working their way through the Oregon Senate and House of Representatives. Education, he told the dozen people in attendance, should be a priority for the state.

"If you look at Oregon's record, nationally, we are near the bottom in most categories of the kids that are graduating, kids that are passing tests," he said. "It's just really sad."

Hansell said it is hard for politicians to say they want to support schools when the proposed funding isn't enough to support current programs and operations. He said he has been discussing with Hermiston Superintendent Fred Maiocco how the proposed funding would impact the Hermiston School District.

Hansell said the full Ways and Means Committee had its first meeting Thursday night, specifically focusing



State Sen. Bill Hansell talks with Hermiston community members about bills he is sponsoring this legislative session.

MAEGAN MURRAY PHOTO

on the education budget. While the Oregon House of Representatives passed a \$7.255 billion budget this week, superintendents have said it isn't enough to sustain current operations. Hansell reiterated superintendents' statements that \$7.5 billion would maintain current service levels for students across the state.

"Currently, the Democrats have the votes to pass whatever they want," he said. "They also pledge that they will, if the main forecast shows any kind of increase of revenue to our caucus, pledge to take 40 percent of that and put it into education, but I'm unwilling to roll that dice. There may not be anything. We need to fund our kids."

Hansell also explained to residents a handful of the dozens of bills he is sponsoring or co-sponsoring during this legislative session. One of those bills that hits a lit-

tle closer to home includes SB 320, which would allow people to sell baked goods in a small, home-business setting without having to meet requirements set for professional businesses.

"We have a Mennonite lady in our town in Athena that likes to make bread and bakery goods that she sells to her neighbors," Hansell said. "Technically, she can't do that because her kitchen hasn't been inspected by the Department of Agriculture. She also doesn't have the packaging they require, and she doesn't list all the ingredients."

Hansell said the bill exempts those types of home businesses. He said home-business owners who earn up to \$25,000 in annual income could be exempt.

Hansell is also sponsoring SB 122, which would provide teachers a \$100 tax credit if they spend their own money on school sup-

plies. He's also sponsoring SB 121, which would allow cities to explore alternative options for taking care of health hazards in neighboring areas outside city limits that do not include annexation or extending city services, like sewer and water. The issue, he said, has particularly affected Milton-Freewater.

Hansell also talked about several bills he does not support, including SB 941 and SB 525, which deal with gun control.

"Both of those, I am a no-vote," he said. "We kept track on Thursday, and in our office we had 700 emails saying don't vote on this."

Hansell said he is also against several "job-killing bills" that are currently proposed. One of those, he said, would increase minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

"The latest I heard was that the \$15 minimum wage an hour was not going to get

out of the Senate," he said, adding, however, that he isn't on any of the committees for the proposed bills he doesn't support, so he can't weigh in for sure on the status of those bills.

Area resident Dan Dorran asked Hansell about whether the Oregon kicker was going to "kick." Oregon's kicker law is triggered when tax collections exceed what is expected by at least 2 percent. If that occurs, the revenue gets returned to taxpayers.

Hansell said he doesn't know for sure, but indicators are that it will "kick."

"We are some \$57 million above the threshold to kick," he said. "We will know for sure in September whether or not what is going to happen there on that."

Hansell said another bill he supports but has yet to sign is SB 459, which would raise interstate speed limits. He said he believes the Senate has the incentive to pass a speed increase for the interstate highway system.

Hansell also talked about how Oregon needs a new transportation package. He said he is not in favor of the low-carbon fuel standard, which he says is impossible for petroleum companies to meet. He said, paired with additional gas taxes, the fuel standards will receive a no vote from him.

"What the Republicans said was this: You gotta choose," he said. "We are not going to support a low carbon standard and an additional tax on the transportation package ... We're not going to give the consumers a double whammy at the gas pumps."

Regarding other issues, Hansell said he is optimistic the proposed water legislation to afford the region more access to water resources will come through.

"It's still in negotiations — still putting together the details in finding a way to move that forward," he said. "There is some talk with trying to carve it out early."

Hansell said he feels people have done everything they can locally for the water legislation, and the issue is in the budget and Gov. Kate Brown has committed to it.

Other people in attendance asked Hansell how he feels Brown is doing in her new role.

"I appreciate very much how she has handled the transition," Hansell said.

"She came in at a very awkward situation, as we all know. I kind of use the illustration that we have the ship of state. We had left port with the current legislative session, and we are heading into what is called sign and die. In that voyage that we are all a part of, we changed captains, but the thing that the new captain didn't do, which is very critical, is she didn't change the crew."

Hansell said it is to her credit that she stayed the course. He said he is pleased that she also seems to be interested in eastern Oregon.

"She made some indicators of where she wanted to go — she communicated the support of the water, the unmanned aerial vehicles in the city of Pendleton," he said. "I think she has done very well ... A shout out to her for how she is handling this transition."

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Saturday, April 18, 2015
Hermiston Conference Center
5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Our Annual Meeting theme "Homegrown" will recognize an array of products grown and processed in our local area. Learn about UEC accomplishments in the past year, and what we expect in the year ahead. As always, attendance is free to UEC members. We hope you will join us!



Featured Speaker
Judy Hill Lovins of Aspen Colorado, a fine art photographer and "homegrown" native of Hermiston, will share her life story.