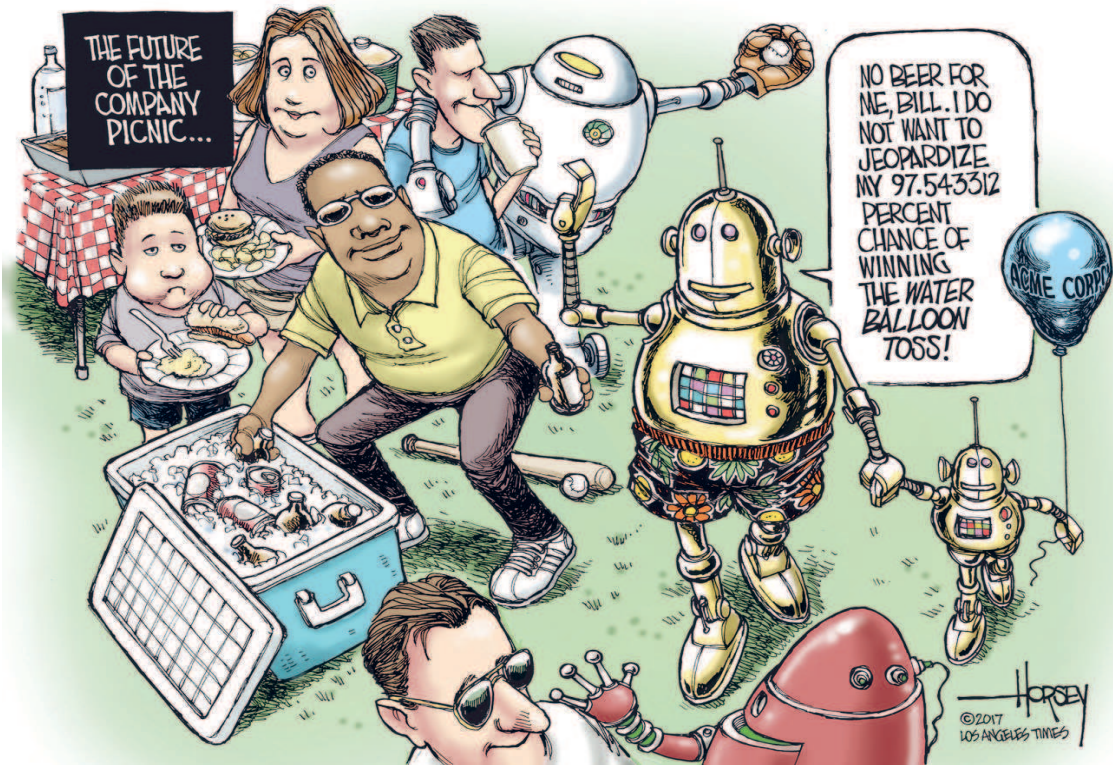


# O P I N I O N



## Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

**Editor's note:** City Councilor Richard Esterman requested a retraction of a story that ran on March 29. The Nugget stands by the story with a correction (see page 5). The following is a statement provided by Councilor Esterman:

To the Editor:

At a March City Council meeting, City Councilor Richard Esterman approached the Council as a business owner and private citizen, rather than as a councilor, to address an issue regarding public events.

Specifically, Councilor Esterman requested a fee waiver for the Sisters Wild West Show due to the nature of the event which historically has translated into a large value for the City due to increased traffic and tourism. The Wild West Show is hosted by Councilor Esterman's business, Central Oregon Shows, and is the only one of its kind in Sisters. The event features nine performances which are free to the public and popular with tourists. The Wild West Show generally does

not make a profit considering the high cost of overhead and free admission to the public.

Central Oregon Shows has always applied for event permits as a for-profit enterprise, although a profit is rarely made. This is the first year Councilor Esterman applied using a charity's non-profit status because the funds generated during the event benefit that particular charity. The application was rejected, but Councilor Esterman simply reapplied and paid all fees due for a profit event.

At the outset, Councilor Esterman, by his own volition, recognized his conflict of interest and voluntarily recused himself from discussion and voting on the matter. However, Mr. Esterman's role as a City Councilor does not prohibit him from participating as a citizen or asking the Council to waive fees or sponsor events that are beneficial to the community.

Richard Esterman

See **LETTERS** on page 20

### Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Sunny 76/48	Chance Showers 81/50	Mostly Sunny 59/36	Mostly Sunny 53/31	Mostly Sunny 55/32	Sunny 63/na

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## The future of our schools

By Tiffany Lee Brown  
Guest Columnist

Could we, the people of Sisters, help the schools bolster their enrollment to increase their funding?

The Nugget's detailed articles about enrollment and funding help us realize what's at stake. To really get involved, it would be great to know how school funding operates in the state of Oregon, what we can expect from the new federal administration, and what regulations our school district is bound by (versus decisions that the local school board has made).

I would welcome an article that explained in simple terms how these things work; a state school board member I spoke with recently could not point me to a resource like that. She was very helpful and sent me some of their internal documents.

What can I say? I was completely overwhelmed. I left with the impression that various overlapping bureaucracies handle the money, and that officially, they leave a lot up to the local school districts. In real life, though, we know that each dollar is somehow attached to students' attendance, and public schools are constrained by legal and ethical requirements to focus resources on helping kids with disabilities and working on remedial learning.

If we understood the system better, community members might be able to help keep our schools desirable and competitive.

As a society we often resist helping those who struggle with poverty, lack of education, or addiction. We vote "yes" on building more prisons and vote no on strengthening the social safety net. Many parents face punishing work schedules and immense caregiving responsibilities. So the schools are only partly about educating our children. They're also compensating for huge inequities that shouldn't exist in the first place. They provide food, medical exams, counseling, stability, and comfort to many children. Is it possible to do all that and be a competitive institution that privileged families support?

Your recent article mentioned a lack of affordable housing in Sisters, which pushes young families out. This is partly due to our

town's high numbers of retirees from other, richer cities. Could they become more involved in the schools? And should the Sisters City Council require new developments to make multi-family units and modest middle-class housing part of Phase I, instead of tacking them onto the end of the building process?

The article mentioned competition from innovative out-of-district transfer schools, flexible online programs, and homeschooling. Sisters schools already have some incredible programs: the average student in America isn't learning to write well-crafted songs, make beautiful guitars, and build Habitat for Humanity homes! But the small-group, multi-age classrooms and active, outdoor environmental focus of Black Butte School up in Camp Sherman have attracted a deep waiting list for transfers. Down in Bend, families jostle for a chance at the environmentally focused charter school Realms. Could our elementary school feature an outdoor-oriented sustainability program? Could we offer more flexible options for families, making it logistically easier to combine traditional school attendance with homeschooling, private schooling, and travel?

I've heard teenagers complain of the lack of diversity here in town, wanting to transfer someplace that actively welcomes LGBTQ students and people of color. Could Sisters keep those kids here? Could we as a city make it clear to visitors and citizens alike that these beautiful high desert skies are not just for straight, white people to enjoy?

Safety and health are concerns, too. One family left Sisters Elementary School after the kids repeatedly brought home norovirus, causing the parents to lose many work days; the school did not respond with a modern, updated cleaning protocol. I have a mold allergy, and I can tell you there is definitely mold in the elementary school. If issues like these go unaddressed, then families with the means to do it may go elsewhere.

How can we as a community support even more opportunities for our kids, at these wonderful schools full of devoted teachers and staff, and keep our students here in town?

*Opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and are not necessarily shared by the Editor or The Nugget Newspaper.*