

Training program ramps up for National Guard

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
STAFF WRITER

Changes to the Army National Guard are resulting in more days that soldiers are away from home for training and deployment.

A Department of Defense agency known as Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve is reaching out to local employers to help them understand the changes, which mean that in some years soldiers will be required to train for at least 63 days instead of 39.

“Right here in Hermiston, it’s very important because of the increased tempo of training that we have a good relationship with employers, because they take part of that heat when soldiers are gone,” said Jack Johnson, area chairman for ESGR.

Johnson said the all-volunteer ESGR helps with outreach to employers and has ombudsman power to work through “misunderstandings of the law” surrounding



EO FILE PHOTO

Oregon Army National Guard soldiers salute as the national anthem is played during a mobilization ceremony for their deployment to Kuwait October 3, 2015 at the Pendleton airport.

duties to employees who are in the National Guard or the reserves for other military branches.

Since the National Guard was created in 1903, Johnson said, to replace the state-by-state militia system, federal law said soldiers in the Guard must train at least 39 days a year and could only be deployed by the federal government for war (the

governor, on the other hand, can utilize Guard units to respond to natural disasters).

That has usually been accomplished with drills one weekend a month and for two weeks during the summer. But in 2016 the law was amended so that the president could mobilize Guard units to non-combat situations.

In response, Johnson

said, a new “National Guard 4.0” was implemented, creating a four-year training cycle for many units that includes a standard 39-day training minimum in the first year, a 54-day minimum the second, 60 in the third and 63 days in the fourth year, with units also more likely to deploy and on shorter notice than in the past.

In practice, said local battalion commander Major J.W. Lundell, that means a “weekend” training will sometimes be Thursday through Sunday instead of Saturday and Sunday, requiring days off work for some soldiers. It also means a four-week training period in the summer, although Lundell said they are trying locally where possible to break it up into two separate two-week periods.

“What we’ve gotten back (from employers) is that they can handle an employee being gone for a two-week timeframe, but any more than that is hard,” he said.

Next year, however, the

62-person Hermiston unit will be required to spend a 30-day training period in Fort Irwin, California.

“There’s nothing I can do about that,” he said.

The Guard operates on a “year” that runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30, so in order to help local employers out Lundell said he is trying to get the next year’s training schedule directly to local employers of soldiers by June or July. Hermiston-area employers of soldiers — who range from Auto Zone to Subway to the Hermiston School District — will also have opportunities to visit the base in Idaho by helicopter while their employees are training there in order to have a better understanding of what they do.

Jerry Carlson, the Hermiston-based military outreach coordinator for ESGR, said soldiers are also being encouraged to nominate their employers for ESGR-sponsored awards for being supportive of their service in the National Guard or other mil-

itary reserves.

Last week no employers showed up for an informational meeting at the Hermiston armory, but Carlson said it was too far for some employers, who live as far away as Portland and the Tri-Cities, and noted that his one-on-one conversations with employers have gone well.

Carlson, Lundell and Johnson said while there are cases for the ESGR to mediate on the east side of the state, it was very rare for an Eastern Oregon employer to be anything but highly supportive of their employees who have to leave for days, weeks or even months at a time for trainings and deployments. In some cases, Johnson said, employers even go the extra mile by doing things like continuing health insurance for the soldier’s family while they are on a lengthy deployment overseas.

“You would be surprised by how supportive many of them are,” he said.

County paying \$43,000 for election

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
STAFF WRITER

Ballots, envelopes and mailing for Tuesday’s election cost Umatilla County almost \$43,000. That money was split between payments to private businesses and the United States Postal Service.

The county owes: \$17,379 to Ryder Election Services, Bend, for printing 53,557 ballots for the election; \$5,521 to BMS Technologies, Bend, for printing, filling and delivering envelopes for the election; and \$20,000 to the United States Postal Service.

