

**MALHEUR COUNTY SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**  
**Pursuant to Initiative Measure No. 23-64**  
**September 11, 2023**

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 to discuss how to promote the interests of Malheur County in any negotiations regarding the relocation of the Oregon-Idaho border. Present in the meeting room were public members Lucy Hutchens, Bob Doughty, Linda Simmons, Antonio Sunseri, Merlyn Skeen, Bob Wheatley, Patrick Barfield, Brent Grasty, E. Smith, Gabriela Brown, Ricki Pattee, Rene House, Linda Feeley, Michelle Jacobs, Blu Fortner, Thomas Haley, and PJ Tobia with NBC News. Present electronically were Mike McCarter, James (for a portion of the meeting – last name not given), Will (last name not given), and Randy Knop (joined at 10:01 a.m.). Notice of the meeting was emailed to the Argus Observer and Malheur Enterprise and posted on the Courthouse bulletin board and County website. The meeting was audio recorded. The agenda is recorded as instrument # 2023-2603

Judge Joyce opened the meeting and called on Bob Wheatley.

Bob Wheatley: First of all, I want to thank you for having this meeting today and allowing us to be here. I really don't have anything to present at this time or new information, so I'm here somewhat like the rest of you to kind of listen to the meeting, to take some notes, to kind of gauge where things are at and where we want to go. I anticipated that we will probably be spending some time today speaking about the initiative that's been proposed to put on the ballot to stop holding these meetings. And, I am not making an official statement for the Greater Idaho group, but in discussions with people in the know and maybe later on Zoom, maybe Mike and Matt will have something to address more clearly on this. But, unofficially, I guess you would say the feelings of the Greater Idaho group, as far as this initiative goes, is that we are not opposed to it. We are kind of the same sentiment, that these meetings, these county meetings, at least on having three times a year, we've kind of reached our point of maximum effectiveness at this point. It is appearing that as this thing has grown and is now 12 counties out of 15 that are considered for the move the border. It's become bigger than just a county type thing. Maybe, it looks to us that maybe that the time is that the emphasis needs to be put on the legislature, both in Oregon and Idaho, to set up a joint committee between the two to meet and discuss the issue; whether they would decide that that's as far as they want to go with it so be it. I think at this point a lot of the questions - in our last meeting I had a handout that a group of us had put together and worked on, trying to come up with some points that need to be addressed. Questions that people are asking about. How's this going to affect this, how's it going to affect that. And truthfully a lot of the information that needs to be put together at this point can only really be done by the legislature. We can look at things and make recommendations and we're more than happy to do that and work with other groups on those lines but at this point to really get down to it and decide, should this move forward or should it not move forward, how is it going to affect all the counties involved, the individuals in those counties? What we're trying to find out is what's best overall. And so, we're fine with that. One

person suggested, and I'll just bring this out, I don't know if this is even doable or not, but it was suggested in our group that if the commissioners wanted to pass an ordinance to stop the meetings as they are, maybe make them just on an as needed basis like that. I don't know if that's a doable thing or not. I'm not educated enough in those types of things to know if that's a doable thing or not. But it is an idea to think about, basically, it would resolve that question that's been put up to be brought forth on election, the ballot, and it would probably save the county some money if it could be done that way. Again, basically, as a nonofficial spokesman, our discussions have been, the Greater Idaho, people with the Greater Idaho movement are not opposed to what the people are talking about, as we know it, in regards to these meetings. Matt McCaw and Mike McCarter are two of the leaders of the Move the Border Greater Idaho movement and they will be joining us. I see Matt's on now. Mike may have forgotten about the time change. They probably will have some things to say addressing that and can answer questions that might come up. I'm unofficially here today as kind of just to present a couple of ideas and to listen and participate in the discussion.

Blu Fortner: I came to hear the information. These meeting were voted on to talk about the financial implications of joining Idaho so I keep expecting Greater Idaho movement to present information on why that would even be financially a good idea. Those of us who are in Greater Oregon, which I'd say there are a few of us in the room, we just want to celebrate the uniqueness of living in Oregon, in Eastern Oregon and try to treasure that and figure out ways to work together with this group, because it's pretty obvious to us that the secessionist movement isn't going to work and that these meetings do need to end and that's what our petition initiative is about. But the bigger picture is, how do we bring our collective voices together and get a little bit more representation in Salem than what we currently have? How do we cooperate in a bigger picture, more realistic perspective?

