

Our View

Time to think big on what to do with federal stimulus

The massive \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act is pouring money into local governments as people and their communities continue to struggle with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Union County is receiving \$5.2 million from the federal aid. La Grande is receiving \$2.77 million. The seven other incorporated cities in Union County will receive funds ranging from \$30,000 to \$450,000. Wallowa County is receiving \$1.4 million, and the cities there will receive \$50,000 to \$230,000.

Our local governments face an array of decisions on how to allocate these funds, and those won't be easy to make. There are a host of competing priorities and needs that seek a one-time infusion of funds. Our elected leaders must sift through the ideas that sound grand and decide what needs the money the most.

La Grande in 2020 used some general fund money to create a low-interest loan program to help businesses in town. Early this month, City Manager Robert Strope reported there still is about \$185,000 in the program. That's an indicator not to use the incoming funds for another grant or loan program.

We suggest local governments instead look for ways to use these funds to help a wide swath of their communities and the local economy, as long as, of course, the federal rules guiding the use of the funds allow for that. With spring here and Union and Wallowa counties in the state's lower risk category for COVID-19, boosting tourism could prove a valuable boon.

A group in neighboring Umatilla County consisting of the Pendleton Economic Development Department, the Pendleton Convention Center, the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce and the Pendleton Round-Up Association has developed a plan to receive \$250,000 to create a broad-based effort to beef up tourism. Local governments in Union and Wallowa counties should give careful consideration to a similar plan.

Tourism is a vital economic element to the communities of Northeast Oregon, from the Pendleton Round-Up to fishing on the Grande Ronde to riding the Wallowa Lake Tramway. There are no doubt plenty of Oregonians looking to escape the strict rigors of extreme risk counties. Our corner of the state offers scenic vistas, abundant outdoor access, local dining, craftspeople and artists all worth checking out.

Yes, pressing concerns abound for local governments, in particular infrastructure improvements. La Grande is rebuilding one of its roads right now. The \$2.77 million it's getting would rebuild a few miles of roads, but a better move would be to invest in downtown parking.

This is a time for La Grande to consider where it could build a parking structure, perhaps akin to what McMinnville has — a large, multilevel free public parking structure a few blocks from its downtown core.

The counties, cities and even school districts — which also are going to get a share of ARPA — could work together to provide better rural broadband access. One of the common laments that came out of online education was the difficulty of getting decent internet access for all students. Several million in federal funds could help build out such access.

Local leaders must be careful not to spread this infusion of money too thin. And if they can identify vital infrastructure projects that need improvement, they should articulate the reasons why and be willing to back it with a vote.

There are not many times local governments are going to receive a chunk of change from the feds, and we are not suggesting any of these projects are simple, but these and others are worthy of serious consideration and discussion.



Other Views

Democrats see racism everywhere it isn't



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So let me get this straight. According to the president, according to the Democrats and according to the liberal media, half my country is racist, my political party is racist and I'm a racist.

That's the message they've all been telling me in the wake of the guilty verdict in the trial of Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis cop charged with killing George Floyd.

They say because I'm white, I'm an accomplice in George Floyd's death.

They say because I'm white, I'm guilty for creating a systemically racist country that deliberately keeps Blacks in political and economic chains and allows police to mistreat and kill Blacks without punishment.

They say because I'm a Republican who didn't vote for Joe Biden, who doesn't support Black Lives Matter and who doesn't want to defund or dismantle the police, I'm a racist.

You know what I say about all this crap about racism being everywhere?

It's a cynical political power play by Democrats that needs to end quickly before we get the race war they are hell-bent on starting.

I'm really sick of watching America being ripped in half over racism by so-called progressive Democrats and their shameless flacks and lackeys in the media.

Based on how the Biden-pampering media spin it, you'd think it was Republicans who founded the

KKK and invented the Jim Crow South's racist system of legal segregation that lasted for seven decades, not the racist Southern Democrats.

The same dishonest media would have you think it was the Republicans who filibustered things like the 1965 Civil Rights Bill, not racist Democrats like Robert Byrd, the "reformed" KKK local leader who a few years later would mentor and befriend a young Delaware senator named Joe Biden.

Speaking of Biden, with his racist legislative track record in the Senate, he has a lot of nerve scolding the country for being racist and blasting police for systematically mistreating Black Americans.

Biden, his media allies don't want you to remind you, was the law-and-order guy who took credit for passing the 1994 crime bill — the tough law that the New York Times says helped to create the era of mass incarceration of Blacks.

But that's OK. Biden's ancient sins against Blacks are forgotten. Now he's a progressive.

Now he's so woke he makes irresponsible public statements about what he'd like the verdict of a murder trial to be while the jury is deliberating, as he did in the Chauvin case.

Virtually no one in the country objected to the guilty Chauvin verdict — except the same people who demanded it before any of the facts were heard.

As we've seen since April 20, convicting a bad cop and putting him in prison for his wrongdoing will not be enough to satisfy the BLM crowd and their Democrat allies.

They want all cops everywhere to

suffer for Chauvin's sins.

They want the country's police to be defunded, disarmed and replaced with social workers and EMTs or they'll protest — and riot — in the streets until they get their way.

They're so insane that now they're saying they don't want cops to intervene in knife fights like the one in Columbus that ended with a white cop shooting to death a 16-year-old Black girl who was about to stab another Black girl.

Of course, it's easy for politicians and celebrities to say we should take your cops off the street when they will always have their own armed protection.

Meanwhile, by pushing the sick narrative that white cops go to work each day hoping to kill a Black man, Democrats and the media have succeeded in smearing all white cops as racist murderers.

It's no wonder cops are quitting all over the country, from New York City to New Mexico to Los Angeles.

Crime and violence is on the rise in our cities because half the country is so stupid they believe the Democrats' lies about systemic racism in our justice system and an ongoing war on Blacks by racist cops.

If the other half of the country — the Republican half — doesn't stand up to the Democrats soon, it's going to be too late for Americans of every color.

Michael Reagan, the son of President Ronald Reagan, is a political consultant and the author of "Lessons My Father Taught Me: The Strength, Integrity and Faith of Ronald Reagan." He is the founder of the email service reagan.com and president of The Reagan Legacy Foundation.

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You can email them to letters@lagrandeobserver.com, or mail them to The Observer, c/o Phil Wright, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande OR 97850.

We will publish our last letters on Saturday, May 15. Any letters received after the deadline will not run.

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THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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