

MALHEUR COUNTY SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

Pursuant to Initiative Measure No. 23-64

Meet to Promote Relocating Oregon-Idaho Border Ordinance

September 9, 2024

The Special Meeting of the County Court was called to order by Judge Dan Joyce at 9:00 a.m. with Judge Joyce presiding and Commissioner Ron Jacobs present. Commissioner Jim Mendiola was absent. 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. Present in the meeting room were public members Brent Grasty, Blu Fortner, Linda Feeley, Tara Dominick, Lucy Hutchens, Joe Recla, Steve Christensen, Mary Christensen, Rene House, and RiEtta Pattee. Present electronically were public members David Armstrong and Linda Simmons; Antonio Sunseri with the Argus Observer, and an unidentified listener. 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 # 2024-2502

Judge Joyce asked for comments from the public.

Blu Fortner: I wanted to take a second to say that we were able to collect the full number of validated signatures and that we will be on the ballot in November for repealing the mandatory nature of these meetings, repealing this measure, which won't preclude anyone from meeting to talk about this in the future. They'll just have to get on the docket like regular County business. And the way to repeal those meetings is to vote yes on 23-74. And I also want to say a big thank you and round of gratitude and appreciation for the Greater Oregon group that helped collect all those signatures and it was a truly grassroots effort. We all worked together and it's been a real blessing to work together to be a part of the group.

Joe Recla: I'm here in support of the 23-74 for removing the requirements of the County to speak to this issue three times a year. And as I thought about things that I like about Oregon or love about Oregon, I love the fact that Oregon promotes reading books and is not interested in banning books. I love the fact that Oregon actually actively tries to support people in the right to vote and makes it easier to get registered. I love Oregon because they support a woman's rights to her own body and supports families to make the decisions about what's best for the health and welfare of their own children. Those are just to name a few of the things that I support.

Mary Christensen: I was an educator, I'm a retired educator, and I want us to stay Oregon. Our daughter is a teacher in Idaho and I see the difference between the education in Idaho and the education that Oregon gives our children. That's really important to me as well. And my husband, and he'll speak for himself, I'm sure, but because I've been married to him for so long, he's just stuck with me, but he's a hunter and he hunts with our son and our son lives in Hillsboro, and I'm

a proud mom of a Hillsboro police officer, and so, when he goes hunting, they hunt together, for big game and if we're in Idaho...(comments were interrupted as others entered the meeting room)

Mr. Grasty: You want them to be able to keep hunting together - is that what you're saying?

Ms. Christensen: Well you know what, I love him to pieces, because like I said, I've been married to this man a very long time. He goes away for a while and hunts with my son.

Steve Christensen: A small piece of that is I am on the verge of qualifying for my Pioneer Hunting License and I have invested a considerable amount of time to get there. And that's just one little small piece of many similar that would need to be changed if we were to become a part of Idaho. The infrastructure that would have to be transferred. I mean, it's just a large change. And I am somewhat disappointed with the misinformation or, whether intentional or just partially, on the Greater Idaho website. Such things as a boundary change between Washington and Oregon in 1958, so it can be done; well it's not a cultural thing as large a scale as we're proposing with the Greater Idaho Movement. So, I would suggest this information be fact-checked as we go through this. A greater thing is probably the misinformation, intentional or not, of so many counties that have voted to actually become part of Idaho. When in fact, they have voted to have meetings such as this, and I'm sure that you've had a great opportunity through, what, three years now to hear many sides and get a lot of the information, and fact-check the information. So, I think its time to stop the mandated meetings and just allow conversation to continue, whether through normal commissioner meetings or between groups and between parts of the population.

Ms. Christensen: I'm a born and raised Oregonian; that's a long time.

Judge Joyce: So, what's the age for Pioneer?

Mr. Christensen: Well it's not an age; it's 50 years of residency.

Judge Joyce: So, there's no age limit?

Mr. Christensen: Well there is a 65-year-old and 50 years of residency.

Brent Grasty: Can I just ask a question? When I've come to Court meetings, which is rare, I've been on the agenda. How do you get on it? If Greater Idaho wanted to get on the agenda or we did, how do you get on the agenda?

Judge Joyce and Commissioner Jacobs: You talk to Kim

Mr. Grasty: Just talk to Kim and say hey, I'd like to

Commissioner Jacobs: And you have to do it a few days in advance because it has to be publicized

Mr. Grasty: Sure, and your meetings are Wednesdays, correct?

Commissioner Jacobs: Yes

Mr. Grasty: Okay, thanks.

