

OUR VIEW

Getting involved in local government

Residents have an opportunity to get involved with their local communities because several county advisory committees have openings.

At least seven committees — from the Mount Emily Recreation Area committees to the Northeast Oregon Economic Development Board of Directors — need new members.

Interested citizens are invited to submit a completed Advisory Committee Application, which are available at the Union County Administrative Office, 1106 K Ave., La Grande.

There are few better ways to contribute to one's community than by volunteering to be part of an advisory committee. The committees play an important — some would say vital — role in the basic nuts and bolts of democratic government.

There usually isn't any stipend attached to such volunteer positions, but their importance outweighs any type of monetary compensation.

We need people to be involved in our communities now more than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic created rifts in our entire society and, by extension, separated us from our government in ways that are not healthy for the future of democracy.

We need to all be more involved in our government for a host of reasons. Our democratic government is structured in a way that demands citizen involvement or it doesn't work. Involvement doesn't mean making wide-sweeping proclamations on social media. That's usually a modern form of yelling and hoping other like-minded individuals pick up the banner and join in the screaming.

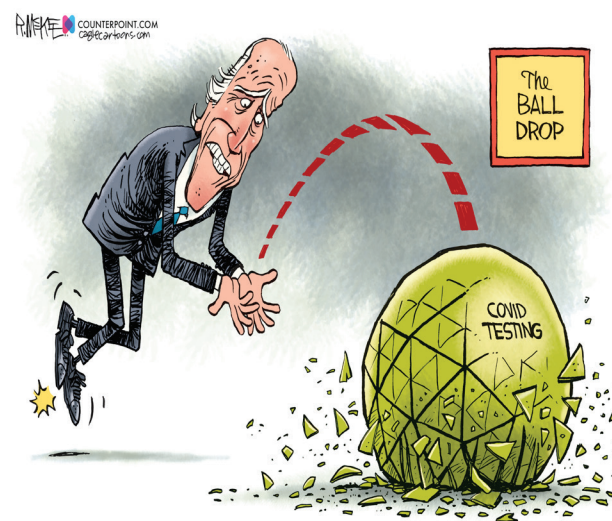
No, our democracy needs people who will volunteer their time with no ulterior motive other than to help.

Once that type of civic involvements was common but over the past few decades it has began to evaporate. There is an array of reasons for this circumstance and scholars can, and do, argue about them now.

Yet the solution remains a simple one — involvement. We are all pressed for time. All of us are busy. Yet, one day, or a few days, a month to be on a committee is not only time well spent but will enhance our democracy.

The beauty of our democracy is its very utility. That's what the founders wanted and that is how they designed our government. It doesn't work, though, if no one is involved.

So, if you have the time and the inclination, check out the open positions on local committees and make a commitment to contributing to the success of our democracy.



YOUR VIEWS

Officials wouldn't tolerate unsportsmanlike behavior on the field

For years, I have worked closely with high school kids in many areas, as a teacher, advising students in various social clubs and coaching high schoolers in basketball, softball and soccer. I have advised a large Key Club in one of the largest high schools with more 3,000 students.

It is my experience that the games are not necessarily for the kids, but for the parents themselves. Kids are participating in sports and other activities to have fun and enjoy the moment. They don't live or die because of a football game in high school. Sure, they want to win. Kids don't have the capacity to be racists — it is a learned behavior later — but the parents do, and the parents complain to the coaches and the balloon continues to get bigger.

I can tell you, sportsmanship is important. The officials are aware of sportsmanship unbecoming a participant. It is their job to recognize a problem and deal with it. I haven't heard one word from any official regarding the La Grande High School and Gladstone High School football game. There isn't a qualified official that would tolerate such behavior.

I believe the focus should be on the parents with the Gladstone team. The parents are more likely to fabricate this situation than the kids on either team. If my kid was on the La Grande Tigers team and in that game, I would be contacting my attorney, and the coaches, the parents and the administrators

would be right beside me in the courtroom.

Ron Keffer
San Jose, California

County commissioners have some explaining to do

In October, our county commissioners — Paul Anderes, Donna Beverage and Matt Scarfo — sent a letter to Sen. Ron Wyden asking him to remove all Union County waterways from the proposed federal River Democracy Act legislation.

One of the commissioners' complaints was that the required process for considering waterways for Wild and Scenic designation, requiring extensive public input, was not followed. The commissioners complained that the federal government failed to hold public meetings in communities that would be impacted by designating Union County as Wild and Scenic and failed to provide a satisfactory substitute for local meetings.

I have reviewed the agendas and minutes of all the commissioners' public meetings for the past two

years. Only in December 2021 — long after the commissioners decided to log a section of Mount Emily and had staff solicit and receive bids on their Red Apple logging project — did the commissioners bother to list the logging project on their own meeting agenda. Only after the commissioners privately discussed and decided among themselves to move forward with logging Mount Emily did they grudgingly go through the motions of soliciting public input on their decision.

It is more than a little ironic that at precisely the same time our commissioners were complaining about the lack of process or public input regarding the River Democracy Act, they themselves were actively violating the laws requiring public discussion and community input regarding their own decisions.

Maybe the commissioners would be willing to explain why they expect the federal government to adhere to the same rules that they apparently feel free to ignore.

Michael Howard
La Grande

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