Bob Wheatley: I might just mention, just based on, last meeting there was a paper that we had put together as a group in Malheur county that addressed some of the questions, and I do have a copy here, I just brought the one copy, because we did try to address some of those questions and we have put in the information that we've been able to put together. But as a small local group, a lot of the questions that aren't necessarily to be looked at, that need to be looked at, can really only be answered by the legislature and that's why our purpose, really right at the moment, is to address the legislatures in both states. In last year's legislature, the Idaho House did pass a resolution to form that committee, it was then moved on to the Senate; due to various I think time issues and other things going on it never made it to the floor of the Senate in Idaho for a vote, but the count that was done if you will, the unofficial count that was done showed that there were more than enough senators on board with it to have passed it if it had made it to the House. In Oregon, it's the issue, you know, it's been presented to the Oregon legislature, first through the House and it's the same issue that started this group that we face every day as members of Eastern Oregon. The legislature in Oregon is dominated by the Democratic Party, they have their own agenda, which in most cases does not align with the feelings and the way of life of people in Eastern Oregon. So basically, that bill was sat on. There was no chance it was ever going to get to the floor for a vote. And so, that's the struggle that is happening now. There has been ongoing dialog with members of the Oregon legislature, both the House and the Senate, and more people are becoming open to

at least talking with us and looking at the issue. But for the most part, with the domination that is there, at this point, I don't know that it's ever going to get up to a vote. But that's what we're working on and where we feel like the energies need to be put, probably on both sides, both those that are for and against it need to be talking with their legislators and try and get this issue up there. I think the common ground that we can all agree on is that there needs to be more fairness and balance; how to attain that is the question. For 25 years we've been saying that in Central and Eastern Oregon and not getting anywhere. I think that is part of why this movement to move the border has grown so quickly and has become as strong as it is. Because the people in Central and Eastern Oregon are truly dissatisfied, and we have some really true gripes if you will, with the legislature and the bills that the governor and the legislature are passing and how they're impacting our way of life. They're impacting our farmers and ranchers, their affecting our people who are in construction, who do contracting, and they're affecting our everyday businessman down on Main Street. And so, we have seen that growing, you know when it started out, I think there were initially three counties that voted to look at this issue, to address it. Its now grown to 12 counties that have voted that this is a true issue and it needs to be addressed and looked at in the legislature. There are three more counties, one more that will come up in this Fall's vote I believe, I believe that would be Umatilla county, and then there are two other counties beyond that that would make up the 15 counties that, as we see it, as the map has been drawn, that would make up the part of Oregon that would become part of Idaho. Umatilla is coming up and then Sherman county and Crook county would be the other two counties that have yet to address the issue with the people. But the issue has been soundly voted by the people of these 12 counties, including Malheur county, that they want this issue addressed. The majority of the people are at this time, if the answers come in the way that we expect they would, that would favorable to it, the majority of the people in these 12 counties are in favor of moving the border.

Blue Fortner: That's not true at all.

Unknown: That is not true.

Bob Wheatley: It's very true.

Blu Fortner: That's dishonest.

Bob Wheatley: No, it's not. We had a vote on it. It passed by a majority vote to address this.

Blu Fortner: What did we vote on in Malheur county?

Bob Wheatley: We addressed

Blu Fortner: (inaudible) to talk about it three times a year

Bob Wheatley: Yes

Blu Fortner: Has a consensus been reached from the talks?

Bob Wheatley: Not completely I would say

Blu Fortner: But your website acts like we voted to join Idaho. You're not being honest.

Bob Wheatley: Yes, we are. You look at it, if, tell you what, because I was on the group that went out and got signatures to get it on the ballot. I personally spoke to the people who signed that signature. Those people weren't signing that signature just to be on the ballot or just to talk about it, those people want the border moved. That I can tell you in truth. Now if you want to go and pull up those signatures, and go through them, you'll find that the majority of them, and they voted yes when it came to a vote, it wasn't just the people who signed to get it on the ballot. The majority of people who voted in that election voted for this, for these meetings, what we're doing to discuss moving the border. We haven't done anything or said that the border is to be moved. What we're saying is it needs to be addressed. The issues that we are in conflict with the legislature and the governor over need to be addressed. At the present time they won't talk to us.

Blu Fortner: Of course not.

Bob Wheatley: Why is that?

Blu Fortner: Because you're dishonestly trying to represent the majority of the people here.

Bob Wheatley: Are you telling me that in the 12 counties that have voted on this and passed it

Blu Fortner: Are willing to talk about it.

Bob Wheatley: that most of those people are liars and that they're lying about what their desire is?

Blu Fortner: No, but I think the Greater Idaho movement is liars.