David Armstrong submitted comments in the chat box as his audio was not working. Mr. Armstrong's comments were: Thank you for taking the time to listen to your constituents. I look forward to voting yes on 23-74 and end these unnecessary meetings and allow our government to focus on the other important matters affecting our county. While our county and state faces many challenges, I believe we solve them through getting our voices heard in Salem.

Linda Simmons: I fully support the work of the Greater PAC to remove this from the obligation of the County to meet. I support anyone being able to schedule in and have an informational meeting, but I don't think it any longer needs to be the three times a year mandated, and I support that.

Linda Feeley: I've never been able to understand why people think they can just move borders around. I would hope that maybe Eastern Oregon could maybe meet in Salem more and get their voice heard. But you don't go to those drastic measures of move a border. It doesn't make any sense to me, but that's the movement. So, I love Oregon; if I didn't I'd move across the river. I mean, I love Oregon. They have a wonderful education system. They're not a welfare state, which I know as a welfare state means they get more from the federal government than they pay in; and I realize it doesn't come from our area, it comes from the other side of the state. I like the laws, even though I'm in Ontario you get a lot of the Idaho opinions. I'm happy to be in Oregon and be governed by Oregon laws. Just for instance, I had a plumber the other day and he was telling me when he was checking our water heater, I said, you know, what's the difference between the regulations for Oregon and Idaho? And he said, oh, he says, Idaho doesn't care what you put in; Oregon does and they have all these little precautions in to help the homeowner. It's just little things like that that make me very thankful that I'm in a state that cares about the people.

Lucy Hutchens: I haven't understood this whole thing and sometimes I get very, very divisive. I've been called divisive. If this went through and everybody agreed, none of us would still be alive when the Congress of the United States of America, which is such a cooperative group, agreed to this. And I've talked to some of the people that want it moved, and I just said, why are you so upset? And they said, well, we don't get what we want from Salem. It's all these Democrats, and it's everything in the legislature in Salem. And I said, you know, for years there were people from this area that were from two different parties, but they had one attribute. They went there with the attitude that they would compromise. We had senators, one who would go on the Yturri bypass, and he worked for years in the Oregon legislature, and he was kind of a middle-of-the-road guy. But he went with the idea that he would try to get things that Eastern Oregonians needed, but they would find a path to compromise. And if the people that are sent to Salem go there with an attitude, it's my way or the highway, then that's when they have to walk out of the legislature and go hide

in a motel someplace and I consider that divisive. So, I just don't understand why they don't find some good candidates to run from this part of the world and sit down and figure out how they can accept things that they don't want but that they can live with and then gradually get to a point where they can accept not being the head honchos in Salem.

Mr. Grasty: I'm just curious, I imagine the Court can't really take an opinion on this, but do you see a downside to having these kinds of conversations at the regular meetings as opposed to here or an upside? Is it a push? I mean we're here and there are no representatives from Greater Idaho, so it's at least the second meeting, maybe the third, and, you know, they've often mentioned, you know, we want to send a message, but do you see any difference? Can you handle the conversation in a regular Court meeting? How do you feel like that would work if this passes, this new bill passes?

Judge Joyce: I don't think it'd change.

Commissioner Jacobs: I think it'd be fine myself.

Judge Joyce: We can handle it.

Mr. Grasty: I went back through the notes over the last 10 meetings now and there was, a couple of meetings had some questions about meeting or communicating with the other counties on how they're approaching it, what their sense is. Have you had any conversations with the other counties? What's your take away from what's going on with these meetings there?

Judge Joyce: Not really.

Commissioner Jacobs: We have an Eastern Oregon Counties Association, and we've discussed it briefly about some of this stuff, but we haven't ever really gotten into detail about it. I think everybody's a little bit like we are; there might be some other counties that are pushing it harder, I don't know.

Mr. Christensen: It sounds like Harney County is going the same direction that we would like to see Malheur County go.

Mr. Fortner: Yeah, they repealed it in May, having these meetings.

Judge Joyce: They did?

Mr. Fortner: Harney County did.

Judge Joyce: Really?

Commissioner Jacobs: They're just going to have it in their regular meetings.

Mr. Grasty: What did they do Blu?

Mr. Fortner: Harney County repealed the need to have mandatory meetings outside of regular meetings to talk about this in May.

Mr. Grasty: Through the Court? Or through a ballot measure?

Mr. Fortner: Through a ballot measure.

Judge Joyce: Really, I didn't know that.

