

Merkley touts American Rescue Plan benefits for Oregon

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
NEWS EDITOR



Doherty



Merkley

Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty was one of several people from around the state who helped Sen. Jeff Merkley tout the benefits of the newest COVID-19 stimulus package on a video call with Oregon journalists on Friday, March 12.

President Joe Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 on Thursday, March 11. The plan provides billions of dollars for COVID-19 vaccinations and testing, along with money for state and local governments, additional financial aid for businesses and relief for individuals that includes

stimulus checks of up to \$1,400, large child tax credits and increased amounts for unemployment checks.

Merkley called the plan “one of the most progressive and transformative pieces of legislation since the New Deal.” While the country isn’t out of the woods yet with the pandemic, he said, the American Rescue Plan will help put its effects in the past.

“This bill will put checks in Americans’ pockets, shots

in their arms, kids back in our classrooms, and open signs in the windows of businesses — small businesses across Main Street and across America,” he said.

During the call, Doherty thanked Merkley for his work in including payments to local governments so that they could determine how best to help their residents.

With the previous stimulus package of CARES Act funds, Doherty said there was too much of a one-size-fits-all approach from state officials doling out funds. While some counties’ economies were devastated by the loss of tourism dollars for their restaurants and hotels, Morrow County residents are mostly essential workers in the agricul-

tural and food processing industries, and had different needs, he said.

“When we got the funds in they said, ‘Use this on your restaurants and hospitals,’ and you know, as broad and diverse in all the things we’ve got going on, you can’t buy a pair of socks in Morrow County,” he said. “So what might fit for another county really didn’t fit here. We needed to get our message out to our essential workers and get it out to our Hispanic population.”

One thing being president of the Association of Oregon Counties last year taught him, Doherty said, is “if you’ve seen one county, you’ve seen one county.”

Curry County Commissioner Court Boice, also on

the call, echoed Doherty’s sentiments, calling the distribution plan in the American Recovery Plan a more equitable plan for rural Oregon. He said there have been some “hard feelings” in Oregon with how previous stimulus money was distributed (or in some cases, not distributed) to local governments.

Representatives from other parts of the state spoke to how the anticipated funds from the new stimulus package will help provide vaccine information in Spanish, allow family-owned entertainment venues to stay in business or help restaurants recover from past shutdowns.

For individuals curious about when their own stimulus check is coming, the

Internal Revenue Service introduced a new tool at irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment, where people can check if they will be receiving a payment, and whether it has already been sent to them in the form of an Economic Impact Payment debit card or directly deposited in their account using information the IRS has on file from tax returns.

The \$1,400 is available for single adults who reported less than \$75,000 in adjusted gross income on their 2019 or 2020 tax returns, or couples filing jointly with a combined income of less than \$150,000 (those couples would receive \$2,800). Filers will also receive \$1,400 for each eligible dependent.

Preparing fields for spring



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

A tractor traverses a field near Stanfield on Monday, March 16, 2021.

BRIEFS

Spicerkuhn retains city council seat after special election

Phillip Spicerkuhn will officially retain his Hermiston City Council seat representing Ward IV after a special election.

Spicerkuhn, a local attorney, was appointed as an interim councilor in November 2020 after the resignation of Doug Smith, and ran unopposed in the March 9 special election to fill the rest of the term.

According to unofficial results from the Umatilla County elections office posted at 8:27 p.m. on March 9, 819 voters turned in ballots, with 726 votes for Spicerkuhn and 74 write-in votes.

There were 19 undervotes recorded, meaning voters turned in their ballot without marking any name for the race.

Filing deadline to run in May election is March 18

Although federal, state and municipal elections are decided in even-number years, dozens of local races will be up for election on May 18.

Seats on every school board in the

county will be up for election, as well as various taxing districts that cover services like fire protection, parks and recreation, and cemeteries.

The filing deadline for these seats is Thursday, March 18.

In Hermiston, the seats belonging to Karen Sherman, Mark Gomolski, Bryan Medelez and Brent Pitney are all up for election. Sherman and Pitney are running for new terms on Position 6 and Position 4, respectively.

Dain Gardner, a senior trooper with the Oregon State Police, is running for Position 3, the seat held by Gomolski.

If no one files for an open seat, the winner of the write-in vote will be offered the seat. If they decline, the board can appoint someone to the seat.

Besides school boards, all fire districts, cemetery districts, water control districts and parks and recreation districts will also be on the ballot.

Other taxing districts with elections include the boards that govern Blue Mountain Community College, the Umatilla County Special Library District, the Port of Umatilla, and the Umatilla Morrow Radio & Data District.

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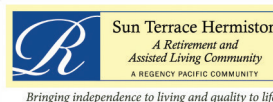
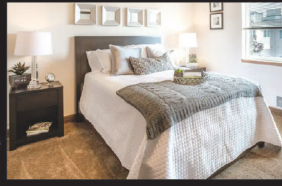
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