

OUR VIEW

City council is public's business

The Joseph City Council made a series of decisions last week that seem — at least for now — to be steps in the right direction after months of internal upheaval and angst that led to the censure and resignation of a councilor.

Joseph City Councilor Lisa Collier was elected to serve as the mayor pro-tem, a slot held by former city councilor Kathy Bingham, who was censured and removed from the position last month — and pulled from several committee assignments — because of controversy over her conduct as a councilor.

Bingham was also banned from contact with city employees. She later submitted her resignation, effective the day after her censure was handed down.

The council will wait until later to fill Bingham's committee assignments because the mayor, Belinda Buswell, was ill and did not attend the regular council meeting.

At first glance the entire Bingham-city council saga could appear to be much ado about nothing but, unfortunately, when it comes to elected leaders, conduct is important.

There is also the important point that elected leaders are stewards of public — read voter — dollars. How they act, what they do and how they make decisions are crucial. There was some regret by the local lawmakers that portions of the debacle became “public.”

Certainly, the months of turmoil were unseemly, but whether the issues should have been “public” is a moot point. That's because the actions of small-town city councils are the public's business. Period. Barring situations where Oregon law stipulates some level of secrecy, the council's actions are, and should be, open to the public.

That means voters have every right to know exactly what is always going on with their elected leaders. Not some of the time. Not when elected leaders believe it is convenient, but always.

We live in a democracy and that means the government's books, so to speak, are open.

We hope the council chaos will recede into the past and the elected leaders can get back to doing what is important — the people's business.

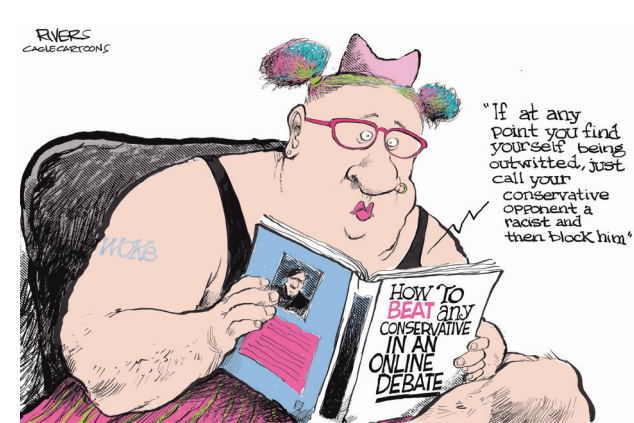
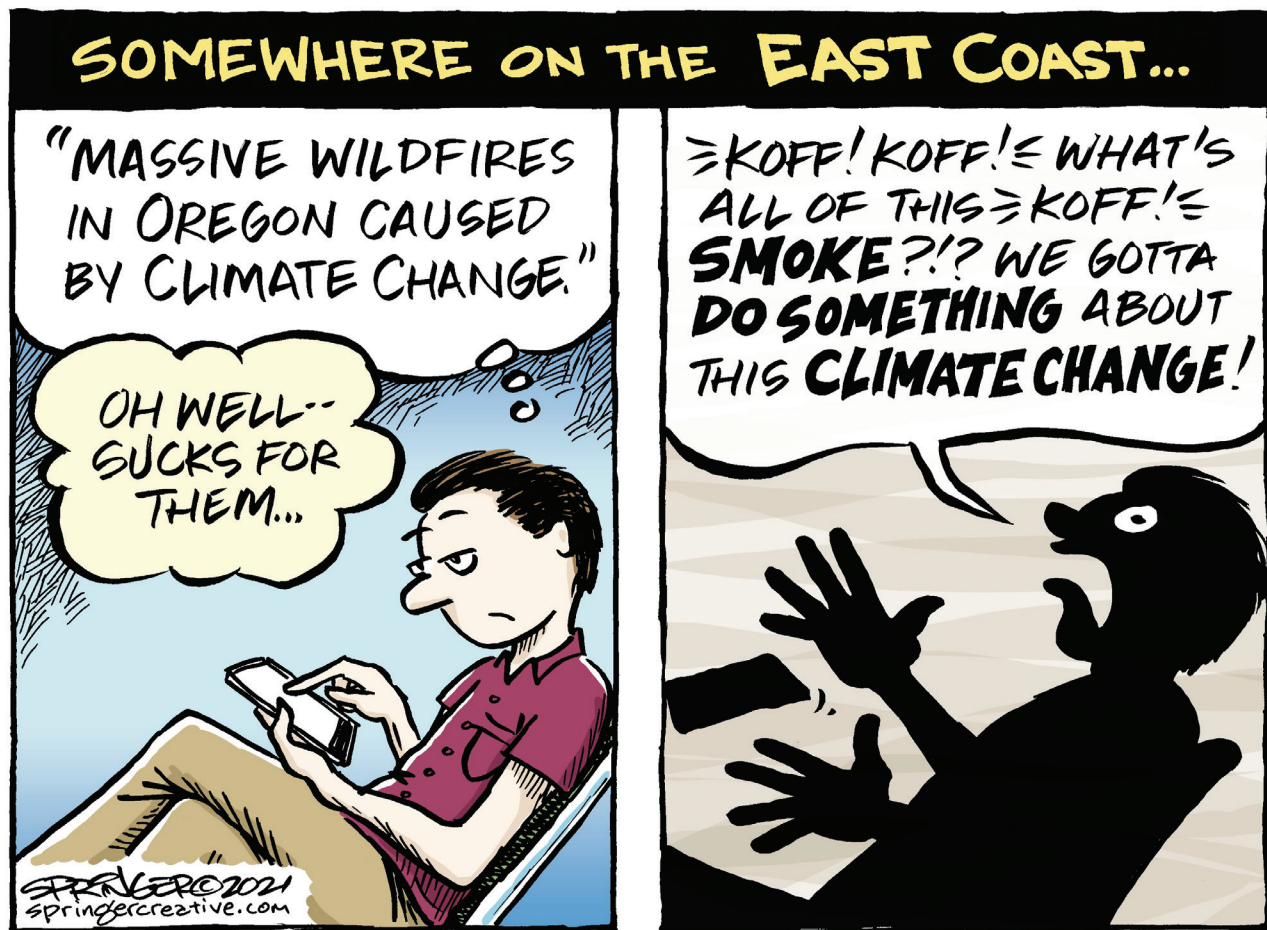
We also hope elected leaders across the region, no matter how small a role they play, understand that they work for the people. Not the other way around.