Bob Wheatley: That is the Greater Idaho movement (inaudible)

Mike McCarter: Can I answer that question? Out of the 12 counties that have voted on this measure, two of those counties – Sherman and Wheeler – had that statement: Would you like your county to be a county of Idaho? And they voted in favor almost 60% of it. Now on an initiative petition by the people, the Secretary of State does not allow us to ask that question point blank. The only way that we could write the petition so that it was approved, was to say: Would you like your county commissioners, your local government, to look into this issue and/or promote this issue? The percentage across the board is right at 60%, which is the same percentage as the two counties that said: Would you like your county to be a county of Idaho? Now if people weren't interested in potentially having their county, a county of Idaho, they would vote No on that vote; and they have voted across the board Yes. Now when we started this process back in the beginning

of 2020, we did not want to force anything on anybody. So, we said, OK, let's go county by county and ask the people how they feel about this. Now we're all rural Oregonians; we recognize the problem of between the east side and the west side of Oregon, and we're bringing it to the forefront that we have no representation and everything that is dictated in Oregon comes out of the northwest corner of Oregon. So, folks, this is moving forward and we're not going to stop speaking out for it. Now, as we finish with the counties in voting, we're moving this up to the state legislature, because this is where decisions have to be made. So, we're asking the state legislature to pick this up and start talking about it. Now you may feel that this is a no-good deal, or it's not effectively financial will work out for it, I tell you what, it requires the legislature to look at it. Who else is out there raising their hand and trying to do something to correct the issues that are going on? Greater Idaho is the movement right now that's trying to improve what's going on in Eastern Oregon and stop what's coming down the road from the Oregon legislature and the folks in the Portland area, because if you look at Measure 114, that did not go through the legislature, Measure 114 came out of the people of Portland, and they can pass anything they want because they have the vote to control the whole state. Somehow, we've got to stop this and change it and if Oregon is not willing to deal with that then let's get out of Oregon and let's be underneath the governance of Idaho who will listen to you. So, I'm off my soapbox, thank you.

Blu Fortner: That does give me two questions. So, one question is: Would you be willing to put forth a more honest ballot, and ask if the people of the county are actually willing to join Idaho, instead of just talk about it, and see if you still get your 60% number?

Mike McCarter: We can't do that. I just explained, the Secretary of State does not allow an initiative petition to ask a poll question like that. The commissioners can take and put it on the ballot as an advisory question, just like Wheeler and Sherman counties did, and it passed. But from our side, we're not allowed to do that, otherwise we would have done it.

Blu Fortner: Second question is: When all this doesn't pan out, when the Idaho and Oregon legislatures aren't willing to consider the issue any further, are you guys willing to work together with Greater Oregon to leverage all of our collective voice so that they can actually hear us in Portland and Salem?

Mike McCarter: We're not against anybody that's trying to better what's going on in Eastern Oregon in order to eliminate the problem, give us the representation, eliminate some of these bills that are coming out of Western Oregon that solves their problem but hurts us. We're not against anybody. We're working with everybody. But right now, nobody's approached us to say, OK, what are we going to do, how are we going to do it? It hasn't worked over the last 20 or 30 years to change this around. They're just totally ignoring us and marching on with what they want to do.

Blu Fortner: We're definitely willing to set up a meeting and discuss some ideas with you guys that are more realistic.

Mike McCarter: I'm all in favor of that.

Brent Grasty: I'm Brent Grasty from Vale. One of the things that I was most encouraged by both with Greater Oregon and with Greater Idaho is, we all have always said and Greater Idaho really emphasized this in the first five meetings was, we just want out discussion. Mike, you kind of echoed that. But the focus on separating ourselves from the state of Oregon is, that just rubs a lot of Oregonians the wrong way. Bob, you've done a great job of reaching out to try to help Greater Idaho identify questions that need to be answered. The one thing that I'll disagree with is, to me it's not the legislature's responsibility to identify the answers to all those questions. And Mike, you haven't done what we've raised (inaudible) these 5,6 meetings on starting to address those questions. And Matt, the last time he was on, said he would go back through the minutes and come up with that list of questions. Bob, you started some of that, that was really helpful I thought. But that list of questions is what really is going to make the difference on both this election in '24, if this gets on the ballot, and what happens in Sherman, Umatilla, and any other county. So, what I'm struggling with is the list of questions; if they're in front of everybody, people can make their own informed decision really easily at that point. There's downsides and upsides to being not in the city and that's just no different in any state. Boise is no different than Kootenai county; it's just that difference and we need to work out the solutions that that conversation happens. Our commissioners are fundamental to taking that message up, our elected officials. I'm just struggling with choosing to, in my mind, separate ourselves from the state, run away from the problems as opposed to stepping up and joining together. We're all neighbors, we all live together. We've seen other communities tear themselves apart; we can't let this be the thing that does that here. We've got to come together and talk about these solutions and talk about, but Mike, we've got to start with the questions, get those questions out. People will make a different decision I think. And then help our elected officials to come up with an approach that carries that voice. And I'm also struggling with the idea that everything comes down in a negative way from Salem; because that's just not the case. Every county gets boatloads of money that's paid for in the majority by Western Oregonians, just by the numbers, and we use that, and sometimes it's forced on us and sometimes it's a really good thing. I like our roads in Oregon. And that's something I think we need to speak up about, there's real positive things about being in this state. Anyway, enough of a ramble, but I really appreciate the dialog and Mike, that's where you come at this from the beginning, let's have the conversation. Thanks.

