

MALHEUR COUNTY SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Pursuant to Initiative Measure 23-64
Meet to Promote Relocating Oregon-Idaho Ordinance
May 11, 2026

The Special Meeting of the County Court was called to order by Judge Dan Joyce at 9:00 a.m. with Commissioner Ron Jacobs and Commissioner Jim Mendiola present. The Special Meeting was held pursuant to Initiative Measure 23-64 and Malheur County Meet to Promote Relocating Oregon-Idaho Border Ordinance to discuss how to promote the interests of Malheur County in any negotiations regarding the relocation of the Oregon-Idaho border. Members of the media and public had the opportunity to join the meeting electronically or in person. Present in the meeting room were public members Pat Barfield, Brent Grasty, Steve Christiansen, and Jim Boyle. Notice of the meeting was emailed to the Argus Observer and those who have requested notice, and posted on the Courthouse bulletin board and County website. The meeting was audio recorded. The agenda is recorded as instrument # 2026-1712

Judge Joyce opened the meeting and asked for comments from the public.

Pat Barfield: My name is Pat Barfield, I live at 3664 Butte Drive, Ontario, Oregon and my goal in making a statement here is I'd like to keep my address Ontario, Oregon. And I think folks that don't agree or don't feel like they have sufficient representation for the place where they live, then they need to seek out that different place to live on their own rather than changing the border of Oregon. And I'll just leave it at that.

Brent Grasty: I'm Brent Grasty and live in Vale. I took a minute and read the minutes from the last meeting and it was a long meeting, the proponents were on the call which part of me says, because their attendance rates maybe 60% in all these meetings, what is it five years now, so 15 meetings, and at least twice they were not familiar that Malheur County's in a different time zone, which says to me, they're not paying attention. And the dominant subjects that from what I've attended and read is really three things: the hourly rates, primarily for farm workers; the inheritance tax and the high rate, admittedly the high rate there; and then representation, and then that's probably the strongest one. And what has been consistent is, over the years, we've listed out, we've asked questions about and tried to identify the lists of things that would have to be addressed to execute a transfer of part of the state to another state. And as far as I can tell, the Greater Idaho group has not answered any of those questions. And last time, McCarter said he's waiting on some momentum from the courts, I mean the county courts or the legislators, you know, state on both sides, and said there's some support from a couple of people in Idaho that supported the concept and the discussion. It doesn't feel to me like they're addressing the questions or pursuing that advocacy. And I know they got some dead ends, they ran into some dead ends, they tried to talk with Owens and others about getting some discussion. I think part of their problem is not all the measures in each of the counties are the same. In Malheur County it was meet to discuss how to promote the county should that happen. And that's what you all and we all have been doing for

five years. But I don't see any momentum and I will say, I was pretty active two years ago with the petition that we gathered signatures for, it failed miserably. And I think it's possible that we did a rotten job of clarifying that yes meant the Court could discontinue the requirement for three meetings a year. And I think it got misunderstood. But, with that as a background, I'm just curious if the Court can take a position on this? So it's passed twice now, so that's fair, that's how the system works, but I'd like to know if the Court can have a public opinion about the lack of progress or if your position must be, maybe because it was passed by the voters of the county, must be neutral. So is that possible? Can the Court take a position and say, let's say another petition drive came about and there was another effort. We tried to do a better job of clarifying what's going on. The second part of that question is, I feel like you guys' role is, and you've been doing it, is advocating for the county. What's the best interest of the county for economic development across the board, recreation, farming, agriculture in general, industrial. And so maybe there's, if the Court can take a position that makes a difference to me because then there's an official body that has an opinion. And then, with that, those three things I listed are things that are important to the business owners and residents of the county. And that clearly is something that needs to be addressed. We can't do anything about Multnomah County and the Valley in general is going to take the dominant win. But that's true with every state, every state that leans one way or the other. So is that possible? Can the Court take a position, an official position on that? And I'm really just kind of preloading the magazine here on if there was another petition drive, we're five years out, two years, six more meetings since the November '24 election. And so there's my ramble.

Judge Joyce: I think that the way I understood it when we started according to the initiative petition that we were to remain neutral and our job was just to sit here and hold the meeting, period. We made some suggestions over time and in particular, a couple that I made, well it was gonna be unconstitutional if we did that. And I said, so what are we doing now? You're doing the same thing. And that kind of goes back to your statement about the Multnomah County versus Malheur County. I've always felt that if you're going to pass a bill out of Salem, it should pass in the county. And that part of it did, the initiative did, but by a slight margin.

Commissioner Jacobs: Well, personally, I feel like we do have to stay neutral, you know, partly because the vote last time was to continue to hold these meetings. And that's really our responsibility right now is to hold these meetings. If there was another bill put forward or initiative put forward, I think we would still have to stay neutral. These are bipartisan positions here in the county.

Mr. Grasty: Do you agree with that Jim?

Commissioner Mendiola: As a board, yes. Personally, I have a little problem with what they're trying to do, but as a board, we have to stay.

Mr. Barfield: Brent, can I ask you, is the only way forward to have a referendum to stop having the meetings, that's the only way to stop them?

Multiple talking

Mr. Barfield: ...the progression of what they're doing. What they're doing is their business I think.

Commissioner Mendiola: Yeah, what Brent said about the ballot and the way it was written, I think it confused a lot of people. If we could get that, and it happens to every ballot, every measure you know, you put it in a certain way, and they do it for a reason, you know, if they confuse you, the voter that's not educated and knows what's going on, or doesn't read the pamphlet or something, how it's supposed to go, a lot of people think, well I voted for that or I didn't vote for that and it was completely opposite of what they actually got done.

