

O P I N I O N

Editorial...

Those who served

The past few months have been hard on many of our military veterans. After two decades of war in Afghanistan, they had to watch helplessly as the fruits of a generation of labor fell to the Taliban in a shambolic and bloody withdrawal.

Inevitably, many were called to question what it was all for — all the strain and sacrifice, the blood and the treasure expended in a cause where four presidential administrations and the top brass failed in their commitment — and consistently failed to tell the truth.

That question is not reserved to those who served in Afghanistan. Since World War II, there have been few clear-cut victories and too many vague and poorly executed “exits.” That’s on our political leadership and ultimately on us — not on our veterans who served their country faithfully and well.

Veterans Day is an opportunity for us to recognize service to country, service that is honorable and valued, regardless of politically engineered outcomes. It’s also a time for the broader American community to recognize that the call to service always comes with a cost to the small percentage of men and women who answer that call. We owe them our thanks, and this day offers us a chance to offer them a salute.

Those who are moved to do so can reach out to veterans through local organizations that are dedicated to helping those who served us and now need our support:

- **Central Oregon Veterans Ranch**, www.covranch.org
- **Central Oregon Veterans Outreach**, www.covo-us.org
- **Warfighter Outfitters**, www.warfighteroutfitters.org

Jim Cornelius, Editor in Chief



Letters to the Editor...

Nonpartisan commissioners

To the Editor:

Many of you have already signed the citizen’s initiative petition to make the Deschutes County commissioner seats and elections nonpartisan. Thank you so much for your support.

We do not have enough signatures and currently are 47 percent of our goal. We want it in the May 2022 election. Unfortunately, citizens’ initiatives can only be signed in person (no e-signature or online allowed). If interested

See LETTERS on page 17

Sisters Weather Forecast

Wednesday Nov. 10 • PM Showers 46/43 	Thursday Nov. 11 • Showers 57/47 	Friday Nov. 12 • Showers 58/44 	Saturday Nov. 13 • Cloudy 59/44
Sunday Nov. 14 • Mostly Cloudy 58/40 	Monday Nov. 15 • Mostly Cloudy 55/39 	Tuesday Nov. 16 • AM Showers 46/31 	

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Sisters needs a permanent shelter

By **Bonnie LaMont Rose**
Guest Columnist

A recent Oregon poll found Central Oregon region in need of at least 100 units of long-term housing for the 18-24 age group, plus another 170 long-term housing units.

There is a complexity of reasons for youth homelessness including family breakdown, mental illness, sexual assault, addiction, family financial difficulty, and/or social isolation.

With the adult homeless population, add to that the possibility of PTSD, low-income jobs, and unaffordable housing. Many of our adult homeless began down this road as teenagers and have grown up on the streets, further alienated, and losing hope of ever joining any community.

A recent survey of Deschutes National Forest identified slightly over 100 individuals “permanently” residing in our local forest in tents or, often, broken-down RVs. Some are families with children, some are youth under 24. The Sisters Cold Weather Shelter (SCWS) nonprofit has been working with the community since 2017 providing winter shelter for our homeless neighbors after a homeless man froze to death in his car in 2016 in Sisters. Their task is simply to save lives. Some living in the forest need winter food and shelter from the cold; others do fine in their RVs.

Providing winter safe shelter and meals is terribly expensive and time consuming. The Sisters Cold Weather Shelter board yearly sends out 150 donor-request letters to concerned community members to cover their budget of up to \$40,000 in past years; the Sisters community always generously donates. The board yearly requests shelter space from local churches. They arrange yearly required fire marshal inspection of the churches. They stock church kitchens and request volunteers to prepare, serve, and clean up after meals. They create tracking and screening forms to assure overnight guests and neighbors remain safe. Nightly they set up mats for sleeping, with required COVID spacing. And all this while changing from one church to another, month by month.

To respond to the need for food and safe winter shelter in a more sustainable way, the Sisters Cold Weather Shelter board has requested \$1 million of Deschutes County’s approximate \$38 million federal American

Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to purchase and staff a building now on the market here in Sisters, ideal for short-term emergency winter shelter and possibly a year-round resource center providing showers, meals, trash dumpsters, and needed resources. This building has been used as an adult care facility in the past, making it perfect for our needs.

One of the purposes of federal ARPA funds is to do exactly what the SCWS board is asking. The County has done a very thorough job of reviewing the board’s request and asking for further information. The request meets all requirements for ARPA funding. However, for the County to grant their request, the commission needs a letter of support from the joint Sisters City Council, mayor, and city manager. So far, the City Council has been unwilling to send such a letter.

The City Council has given two reasons: First, they have said they believe the shelter is functioning quite well as is, which, of course, is depending on the goodwill of community donors, on churches to provide shelter space, and on volunteers. They have also said they do not think Sisters is ready for a permanent emergency shelter and resource center. Yet it is a permanent facility we desperately need. If the 100 individuals in the forest were lining our streets, as the homeless are in Bend, things might be different, but our forest neighbors are out of sight and that makes it easy for them to be out of mind. I do not want to believe the City’s refusal to support a shelter facility comes from the old “not in my backyard” response that has hampered so many attempts to incorporate the homeless across America.

We live in one of the most generous and caring communities in America. Do you remember, years ago, when the Sisters community answered the call, pitched in, and created a much-needed classroom at the elementary school with just volunteer peoplepower? I do! I was so proud of us! And our city has created more Habitat for Humanity homes with only community volunteer labor than most cities our size. But that’s just who we are here in Sister — we care!

I am still hopeful the City Council will change direction and provide that letter of support. The time *is* right, and Sisters *is* ready to see a permanent cold weather shelter within its city limits as a sustainable effort to save lives.

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