Mike McCarter: Thank you for those comments, and I want to thank everybody for being there for this meeting. We are becoming a society of not talking to each other, of not sitting down and even if we choose to disagree, being civil about it. You know, we're being accused of not being truthful on our website with the way the vote is going. If Greater Idaho came out with answers to questions - school funding, PERS (Public Employees retirement System), licensing, taxes, and things like that, that would be a lie. Because we have no control over that, and when two parties sit down to negotiate a contract, which is basically when you move the border it's a contract between Oregon and Idaho, how it's going to work, how the money's going to be split up, who's going to pay what and do. It's not Greater Idaho that decides those numbers; we can only input our recommendations to them. It's got to be the parties who sit down and say, Yes, no, here's the dollar amount, we'll pay 50/50, whatever. If we came out and came up with these factors and these figures, it would be a lie, because we don't have any control over that. The whole thing has got to be taken upstairs

to the legislature to say, OK, sit down folks and let's start talking about this and come up with some answers. If it doesn't look good, if the people don't want it then, then they can vote that way. But in the meantime, we've got to get this discussion moved up to the decision makers.

Pat Barfield: My name's Pat Barfield, I just have a couple of comments primarily around the issue of our country is divided enough as it is to be focusing on dividing property lines to suit our political representation or to be given sufficient representation for our ideas out here in Eastern Oregon is just the wrong direction to proceed. I believe that we're better off finding forward ways for unity in pathways that are already paved, and those are discussing this with our representatives and speaking up and working together in civil discourse just like this, but making an appeal to the state to listen better for better representation here for what's needed in our county. You know, both, whether it's Greater Idaho or Greater Oregon, I don't think either of the proponents or opponents of either of these groups really believe that a border change is going to ever occur so I'm not sure why we're having these meetings at all. So, that's my perspective.

Linda Simmons: My name is Linda Simmons, I'm from Ontario, grew up in Vale, and lived in many places in Oregon; I was born in Pocatello, Idaho. So, I have a little of that blood. What has concerned me the most about this is the tactics that have been chosen and used as in Wallowa county that concern me greatly, that rumors are not that outside money came in and was doing marketing and they were not telling the truth. As an Oregonian inhere I see this has become a pure political issue between republicans and democrats, and I hate that. Almost all of those counties that you've listed have voted republican, and the democrats have taken over, so therefore they're bad. And I don't believe that. People are people. I love Oregon. I love Malheur county. I have many, many friends in Idaho, they don't want us to come over there either. We don't. And I think that's important and people who voted on the things voted for information and I love what I'm hearing from everybody, but the people, the information that came out is not what they thought. The person who said, and I'm sorry, you said that Sherman county and which one wanted 60% to have their county be part of Idaho; that concerns me. That wording is dangerous. You know, there's a whole lot more. I think our local issues are with the state of Oregon. Whether you're a farmer, business, they treat us differently, we treat them differently. I ask the question, if you have a wonderful farm did your kids stay here? Most them did not; they got a degree, they went somewhere else and they went to where the jobs were. We are struggling as a county getting enough people to work here, whether it's people that perhaps (inaudible) but those people are not taking the jobs here. That concerns me more than anything that we're talking here because we as a community are struggling really hard to have a good workforce. We can't get larger companies to come here because we don't have a workforce. How many people in Malheur county go to Boise area; there's a whole lot of us. I love Oregon, I love my county, I love our area here, I don't want it to become more political than what is reasonable, and I want answers and I think it's wonderful that we talked about it, but if we're to the certain point that we can't go any further, I'm not sure what our legislatures going to do and I don't believe we have fair representation at the state, and I'm talking for myself personally.