Mr. Grasty: Yeah, we checked right at the beginning because, the first thing I wanted to know is how long do you have to do this. And the County Clerk checked and said, yeah, this is a forever. And it really comes down to if it were to happen again it's really got to be more clearly outlined and, you know, it's supposed to be anyway, a neutral ballot wording and the description, you know, I think the Greater Oregon group put a draft together and it got modified to try to be neutral. I don't have a problem with how that process worked. I think we just didn't get the word out right.

Commissioner Jacobs: If we were to have another vote on it and I want people to know that it doesn't mean that we can't discuss it in a court meeting. Someone can put it on the agenda and bring it up and we can have these discussions periodically, or if someone wants to put it on the agenda we can. But the way it is now, we have to hold these meetings.

Mr. Grasty: It was interesting, Bob Wheatly got in touch with me and he's been, he was a chief signature gather in the first go around. And he said a number of times, and then McCarter said it, McCarter said at the last meeting, they don't have a problem with these meetings being curtailed. But they kind of backed themselves and you guys into a corner. As far as I can tell, no progress has been made on this discussion since the get-go. The group, the Greater Idaho group, hasn't answered any of those questions for 13 counties. And then you've got Harney County that did vote and passed discontinuing the meetings. We've got a big old hole between us and Lake. Well, I've rambled a lot but, just curious if you guys can take a position, and I understand the rationale.

Mr. Barfield: Well, doesn't not showing up speak loudly?

Commissioner Mendiola: Yes it does, to me it does.

Mr. Grasty: So do you guys feel, does the Court feel in some way you're addressing those what I think really are the three most common concerns? I think it's the inheritance tax and representation. To me that's pretty much what you all do to get our voices heard at the next step up. I know if Bob was sitting here, he had an idea, he texted me and said I got an idea and generally he discusses that when he comes, that he doesn't care whether we keep having the official meetings, he just wants to have that voice and know that we're doing something. Do you guys feel like you're addressing those in your own way?

Commissioner Jacobs: Well we're in contact with the legislators and we definitely have some thoughts about those specific issues that you brought up and so we would hope that they would get discussed more prominently and in Salem. But that's part of the problem with the population that we have here in Eastern Oregon we don't have near the representation as the West side.

Mr. Grasty: I know my brother Steve was president of the AOC, Association of Oregon Counties, I mean, that's a lobbying group in part, right, that I'm sure many of the rural counties share the same concerns. Are you able to use that as a vehicle to...

Commissioner Jacobs: Sure, we have the Eastern Oregon Counties and the Association of Oregon Counties across the state so yes, we're involved with those organizations.

Mr. Grasty: I guess it is just a burr in my saddle that your time is invested in this. I don't know if you do prep before you come or follow up beyond just recording the meeting, but it feels like there's at least 15 hours that could have been spent doing something else and to and from and that it adds up.

Judge Joyce: Two of our, well at least one of our former state senators and another one that he worked with from North Central Oregon, what they would like, one of them represents ten counties, and he said it would be nice to have a state senator in every single county. That would probably eliminate the issues that caused the petition to begin with.

Mr. Grasty: Heavy lift Dan.

Judge Joyce: Well, everything's a heavy lift. What difference is it going to make, you know?

Commissioner Mendiola: It'd be more equally legislated then, instead of by a population, you'd have two per county instead of one for every 100,000 people or whatever it is.

Mr. Grasty: You could apply that nationwide and they'd just flip houses, that's the outcome. Where's the one person one vote come in in that? These are old arguments. We've got the system we've got.

Commissioner Mendiola: It's just not Oregon that's having a problem with that. You've got Eastern Oregon and Western Oregon, but you've got Northern Nevada and South Nevada. Washington, same way, East and West, people on the East side don't get the representation they think they need. It's just not Oregon and Idaho. And Idaho is, you know, Southeast Idaho and pretty much every direction after that.

Mr. Barfield: I'm not sure that adding more politicians is going to solve any kind of problem. Actually, I think that'd be like turning them into an army, which is basically, that's a few directors and everybody else follows the rules, but I don't know. Mostly the political establishments that we have, spend more time just arguing about things than they do getting much accomplished.

Judge Joyce: I think they were looking at the vote. I think they were looking at the vote when they said that. One guy having one vote for ten counties versus ten voters in Salem representing them.

Mr. Grasty: See you in September.

Mr. Barfield: What's the date in September?

Commissioner Jacobs: The 14th of September is the second Monday.

Mr. Barfield: So it's the second Monday in May, September and

Judge Joyce: January

Judge Joyce: Jim?

Jim Boyle: I'm an observer. I kind of wondered about it. Pat called me this morning and said, hey, they're having a meeting and I thought, I wonder where this is going. I always kind of thought maybe it was like what the southerners call the Civil War, the lost cause you know.

Judge Joyce: Steve, you have any comments?

Steve Christiansen: Steve Christiansen from Ontario. And I will agree with most of what I've heard this morning, it doesn't seem like anybody is really interested in resolution, just stirring the pot. Resolution is not through total boundary change; resolution is through addressing each issue and finding common ground. Nobody's going to get everything they want. No group is going to get everything they want. So find common ground and find resolution that everybody can at least survive under.

There were no further comments. Appreciation was expressed for attending the meeting. Commissioner Mendiola moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Jacobs seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Vote:

JM/RJ/DJ in favor. Approved.