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Too risky: Why Fourth of July Boomfest is sputtering out

By Emma Maple
of the Daily Courier

Call it a farewell to fireworks.

Due to rising fire risks, Central Point city officials and the Jackson County Expo have announced that the 2026 Fourth of July Boomfest show will be the final event of its kind at the Expo grounds.

"Even though we do our best, the launch zone is adjacent to the Greenway, and it has become increasingly challenging to prevent fires there," Central Point Parks and Public Works Director Matt Samitore said Friday.

City officials are hoping to provide an alternative for celebrating Independence Day, either by moving the Boomfest show elsewhere or switching gears, perhaps to a drone show.

However, Samitore said the city has "limited options" for relocation.

Alternatives to fireworks will be presented to the Central Point City Council in the fall, Samitore said.

Boomfest, which has been held at the Expo for 15 years, is also being shut down due to ongoing construction of Jackson County's multi-use pandemic response center and other buildings that are being constructed within the fireworks fallout zone at the Expo, Samitore said.

The cessation of the city-run fireworks show comes amidst a move by local cities to limit citizen use of fireworks.

Last year, Phoenix banned the use and sale of fireworks in the city, while Central Point banned retail fireworks most of the year excluding a small window on July 3 and July 4.

Grants Pass restricts fireworks use to 6-11 p.m. on the Fourth of July. No matter the time of year, fireworks cannot be set off in Grants Pass in wildfire hazard zones, city parks and school property.

Medford has more liberal rules, although fireworks are banned there in the Greenway, city parks, schools and in certain "wildfire risk areas."

If a viable alternative to Boomfest cannot be found, the city plans to use Boomfest's lodging tax funds for other events or tourism draws that help promote Central Point, Samitore added.

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Reach reporter Emma Maple at 509-370-0980 or emaple@thedailycourier.com.

Partial government shutdown could be short as Senate passes Trump-backed bill and House set to vote on it Monday

By Mary Clare Jalonick and Lisa Mascaro
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted Friday to fund most of the government through the end of September while carving out a temporary extension for Homeland Security funding, giving Congress two weeks to debate new restrictions on federal immigration raids across the country.

With a weekend shutdown looming, President Donald Trump struck the spending deal with Senate Democrats on Thursday in the wake of the deaths of two protesters at the hands of federal agents in Minneapolis.

Democrats said they would not vote for the larger spending bill unless Congress considers legislation to unmask agents, require more warrants and allow local authorities to help investigate any incidents.

"The nation is reaching a breaking point," Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said after the vote. "The American people are demanding that Congress step up and force change."

As lawmakers in both parties called for investigations into the fatal shootings, Trump said he didn't want a shutdown and negotiated the rare deal with Schumer, his frequent adversary. Trump then encouraged members of both parties to cast a "much needed Bipartisan 'YES' vote."

The bill passed 71-29 and will now head to the House, which is not due back until Monday. That means the government could be in a partial shutdown over the weekend until they pass it.

Speaker Mike Johnson, who held a conference call Friday with GOP lawmakers, said he expects the House to vote Monday evening. But what is uncertain is how much support there will be for the package.

Johnson's right flank has signaled opposition to limits on Homeland Security funds, leaving him reliant on Democrats who have their own objections to funding U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement without immediate restraints.

Two-week debate over ICE

It was unclear how involved Trump will be in the negotiations over new restrictions on immigration

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Documents shed light on Talent library staff's debate on patron

By Emma Maple
of the Daily Courier

Documents released by the Jackson County Library District shed light on intense internal staff debate over whether to suspend privileges of a man seen viewing images of naked children and babies on Talent library computers.

The district released the documents to the Daily Courier on Wednesday, the day before the board of directors voted to extend Director Kari May's administrative leave by one week to give her more time to decide whether to resign or face termination.

In the wake of criticism over how the district dealt with the problem, May has been on administrative leave since Jan. 5. Unless board action was taken on Thursday, she would have resumed her duties at noon.

