



On the Fence

Union County needs safe, affordable, stable housing — the path forward is through collaboration

A thriving Union County requires a healthy workforce. The health of each citizen is dependent upon certain baseline conditions being met. Safe, affordable, stable housing is essential to reaching this goal and must be in place even before such things as good nutrition, personal safety and access to health care can be achieved.

Many in Union County are struggling with basic housing needs.

Currently, 84 students identified as homeless are being served by the La Grande School District Youth in Transition Program (according to Scott Carpenter, director of educational programs, La Grande School District). More than 26 percent of Union County households are considered housing burdened, which means they spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing (according to the State of Oregon, based on U.S. census data).

There are no easy answers.



COLLEEN NELSON
UNION COUNTY
PROGRESSIVES/
DEMOCRATS

The need for safe, affordable, stable housing is prevalent across the nation and is present right here in rural Eastern Oregon. To address this problem we must come together as organizational and governmental leaders and concerned residents to work on creative solutions. Collaboration is the way forward.

The first step is to listen carefully to those who are dealing with housing issues including those who are homeless, those who are housing insecure, social service providers, subsidized housing providers, landlords, tenants, contractors and government representatives. Local issues need local solutions. Success comes when we hear many voices, understand the issues from different points of view and act on what we hear.

As a pastor, I have had the opportunity to speak with people who come to the church for housing assistance.

I quickly learned La Grande had no place for people who need overnight shelter. The only option was one-night motel vouchers. Social service and subsidized housing providers shared that they were frustrated when they could not offer needed assistance to those I referred.

Last winter, a number of organizations, including Zion Lutheran Church, supported the Union County Warming Station in a two-month trial run. The station served 42 guests who stayed 263 total nights (according to Cami Miller, Warming Station director). It trained 80 community volunteers. It was a place for homeless persons to stay for a night and also a place to access support services. The Warming Station Advisory Board is in the process of securing a permanent location and hopes to offer services starting Nov. 15 this winter. This is a great example of

a collaborative approach to a community issue.

When I tried to help a homeless couple gain access to safe, affordable rental housing, I learned that securing rental housing can be a costly and discouraging process requiring applications and fees for multiple landlords and agencies. A coordinated rental housing application process would have been a great benefit to us.

In working with the non-partisan collaborative Housing Matters Union County, I found a group of leaders willing to tackle this issue. Through their networking efforts, there is an improved path to help those seeking assistance and support. Housing Matters Union County is another collaborative venture working on solutions.

Who needs safe, affordable, stable housing in Union County? Everyone. Union County thrives when all residents are adequately housed. For many, wages have not kept up with housing costs. Safe, affordable, stable housing is work-

force housing. Ensuring a stable workforce to provide services and amenities that make Union County great requires accessible housing.

These issues are only the tip of the iceberg. Here, as in the rest of Oregon, the critical shortage of housing has a negative impact on the whole community. Who gets access and how they are supported is only the beginning. The school district's 84 homeless students are 84 example of people in need of a place to call home.

How will we work together to make plans and offer creative solutions so that all Union County residents will prosper? Are we willing to support one another across the public, private and non-profit sectors to create housing solutions that work for all? I am convinced that the path forward is through collaboration.

Editor's Note: The Republican writer did not submit an On The Fence piece for this week's topic

Your views

LaMont: Remembering those who have fought for our freedom

To the Editor:

The members of American Legion Auxiliary La Grande Unit 43 would like to express our sincere appreciation for the men and women who served in the United States Armed Forces.

Thank you for serving this great country. Thank you for protecting us. Thank you for the security we have here at home. We know you sacrificed much for your country and all of us. And though you may no longer wear the uniform, we know you're always on call to serve and protect the freedom and security of the United States of America.

We invite everyone to pause on Veterans Day to remember those who have fought for our freedoms. Thank you to all who have so bravely protected us.

Founded in 1919, the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) helps to advance the mission of the American Legion.

With nearly three-quarters of a million members, it is the world's largest women's patriotic service organization and one of the nation's most prominent supporters of veterans, military and their families.

ALA members volunteer millions of hours annually, with a value averaging \$2 billion each year. From helping to draft the GI Bill in 1944 to advocating for veterans on Capitol Hill, the American Legion Family has been instrumental in advancing legislation that improves the quality of life for our nation's veterans. To learn more and get involved, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Maggie LaMont
President, ALA La Grande Unit 43

Knop: When a news reporting agency "gets it wrong," it is voter suppression

To the Editor:

While reading Monday's edition of your newspaper, I was shocked to read the article "Let the Counting Commence." The front-page showcased bold, eye-catching graphics, followed with a captioning that informed and advised voters that "Nov. 6 is the deadline in Union and Wallowa counties to mail in ballots for this year's general election."

This obvious lack of consideration to inform your readership with timely and accurate information is both unfortunate and irresponsible to the role of the media. However, it is the reality that concerns me. Since no correction could undo the harm to late voters in Union and Wallowa counties who will have taken your reporting as coming from a trustworthy

news source.

In addition, there is absolutely no excuse that a media outlet such as The Observer can rely upon to avoid accountability to voters or to its damage inflicted upon the democratic process in Union and Wallowa counties.

To a late voter, taking this advice to mail in their ballots on the day of election is tantamount to voter suppression and should not be taken lightly by either the reporting news agency, readership or subscribers. It is this type of reporting, so critical to Oregonians and late voters that grieves me, as any ballot mailed as the article suggests at this late hour will result in their ballot not being counted in this important election cycle.

I am hopeful that in the future yours and other news agencies will do more to critique your messages and articles so that voters will receive accurate and timely

Write to us

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are limited to 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's address and phone number (for verification purposes only). We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We do not fact check. We will not publish poetry, consumer complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Thank-you letters are discouraged. Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks. Email your letters to news@lagrandeobserver.com or mail them to La

Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850.

MY VOICE

My Voice columns should be 500 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We do not fact check. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

news rather than news that results in further voter suppression and the loss of individual voter rights.

Randy L. Knop, Chair
Union County Democratic Central Committee
La Grande

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