Merlyn Skeen: Merlyn Skeen, from Nyssa Oregon. My husband is a third-generation farmer, lived here in Oregon his whole life; I'm new since marriage, 45 years. We love Oregon, but we farm. One of our farms has the Snake River runs right at the edge of it. I see Idaho right out my front window. Here's what I see in Idaho as a farmer: In Idaho they do not require overtime for ag (agricultural) workers, you know how hard on a farm you have to work and how many hours you have to put in; in Idaho they don't charge us an extra \$0.50 a gallon for our fuel that we have to use on our farm; in Idaho they don't have a death tax – Oregon has the highest death tax in the nation, tied with Massachusetts, at 16%, so we have all these issues and many more issues that face us as business owners, not just farmers, that our state doesn't hear, that our state doesn't help us with, that they don't understand, I get that, they don't understand that. But we keep having these meetings and keep talking about what we need our legislature to do - and our representatives fight really hard for us and they did get the natural resource credit raised which does help the farmer; that is just one thing but that does help the farmer but that doesn't help all the other business owners. They are leaving the state, people our age are moving, they're buying homes in Boise, McCall, Fruitland, because they don't want to pay the death tax and all the other taxes that the state imposes on us; it would be really simple if they want us to stay, if they want us to behave and do the things and be able to stay in Oregon – work on that death tax, listen to us about overtime for ag workers, listen to us about our other issues, just pay attention to us over here. And we would, we don't want to move, I built my dream home in Nyssa, I don't want to move, I built that after saving for 15 years. But we will have to, we are being forced to. When my husband retires we're going to move to Idaho because we didn't work all these years to build a legacy, to pass down to our children and grandchildren, to leave 16% of it to the state and have to sell off part of our farm to pay that tax bill. So that's my issue, and I hope, I just want us to have a voice, really, that's all we're fighting for is a voice on the other side of the state.

Bob Wheatley: Just a comment to kind of follow up on that. I'm a lifelong resident of Oregon. I was born and raised in Ontario. I did go to college in Idaho, lived there for several years, my wife and I met and married there. I had an opportunity to move back to Ontario about 30 years ago so I came back, became an Oregonian again. So, I've seen over my 75 years, the transition that has happened, not only in Malheur county, but primarily talking about Malheur county, but it's been throughout the state. I can remember the days of Tom McCall when he was governor and we had people then starting to move to Oregon from California, and he came out and said, you can come and visit but don't stay. That was his statement. I think we kind of grew up with thinking that way I guess a little bit. So, it is time for us long-timers to make some adjustments, and the reason, the real reason at my age, no I'm not going to live long enough to see this happen. I'm pretty sure of that. I sure would like to see some positive changes occur in my lifetime. The reason that I really got on board with this Greater Idaho movement and the issues that they address, my big concern, and this is specifically for Malheur county, is the impact that the governor and the legislature over the last 25 years with the laws they've passed, what impact they've had on the farmers and ranchers. They are forcing these people out of business. I know many farmers and ranchers in Malheur county that I've personally talked to that tell me if they could they would sell out and move. The majority of them would probably move to Idaho because that's the closest, but not necessarily, but they would move out of Oregon. But it just can't happen, that kind of money's not



available, people aren't coming and buying these big farms and ranches. The other thing that was mentioned, Skeen's, they're third generation, there are farmers and ranchers in Malheur county that are five generations deep. You can't just take those big farms and ranches and pull up and move across the border and put it back down again. We need to do something to help those people. If we lose our farms, farmers and ranchers, there won't be a whole lot left in Malheur county. We'll all be moving to Idaho because there won't be any reason to live in Malheur county. So, think about that. The other thing, the point that I really want to get back to is that I really did not come here today with any agenda and I wasn't trying to get into an argument with you; I really would like us to come together and try and gather some answers. We tried to form a committee earlier in the year to do just that with people on both sides of the issue and we didn't have a lot of success; it was hard to get together and conversing by email and text maybe isn't the best way to go about it. So yes, we'd be more than happy, at least the people I know in Malheur county that are on the Greater Idaho side of this, if there is a side, we'd be more than happy to have a joint group and to get together and discuss these things, try and come up with some of these answers like Brent has asked for. We've tried in the past; Greater Idaho as an organization has tried to answer these questions, but as Mike said, some of these big issues that are really important – PERS is a big issue with people in this county, people who work for the government, those who are teachers – what happens to their retirement? And those are questions that we can't answer. It's going to take people in the legislature, people who have hands-on involvement in those things to come up with the answers, and yes, there are going to have to be compromises and that concerns me. My biggest problem right now with what's going on, if somebody could come up with an answer for me, to tell me how we could get greater balance in the Oregon legislature to give us an opportunity to voice our needs and our problems and have them listened to and have action really happen. Man, I'd be right on board. That's what I'm looking for. But, up to now, this has been the most successful alternative. It's not to say that it's the only alternative, or that it will eventually be the correct alternative. Myself, personally, I am certainly open to hearing things. If we could turn this meeting over, the discussion over to the ideas on how we address these things, what do we do, how do we address the legislature, how do we move forward? Those are the questions that we have been fighting for, for the last four or five years with the Greater Idaho group. And, we haven't gotten there yet either. But we have made some steps forward, we have gotten some attention, we have gotten some people to listen who are in the legislature, who are on the western side of the state. There are members of Greater Idaho who live on the western side of the state, so it's not just us here in Eastern Oregon. Again, I just want to make it clear that my position on this is to not get into arguments or fights, let's try and work together, let's see if we can answer some of the questions, let's bring the questions out, let's talk about it. If we can free up some time for you as county commissioners so that you don't have to meet three times a year to discuss this, if we can have discussions on our own and try and address some of these issues and then come up with some things that we can put in a report to you and request that we have a meeting with you to talk about those things – that sounds good to me. That would still meet what we're trying to do. We're not here to right against this. If there's a way to address it without even having to go to a vote on the ballot that's fine with us. We're not going to oppose it or get things in an uproar over that.