Although the board met in both a closed-door session and an open meeting, no action was taken on Thursday regarding May's long-term employment.

May sat in the audience during the public portion of the meeting but left for the closed-door session. She declined the opportunity to comment after the meeting.

A week ago, the board unanimously voted to ask May to resign in lieu of termination or to enter into negotiations with legal counsel over her termination.

May's tenuous position as director stems from a series of incidents in which a man later identified by authorities as 33-year-old Nicholas Earnest Joseph Johnson was seen viewing photos and videos of naked children at the Talent branch of the library system.

The documents provided by the district include emails and messages exchanged between staff members about their response to what Johnson was doing and incident reports filed by staff members

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A winning move

Photos by JULIE ANDERSON / Daily Courier

Kyson Bischoff (left) makes a move against Zachariah Kelly during the dramatic end of a chess game at Allen Dale Elementary School in Grants Pass. The two are members of a chess program that will benefit from a $7,500 grant from the Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation covering Josephine and Deschutes counties. In the background, (from left), are chess club adviser Donna Hull and classmates Max Nelson, Jaxon Blank, Kellen Bischoff and Eliana Kelly.

A Cow Creek foundation grant supports kids learning strategy, having fun with chess

Skylar Peckham watches as her opponent, Kellen Bischoff, ponders his next move during a meeting of the chess club at Allen Dale Elementary School in Grants Pass. It's one of the clubs getting a boost from a grant given to Chess for Success.

By Vickie Aldous
of the Daily Courier

Zacharia Kelly, 10, and Kyson Bischoff, 9, faced off against each other in the last tense minutes of their chess game at Allen Dale Elementary School in Grants Pass.

With his pawn a few squares away from reaching the end of the chessboard and getting promoted to queen, Zacharia had only his king left to guard the lowly piece as it made its desperate run.

Kyson was intent on hunting down his opponent without getting his remaining queen and king killed, but Zacharia slipped his pawn through and converted it into a queen as the rest of the school's chess club watched.

The two boys then killed each other's queens, leaving only their kings and creating a tie ending. They shook hands.

"They learn good sportsmanship," said Donna Hull, a third grade teacher at the school and the chess club's adviser.

The club with 18 students is part of the Chess for Success after-school program that provides T-shirts, chess sets and lesson plans for participating schools in Oregon, southwest Washington and Hawaii.

This month, the Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation awarded Chess for Success $7,500 for programs in Josephine and Deschutes counties. The funding was part of $759,930 in grants donated by the Cow Creek foundation to help with food, physical and mental health, housing and education in seven counties.

Hull said playing chess has a variety of benefits for young people.

"It's a very strategic game. It's very mathematical and sequential, so they have to

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Oregon's new forest plan will guide logging, conservation

By April Ehrlich
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon's forestry department has proposed a flexible approach to managing state-owned forests west of the Cascades over the next 70 years. Staff say it will allow them to adapt as scientific understanding evolves — and as the climate changes.

But environmental groups say the department has drafted a plan that's too vague. They would like to see more focus on saving the mature and complex forests that are critical to fighting climate change.

Members of the public can submit their input on the state's draft forest management plan through the end of the day Jan. 31 by emailing comments to odf.sfcomments@odf.oregon.gov.

Forest management plans typically outline an agency's high-level goals and strategies for logging, recreation and conservation. State and federal agencies refer to them as they are crafting more detailed, short-term plans that identify which forest stands will be logged, and which will be protected.

This forest management plan is meant to accompany the Western State Habitat Conservation Plan — a 70-year agreement with the federal government that ensures state logging projects comply with the Endangered Species Act.

That plan, often referred to as the HCP, outlines conservation measures the state will take to offset the environmental harms of logging. It's awaiting federal approval, which state officials expect by the end of March.

If approved, the HCP would overhaul how the Oregon Department of Forestry pursues logging

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