

# Legislators outline their priorities for short session

Three Eastern Oregon legislators share what they are backing

By ERICK PETERSON AND ANTONIO SIERRA  
Hermiston Herald



Eastern Oregon lawmakers looking at the upcoming legislative session are focusing their efforts on more money for ranchers who lose livestock to wolves, increasing consumer protection and taking on illegal marijuana farms in Southern Oregon.

Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, and Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, told the EO Media Group about their priorities for the 2022 short session that begins Feb. 1 and must end by March 10.

## Wolf bill drawing Levy's attention

Levy named two bills as most important to her, starting with House Bill 4127, a million-dollar ask for the Wolf Management Compensation and Proactive Trust Fund.

"Right now, we have already close to \$800,000 worth of cattle losses and missing livestock, not to mention all the incremental costs that go along when

wolves have been chasing animals," she said, adding animals have suffered "continued weight loss, low birth rates and more because of wolves."

She also is big on HB 4154, a \$400,000 request to provide the La Grande Airport with new fuel tanks.

Levy said she will be co-sponsoring bills as well, including HB 4022 to put course curriculum on school websites, and HB 4042, which would require doctors who prescribe drugs for chemical abortions to provide "certain information" to their patients. She said she also is adding her name to bills concerning animal predator control, a salmon habitat credit program and gun-free zone liability.

## Smith focusing on consumer protection

Smith in a press release Thursday, Jan. 20, said consumer protection, gun rights and housing are among top issues he is working on

during the session.

He said he is proposing a bill to limit how much Oregonians have to pay residential general contractors before completing remodel or repair projects.

"For context, large contractors charge 100% of residential project costs up-front," Smith stated. "Once payment is received, the consumer is at their mercy and completion of the project can often become an incredibly difficult process. This legislation would strengthen the consumer's interests and improve project outcomes."

Smith also explained he was "disheartened by the passage of SB 554 during the 2021 legislative session," the Senate bill Gov. Kate Brown signed in 2021 that regulated firearm storage and banned guns at the state Capitol and Portland International Airport. The law also allows school boards to ban guns on school grounds. He said he would support legislation that would "establish liability for specific crimes committed in 'gun-free zones.'"

Smith also said he is going to focus on middle-income housing, according to the press release, which he called "District 57's most

pressing housing need."

He also pointed out the importance of the Interstate 5 bridge, which connects Oregon and Washington, as "critical" to the Port of Morrow and other ports in his district.

"As a member of the Joint I-5 Bridge Committee, I support the new bridge and will be intimately involved in its development," he stated.

Protecting Eastern Oregon livestock from predators, education funding, behavioral health, curbing the governor's emergency powers and returning people to "normal" life also are on Smith's agenda.

## Hansell to address two issues

While he waits for his proposals to become bills through legislative counsel, Hansell said he hopes to use the two bills he's allowed to submit this session to address two issues: illegal marijuana grows in Southern Oregon and medical mergers and acquisitions.

Hansell said he's a part of a bipartisan group of legislators looking to pass a number of bills to assist Southern Oregon, a region Hansell said is being inundated with drug cartels and others operating illegal marijuana

farms. While his bill likely would fund operations outside his Northeastern Oregon base, Hansell said the impacts could be felt locally if the Legislature fails to act.

Hansell is focusing his other bill on amending a law passed last year that requires the state to approve many health care provider mergers and acquisitions before proceeding. The bill passed with heavy Republican opposition, and Hansell said he would prefer to just repeal the bill and start over.

But instead, he said he's working with hospital groups to change the law. If the law isn't changed, Hansell said it could cause rural health care providers to shut down rather than seek out a merger that could keep them open.

Besides the bills he's sponsoring, Hansell said one of the issues he's keeping an eye on is the push to lift the overtime exemption for agricultural workers. Hansell said such a law would lead employers to cut hours and would hurt producers.

## Short session hot takes

Smith said he is looking forward to the session.

"The 2021 legislative session was a long and difficult session coupled with a

full reconstructive shoulder surgery that I dealt with," Smith stated. "This session, I am hoping to see many constituents in Salem again because, unlike last session, the Capitol is slated to be open to the public."

Levy also expressed positivity about the session, even if it's no longer doing what Oregonians intended it for.

"This short session was meant to fix budget shortfalls," she said, "and there's nothing in my bill or anyone else's bill who I'm sponsoring that's a budget shortfall — except, perhaps the \$1 million ask, because we don't have enough money in that compensation fund — but I sure hope we get them all passed. I always am an optimistic person."

She even said she, a Republican, might vote for a Democrat as the next speaker to replace the outgoing speaker, Rep. Tina Kotek, D-Portland.

House Democrats selected Rep. Dan Rayfield, D-Corvallis, to be their nominee as speaker. As Democrats have the majority, Rayfield likely will gain the office. While Levy said she did not know him well, she credited him for being experienced, moderate and logical.

# Tactile map may be the next feature of Funland Playground

By ERICK PETERSON  
Hermiston Herald

A visionary's work is never done, according to Hermiston Parks and Recreation and the Hermiston Lions Club.

"I don't know if we will ever be completed," Lions Club member Charlie Clupny said. "The playground is a process."

People from the two organizations are planning new work for Funland Playground, which they refer to as "the jewel of Hermiston." This work is in the early stages, but they spoke recently of their plan, which they wish to introduce to the public.

"We want to build a tactile map," Clupny said.

The map, as he described it, would include raised features and a layout of Funland. Located at the playground, it would give blind users a picture of the park they could feel and understand, he said.

Lions Club members



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

Children climb on a play structure July 4, 2021, during the grand opening of the new Funland Playground in Hermiston. The city's parks and recreation department and the Hermiston Lions Club are working on a tactile map to make the playground more accessible.

were among volunteers who helped build Funland. Also, the Lions donated money and a fountain to the project. The playground remains important to the club, according to Bill Kuhn, Hermiston Lion's Club president, and Hermiston Lions have been looking for new ways to contribute to Funland.

"As (Funland) neared completion, we saw that maybe the project could be made better for the sight-impaired," he said.

He added that a tactile map could fill this need; sight-impaired children could gain understanding of the playground by feeling the map. They could, then, play

on the actual playground.

Kuhn said his club was interested in pursuing this idea, so they contacted Inter-Mountain Education Service District to gain a better understanding of the maps and how they are used in children's education. According to Clupny, the district has been help-

ful in improving accessibility in the playground, as it had made suggestions leading to such things as markers for different levels on the pirate ship.

A tactile map would be another step toward making Funland accessible to a growing number of people, Clupny said.

"I think this is very important," Hermiston Parks and Recreation Director Brandon Artz said.

He explained it is the aim for his department to make this playground usable for people of all different abilities, not just for able-bodied people.

Funland has features for people with various disabilities, he said. Ramps and bars, for example, allow some children to make better use of the equipment. Also, some equipment was made so it was spacious enough for wheelchairs.

"It should be inviting for anyone and everyone to be able to use," he said. "(The tactile map) is a fantastic

idea, and I am blown away that the Lions Club wants to take this on and get this done. I think it would be a huge asset to the playground. People from all over would come here to use it."

Artz said it would serve more than visually impaired people, it also would help other children as well. The tactile map would teach empathy, he said; it would be a reminder to others of challenges of blind people. Young people would see this map, feel it and think more deeply about the people for whom the map serves, according to Artz.

The Lions and Hermiston Parks and Rec are on board with this idea, but there still is more work to do. Now, they need to develop their idea and find funding for it.

Clupny said he is reaching out to local businesses for funding. There is no timeline on this project to date, he said, though he said he would like to make it happen as soon as possible.

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