Lucy Hutchens: My name is Lucy Hutchens, I'm 87 years old, and I was brought to this vast desert in 1961 by my husband. I adapted, I learned to live here. And what I've heard so far is that everybody concludes that it's in the legislature and we can get together and make nice and agree on what we agree on. But the bottom line is, we can do this for the next 50 years and nothing changes. What has to change is the type of representation and people in Eastern Oregon have to look for the individuals who know how to compromise, not completely, but to compromise enough to get some of what they think that people over here want. And the other thing is, we have to face the fact that things change in this universe. I mean, I went from carbon paper to copy machines in one lifetime, and now they're trying to explain artificial intelligence to me. And people are still worried about selling their land, when it doesn't get what it used to, because the bottom line is painful. The younger generation does not want to work that hard. You cannot get anybody to get down on their hands and knees and scrub a floor anymore. They need an automatic floor scrubber of something. But I, over the years, saw many people who were conservatives like Mr. Yturri, they named a boulevard for him so we can bypass Ontario, and Denny Jones, who wasn't the most highly educated man in the world but he got in there and he learned what he needed to know and then he was able to do some good compromising, he helped me get a better retirement, and I'm in another party if you haven't noticed. But, there are individuals who were kind of operating, and we don't like majority rule. And we live out here in this desert where there aren't a lot of people and that's what makes it nice. But the majority in the state doesn't always go along with the minority party. The minority party has to get people who don't go into the situation expecting not to compromise. This year, I was very upset that they quit attending sessions and their committee meetings to the point that now there's a big legal fight about whether they can run again or not; that was not necessary. When they are sent over there by a vote of the people they need to do their jobs, even if they don't always like the outcome. But if they're not even there to talk to, I don't know what they are griping about. That's all I have to say for now.

Linda Feeley: My name is Linda Feeley, from Ontario Oregon and I was raised there and have lived in Oregon all my life – I was in Boise for a couple of years, but basically my whole life. I think the thing that bothers me is it is so political. I remember as a child when Frank Church and Idaho was more democratic than they were republican. Things shift over the years; they just do. Ideas change, things shift and I think it doesn't make any sense to move borders. If you did that in the United States, and tried to move borders all over what a chaotic thing you'd have there. I agree we need to talk to the legislature. I also think we need to understand people on the other side of the state have different problems and there are more of them, and we have to understand their side too. Maybe it's been about them, they need to listen to us, there's no doubt about it, but we also have to understand that they're over there with different sets of problems. And, I will say, Oregon is not a welfare state, Idaho is. Idaho takes more from the federal government than they pay in. I don't want to be from a welfare state. And yes, our taxes are higher, but we pay our way here in Oregon. That's all I have to say.

Antonio Sunseri: I'm Antonio Jacob Sunseri, I'm a fifth-generation resident of Malheur county and I just want to bring up the topic of education service districts because Idaho is one of very few states that do not have education service districts. And the ESD's (Education Service District)

provide a lot of important resources like special education for our smaller school districts, which include most of the school districts in the counties that are being considered to join Idaho.

Pat Barfield: I just have one comment. To summarize the perspective here a bit, I wonder if our way forward might be smoother if rather than calling it Greater Idaho if we just called it Greater Representation. Because whether it's Greater Idaho or some other device, it means a border slicing, I just think that's too inflammatory to move forward in any consensus building direction.

Ricki Pattee: I'm Ricki Pattee. What is the benefit for the Idahoans if they incorporate our area? What benefit does Idaho enjoy if this goes through?

Judge Joyce asked Mike McCarter to respond.