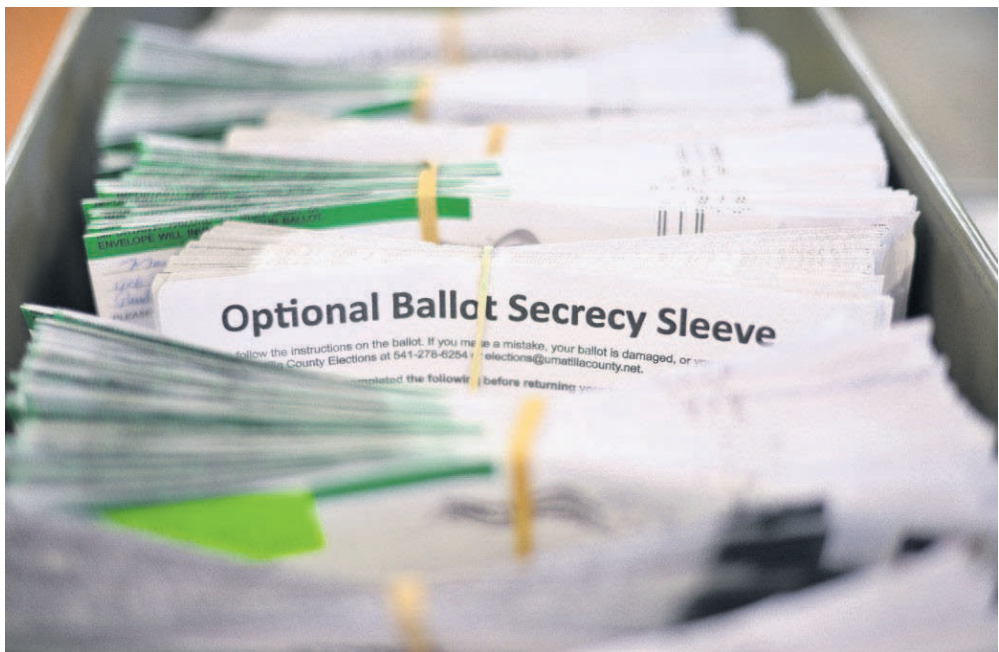
The elections division used to handle this work in-house, said Dan Lonai, administrative services director for the county.

“And no matter what, I always ended up with errors,” he said, “... stuffing errors, human errors. That was a big part of it. We want to make sure the right ballots are stuffed in.”

Even a 1 percent error rate with 30,000 ballots means there can be 300 errors. And the state’s motor voter registration law boosted the county’s voter total to more than 40,000. As of April, the county had 42,519 voters, about 2,400 more than the same time last year.

All told, the county owes \$42,901. That includes \$5,570 to Elections Systems & Software, Chicago, for maintenance of the ballot reader.

The costs are in the county’s 2017-18 budget and are



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Mail-in ballots wait to be counted at the Umatilla County Courthouse on May 9, 2018.

about the same as what the county allocated for a part-time surveyor or improvements to the Stafford Hansell Government Center, Hermiston. The county board of commissioners plans to approve the payments during its meeting Wednesday morning starting at 9 at the county courthouse, 216 S.E. Fourth St., Pendleton.

It wasn’t just a concern for accuracy that caused the county to outsource the work — the election costs began mounting for the county a few years back.

First the Postal Service stopped using Pendleton as a distribution center, which for a long time allowed the county to receive a discount.

“If I want to drive my

ballots down to Portland, I can get still get a good discount,” Lonai quipped.

And the county no longer has its own print shop. So the county pays Ryder Election to handle the precise printing on card stock that ballots require. Lonai said Ryder also services the county’s election machines.

Ryder also is “right next door to Bend Mail Services,” he said, which prints the envelopes and makes sure the right ballots go inside.

“That’s still a bit more than in-house,” Lonai said, “but everybody gets the

right ballot.”

Well, almost everybody. Some voters move and don’t update their registration, he said, and the ballot goes to the address the county has. That’s most common when someone moves out of a family home, he said.

The county in those cases can mail a second ballot. Lonai explained serial numbers on the envelopes allow the county to keep track and make sure someone does not vote twice. He said keeping this all under the county’s roof would be nice, but Eastern Oregon lacks the volume to make that work.

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