Mr. Fortner: So, I think the time is coming where we're going to have to find some compromises, and have the Greater Idaho group and the Greater Oregon group working together to build a consensus that we all agree on, and things that we like to see change or how to communicate other ideas for changes, besides such an extreme unrealistic one. I think the time for compromise and collaboration is just very ripe in my opinion.

Judge Joyce: Do you talk to those people often?

Mr. Fortner: No, I lost an email that they sent asking to get together back in June. And then when I was interviewing with Pat Caldwell he brought it up and I looked in and found it so I'm going to be responding to that later today. See if they have any interest in still getting together and talking about some of the issues and what some other compromises might be.

Commissioner Jacobs: Well, I don't want you to think that we expect you to do all the, you know, to step forward first either, so, you know, they haven't made an effort to...

Mr. Fortner: So maybe instead of just looking at it as Greater Idaho and Greater Oregon working together, we could look at it as Greater Idaho, Greater Oregon and the County Court working together. If you guys are okay with that.

Commissioner Jacobs: Well, we'll see what happens.

Mr. Fortner: Fair enough. I'll CC (carbon copy) you guys in the emails that I send.

Tara Dominick: I am a 20-year educator, also I like the, you know, talking about the banning of the books, I am a librarian and a teacher and so I really, well, one, again, I love Oregon. I live in Oregon because I want to be in Oregon. If I wanted to move to Idaho I would move over there. But I also see not just that, but what would happen again as educators and having a child who is in the school district in Ontario and knowing the difference between the educational systems between the two states, it would be very detrimental to the youth of our state to switch over to their educational system. Not to mention the fact that most of us would probably lose our jobs if that

were to happen, right? I mean, if we're, you know, I work at the college and all of a sudden you become Idaho we are no longer going to be, right. And the courthouse here, we're no longer, everything would have to shift, the amount of money that would, not to mention the fact that just legally, it would most likely never happen, and like you said, it would take forever in Congress and all of that. So, I think the wasting of time and energy to have a conversation on something that is not going to happen, that just causes more animosity between people. It just doesn't need to be discussed three times a year. And again, if someone wants to have that discussion, then they can go through other legal means to come to different meetings to have that. But we're Oregon and we live here because we choose to live here. It's a wonderful state. I have the right to choose what to do with my own body. I have a right to work in a career that I love and where children can be educated without restrictions. And so, that's why I support this.

Ms. Christensen: I'd like to tag on to you because I didn't think of our certifications. I'm an Oregon certified teacher, but I'm not certified to teach in Idaho, so our certifications...

Ms. Dominick: We can transfer over but in Oregon you need a master's, but in Idaho you only have to have a high school diploma to be a substitute so this is where we talk about the lowering of standards for education, where Oregon, you have to have a bachelor's to be a substitute.

Ms. Christensen: Right, and then I was thinking as you were talking about physicians, to get their certification or a doctor, I don't know how that works, just because I've been an educator and know that what I needed to have for Oregon certification, so other businesses, other doctors, lawyers, are you able to go from state to state to state without having some certification, some extra that it's going to cost them in order to maintain their businesses in Oregon or Idaho.

Ms. Hutchens: Would there be any way that your secretary could just give a ballpark estimate of what one of these meetings costs to set up? I mean there's electronic stuff and staff time etc. etc. I'm just curious what this cost in dollars and cents because one of the problems with people wanting to move the border is that there's money.

Judge Joyce: I'm sure she could figure something out.

Commissioner Jacobs: If no one else has anything else to say, I just want to say something about our representation that we have here on our side of the state and I'm very happy with Senator Findley and Representative Owens. I don't think that we could have better representation. Hopefully we can find somebody good that will replace Senator Findley, but I think he's been a great representative for a senator for our Eastern Oregon; I don't think we could ask for a better one. I just want to thank them for their efforts and let you know how I feel about our representatives.

There were no further comments. Judge Joyce adjourned the meeting.

After the meeting was adjourned it was noted that Matt McCaw with Greater Idaho had just joined the meeting electronically. Judge Joyce allowed Mr. McCaw to speak.

Matt McCaw: I am sorry, I had some technical difficulties, sorry to join late. You guys probably know me by now, I'm with the movement, I try to come to all of these meetings to be able to answer questions, give updates, and all those sorts of things; be a resource for you guys if questions come up. So again, I apologize for not being on time and being here earlier. But if there's anything that the commissioners would like to know or anybody else in the audience had questions that I might be able to answer as part of the representative of the movement I'm happy to do that.

There were no questions for Mr. McCaw.