Mike McCarter: Idaho is of course, a different political party leads Idaho. They believe in people speaking out, in allowing both sides to come together and come to a solution for the people. Greater Idaho has never tried to be a political movement; Greater Idaho, even though some folks may not agree with that term, it came about and the die is cast with it. Greater Idaho is about traditional values of faith, family, freedom, and self-sufficiency. Those of us in Eastern Oregon, and again, I'm a third generation Oregonian, only time I left the state was during my time in the Vietnam War. I believe that we're not running away from the problem. We are meeting the problem head on and it's causing some angst and heartburn. When I look at Idaho I look at less government regulations over the top of us, taxes over the top of us. I look at not having the green movement pushed down our throat, not having certain educational programs dictated by the state. I believe in that Idaho looks at local governance in the counties versus the state dictating everything. Oregon has become really good at getting everybody on the dole as far as giving them this giving them that and so on. And when Oregon or a county does not agree with them, they put their foot down on it and stop it. The ESD question that I heard just a little while ago - Oregon spends on average right now \$4000 per student above Idaho. Yet, Idaho's graduation rate is 3% higher than Oregon. Oregon has dropped the requirement for high school graduates on basic skills. How can you hire young people when they don't know how to write or understand basic math? But they say, well, the computer tells me everything, I don't have to do it, I can just type it in and it'll spit out the answer to me. No, there are some common skills that are required when you come out of school. When I look at this, Oregon does not like charter schools, Oregon does not like home schools. Idaho is welcoming that the best education for the student is what's important with it. Greater Idaho is about people, not politics; it does border on politics because of who's in charge of a particular state. I apologize for having a long-winded answer, but that's what I gave you.

Lucy Hutchens: What I heard was there were a lot of constitutional problems that Oregon is forced to impose, which aren't always imposed in other states. For instance, people have a choice about standing up and saying their mind in Idaho. I've never had a problem stating my opinions in Eastern Oregon. It's not political, but what I heard all had to do with which political party was in charge at this time. And, as somebody else said, there was a time when Idaho was run by democrats; maybe that was the source of their demise, I do not know, but I know that in politics

all of this could change and I think that people who want changes in Malheur county should organize a political lobby group, find out what's going on in that legislature, get representatives who will present things to the legislature and then show up. It's inconvenient because unfortunately the pioneers put the capital at Salem. Maybe that would be easier to move. We're saying we're not being political, but we're being very political and one of the political things and what they scream about in Washington DC, and by the way they would have to approve this in the long run so I know that my great grandchildren probably won't live to see a move of the borders if the United States Congress has to agree on anything. So, I think we need to use political need for lobbying and numbers, and you have to show up, and things change in those committee meetings if enough people show up or enough people send in emails and so on. I've been active in the AAUW, that's University of Women, we have a lobbyist aide in Salem and she lets us know on email, I need support on this particular thing. It's usually education or women's and children's and then we get on our email and send it to them and they can get things out of committee by having an organization that lobbies for certain things and if you want to get rid of the death tax, get rid of it. Get organized and get over there. I'm not going, I don't like to drive that far.

Brent Grasty: We're a member of the Association of Oregon Counties and I don't know if there's an Eastern Oregon component to that,

Judge Joyce: There is.

Brent Grasty: Something similar, but what do you hear in the different counties that have passed? What's the scuttle? What's the conversation? Does it come up at all?

Judge Joyce: I don't know that it's come up since I've been there but I've been busy at another arena so.

Mike McCarter: This discussion that is taking place in your County Court is probably one of the best discussions that I've heard in a long time from people, and I appreciate the fact that people are speaking out every which direction. We're showing more and more people are starting to stand up and I guess probably the reasoning for that is they're not happy with what's coming out of Salem or out of the northwest part of Oregon. The county commissioners are starting to send the word up the line to our state representatives and our senators, whether it's Senator Findley or Representative Owens or Reschke, no disrespect when I don't say representative or senator in front of their names. They are starting to send the word up. And yes, it does need, these problems do need to be picked up in the legislature. When I talked to a Western Oregon democrat representative, I said, you don't listen to the problems, you don't understand what's going on in Eastern Oregon, and they stopped me right on the spot, and they said, Mike, we hear what you're saying, we just outvote you. And that tells me that there is a desire for a lot of the politicians in Salem, because they are elected out of the mass population in the northwest part of Oregon, to try to solve the problems in northwest Oregon. Electric cars may be great in the Portland area, but try driving two and three hours from John Day or from Burns to get medical care or go to a store with an electric vehicle. How do you run the combines, how do you run the tractors without diesel and without gas

and so on? We've got an issue here. 160 some years ago the border was set. At that time, 10% of the people were urban, 90% of the people were rural. We're looking at 2023 with a total flipflop, we've got 90% urban and 10% rural or less. I would love to see people reaching across the aisles in the capitol and even in our particular meetings and sit down and start discussing the issues. We're not running away from them by any means. And I know that our representatives are frustrated because they walk out; that is the only tool that is available to them to stop some of the legislation and they're criticized for it. You could do the same thing with union people who walk out because they're not happy with an issue and we don't put them down. So, I think that I would love to get it away from the politics and just start talking about people, wherever possible, because these issues are important to us. And I hope that we can take and sit down and hash some of this out.

