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The Columbian

Tuesday, May 12, 2026 | Serving Clark County, Washington | www.columbian.com

Public lands agency confronts cash crunch

Washington logging revenue is lagging

By **ASPEN FORD**
Washington State Standard

A regional timber industry group warns that Washington's Department of Natural Resources is headed for deep budget trouble that will result in state worker layoffs and force taxpayers to foot more of the bill to keep the

agency running. Counties that rely on logging revenue from land the agency manages could be at financial risk, too, argues the American Forest Resource Council.

While it's become common for the group to clash with the department, they're not the only ones complaining.

Foresters inside the agency are pointing to Public Lands Commissioner Dave

Upthegrove's decision to pause some timber sales for eight months as a reason for the looming deficit in a key operating account, which covers many of the department's expenses for managing timberland.

The account is on track to go negative by midsummer.

Upthegrove and other agency leadership say recent management decisions are not to blame for the low balance. They say it has less

to do with recent timber sale activity on state land and more to do with the timing of when logging revenue reaches the agency.

That's because the Department of Natural Resources is only paid 10 percent of the auction price at the time of a timber sale. Loggers then have three years to harvest trees and often wait until lumber prices are higher to cut.

"We have more than \$20

million in sales that we haven't gotten the money from yet because the trees haven't been removed," Upthegrove told the Standard.

He rejected the idea that his policy decision to move older tracts of trees — which some call "legacy forests" — out of the logging rotation has anything to do with the budget difficulties. Upthegrove ordered last year's pause on sales to

identify which forests to set aside.

"It's darn near nothing to do with this conversation about older forests," Upthegrove said.

Timber harvesting hit a 22-year low last year, but it's on the rise now, according to Heath Heikkila, director of government affairs with the American Forest Resource Council.

TIMBER, Page A2

Medical equipment manufacturer Pedigo COMMITTED TO VANCOUVER



TAYLOR BALKOM/The Columbian

Javier Guadarrama, right, polishes metal brackets May 4 at medical equipment manufacturer Pedigo. The nearly 80-year-old company is continuing to flourish in central Vancouver.

Company having a strong year, but state's increasing taxes and regulations are a concern for business

By **SARAH WOLF**
The Columbian

Anyone who's been to a hospital or doctor's office has likely seen a gleaming stainless steel cart from Pedigo.

The company makes those carts right here in Clark County.

The Pedigo family founded the manufacturing company in Huntington Beach, Calif., nearly 80 years ago. It specializes in three-legged stools that the founder welded himself on a dirt floor in his garage and then sold door to door.

In 2000, the company moved to Vancouver, where nearly all of its roughly 300 employees work. The office and manufacturing floor share the same Columbia Business



An occasional series examining how different businesses in Clark County are faring in the current economy.

Center building near central Vancouver's industrial waterfront area.

Still family owned and operated, Pedigo now sells its stainless steel carts in all 50 states.

"They're not the flashy things you see in hospitals," said Andrew Saxton, vice presi-

dent of sales and marketing at Pedigo. "But we do have a very loyal following."

Generations of doctors have been using Pedigo carts since medical school. Saxton chalks that up to the Pedigo family's dedication to quality.

"It's not uncommon for us to go call on a customer and they'll say, I bought (this cart) 15 years ago, but it still works fine," Saxton said. "It's a good problem to have."

Strong but not immune

Business is good for Pedigo, Saxton said. The company caters to hospital and acute surgery centers, many of which are being built or updated around the country.

PEDIGO, Page A2

Insurance may cover weight-loss drugs

Wash. court ruling forces insurers to justify lack of coverage

By **AMANDA SULLENDER**
The Spokesman-Review, Spokane

SPOKANE — A blanket refusal to cover weight-loss medication like GLP-1s is no longer allowed under Washington law, an appeals court ruled last week.

Many health insurances do not provide coverage to weight-loss medication. In years past, weight-loss drugs have been ineffective and expensive with many side effects. That may be changing with the advent of GLP-1 medication like Ozempic, Wegovy or Manjaro.

Glucagon-like peptide-1 is a naturally occurring hormone within the body that regulates insulin uptake. The drug is injected and increases the amount of this hormone in the body.

First approved in 2005, the drug was primarily used for diabetes patients to increase and help regulate insulin in the body. The drug also suppresses appetite by slowing emptying of the stomach. The drug does not cause weight loss itself. Patients lose weight because the shot changes their eating habits by making them feel fuller.

With the advent of more effective weight-loss drugs, the new ruling from the Washington Court of Appeals forces insurances across the state to justify why they do not cover all drugs prescribed to lose weight.

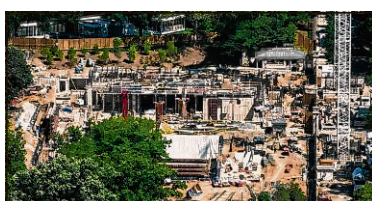
The Washington statute "does not permit" a health insurance plan deciding "not to deal with a person's disability for no reason other than because it had always done so," wrote Judge Ian Birk in the May 4 ruling.

Under Washington law, obesity is considered a disability. A 2019 Washington Supreme Court ruling found that obesity is a protected disability, and employers cannot discrimi-

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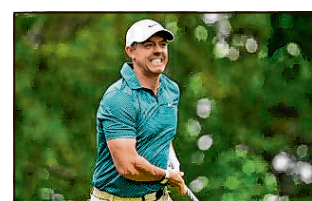
Democrats target \$1 billion security plan for ballroom

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Mcllroy, Scheffler have company as PGA hopefuls

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Allison Schragger: Taxing wealthy won't limit power
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