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LETTERS

EOU should reevaluate requiring vaccination

A recent story (“EOU to stay the course — for now,” July 8) reports that Eastern Oregon University is not changing its guidelines for COVID risk reduction after Gov. Kate Brown recently lifted mask restrictions. EOU is still requiring vaccination for all students, although the EOU website contains the vague statement that “accommodations will be available for medical and non-medical exemptions.”

I believe that EOU should re-examine its policies in light of current knowledge.

We know much more about COVID and its treatment than we did a year ago, and no longer have to make decisions from sparse data. It is clear that there is no significant threat of death from COVID for healthy young people. Moreover, protocols for treatment have been developed that greatly reduce symptom severity and risk of death.

The safety of the mRNA vaccines is widely touted by the media and government, but a look at the CDC's Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System shows that these statements are too sanguine. The FDA has recently issued a warning concerning possible myocarditis (heart inflammation) after vaccination, unexpectedly high in young people. The CDC has similarly recognized a correlation between the vaccine and myocarditis, albeit with low numbers.

I have reviewed several studies showing that the vaccine has no added benefit for those who have already had the disease, and there is some evidence of adverse immune responses among some who take the shot after having had COVID. One should, then, make exceptions for students who have already recovered from COVID. Moreover, there have been no true studies of the effect of these vaccines on fetal development, and VAERS reports hundreds of miscarriages after vaccination. At the very least, EOU should discourage pregnant students

from taking the job.

The Observer reports that 65% of EOU students polled were against mandatory vaccinations for COVID. I am puzzled that the administration would ignore this and seriously compromise the principle of informed consent. Requirements for well-studied vaccines (such as for measles) are reasonable, but mRNA-based treatments given under an emergency use authorization are another matter.

As a retired faculty member, I urge EOU to reevaluate these policies.

**Tom Herrmann
La Grande**

Solving labor shortage will take balanced thought, ideas

I wanted to commend The Observer editorial team, and Alex Wittwer in particular, for the thoughtful article “Help Wanted: Eastern Oregon feels pinch of labor shortage” (July 15, 2021).

I've been listening to friends in the community talk about how “government handouts” are solely responsible for the labor shortage issues — without offering facts to support their claims — so it was a pleasant surprise to see such a well-researched piece in our local paper.

I agree with Professor McConnell's comments that this is not a simple issue, and lacks a single cause. But without open and honest discussion about this issue, and applying balanced thought and ideas toward solutions that work, we'll continue to sit in our respective camps, blaming the other side for the problem. We are not going to solve these issues by repeating old tropes about handouts.

I am not ashamed to say that, as my business suffered in 2020, I took advantage of the state and government programs aimed at helping people like me. I had never before applied for unemployment, nor had I taken out loans for my business, and I initially struggled with it. However, those funds helped me stay afloat for a difficult six months last year, and I am appreciative of the fact that there

were options for me (and many, many others).

Thanks for writing about this issue, for doing it so thoroughly, and for asking the difficult questions.

**Rick LePage
La Grande**

Commissioners or post turtles?

Gov. Brown finally gave Umatilla and Union counties what they have wanted and now folks are happily involved in a COVID super-spreader event. By my count as of July 18, 24 new cases or as high as 53, which accounts for the majority of Oregon's new COVID cases.

As far as I know all county employees have been vaccinated, which must include the commissioners. Now they sit there like post turtles doing nothing to halt the spread of COVID.

Kudos to Jeremy Davis' (CEO of Grande Ronde Hospital) comment in the June 7, 2021, Observer, where he pointed out the low 36% Union County vaccination rate.

Long before COVID, surgeons were donning gloves and face masks to keep their patients from being exposed to any of the surgeons' bugs, not to protect themselves.

If our county commissioners have any respect for their supporters, they must bite the bullet and at least attempt to protect their supporters.

The most effective would be to establish some mask wearing principles, which requires all citizens to wear masks indoors, both unvaccinated and vaccinated, so the public can feel safe.

I have friends and extended family who voted for Trump, and all of them still chose to be vaccinated.

Vaccinations are not that complicated. Most all of us were vaccinated for measles, flu, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus. Many of us old codgers have also been vaccinated for shingles, too. Let's not forget.

**Stuart Croghan
La Grande**

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