Lucy Hutchens: Nobody wants to get political, but they say the political process governs this. So, to me that dichotomous. I mean, why is it dirty to talk about getting political and get in the political process? Doesn't have to be a particular party but you can get into the process that's been set up in law and work with it. There's not going to be any change unless people do, because that's what we've got. I haven't had a call since the robo calls driving me crazy at election time. That's what you see about politics is the money that has been put into our law for money to be speech, which happened about 10 years ago. And all that our people do on the national level is run for office from the moment they're in there because they think they have to. And every day I must get 50 requests for money on email; maybe I should give up email, but then you can't function in society without email, well I have friends that do but they're not functioning well, they don't know what's going on. And I represent a large section of the population because I am over 65, see I even represent you Judge.

Judge Joyce: And I appreciate that very much.

Lucy Hutchens: And those of us who are in this state of, terminal maturity I like to call it, we have a history that we can draw on and share. But the idea that we're going to get together and talk and be nice friends and go out to lunch together, that's great but nothing's going to change until you get a political process going that can be bipartisan.

Bob Wheatley: Just to address a couple of questions that I think are main points of this meeting originally. The question about whether or not these meetings should continue or stop. Is there a mechanism by which you as a commission can put an end to them or does it need to go through the vote of the people?

Judge Joyce: I think we'd have to get some legal advice on that from the legislature since they wrote the bill, or helped write the bill and okayed it.

Commissioner Jacobs: But the bill was passed by a vote of the people so there's a good possibility it'd have to be

Blu Fortner: I've got the petition right here if you'd like to sign it.

#### Multiple talking

Bob Wheatley: I guess that was the other point is that I think we're all agreed as far as the people I talk to that we have come to a point where these meetings – they're nice and we've had some good discussions and some great points presented, but we're kind of stagnant, we're not really moving one way or the other and it does occupy a lot of your guys' time. So, I think we can probably agree on everybody's pretty much in agreement that it's time to find a better way to communicate it. So, I guess what I'm asking is first of all, if you would check into the legality and see if there's any other way, if we need to go to vote then we'll go to vote and I'll do what I can to help you guys. And the other thing is, is if you would think about if we eliminate these discussions, what would be a better way that would help you as commissioners of this county for us out here to either group together and discuss issues and make reports to you, or think about some kind of a format that would maybe work better for you that all of us could get on board with and we work together.

Blu Fortner: So, there's another way that we can do consensus taking within this meeting, about whether or not people want to join Idaho or not within this county, because we have a fair representation of both sides. You can take a poll within this group and say, how many people here want to join Idaho, and how many people are against that idea?

Bob Wheatley: I would be opposed to that; I don't think there's fair representation. I could get you 100 people in this room that would vote for it, if that's what we're looking at doing. If we're going to do that let's poll the whole county.

Blu Fortner: I think that would be a really good idea.

#### Multiple talking

Commissioner Mendiola: I think we're closer together on our problems than we're apart; I think we just need to get together and charge one direction instead of trying to change the border, because it's never going to happen. I hate to tell you. We can get it through the state maybe, probably not, Idaho might let us in, but the United States government is not going to let it happen. I hate to be the guy, you know, he's on the parade here, but I think we're closer together when we talk about these issues and then go forward. I think we're pulling the same direction but we're pulling from the opposite corners.

Antonio Sunseri: I'd just like to say that it'd be a whole lot easier to do an initiative petition if the County Court put an advisory ballot out on the issue because it seems like both sides are kind of at a consensus about these meetings having run their course.

Michelle Jacobs: My name is Michelle Jacobs and you know the old saying, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. I think this whole movement has evolved out of frustration because we're not heard in Salem and we don't feel like they care about us. Look at the last election for the governor, trying to get a new governor (inaudible) and the whole state voted red except for right up in the corner where it was blue. The whole state voted red. That should tell them how we feel, but they don't care. So, I think this was all maybe to get their attention, make them listen to us. And so now we have discussed it locally. I think we do need to move to Salem, get some lobbying groups, I don't know what we can do to be heard. But we need to be heard.

Lucy Hutchens: The people that are here could form a bipartisan political action committee since we're so close together. You can organize it and then you can lobby.

Judge Joyce: Are you going to be in charge?

Lucy Hutchens: I would be a consultant. I don't want to have to travel.

Judge Joyce: Well I kind of think we've come to a conclusion here and I also think it's probably been one of the better meetings we've had since we started two years ago so appreciate it and thank you all for coming.

No written comments were received.

Judge Joyce adjourned the meeting.