

OUR VIEW

Helping bridge state's urban-rural divide

Local voters, if they get the chance, should listen in to the Union County Board of Commissioners special meeting Wednesday, Feb. 9, regarding the idea of moving several Oregon counties into Idaho.

In 2020, local voters passed a measure that compels the commissioners to hold public meetings to discuss the proposal. While residents can't attend the meeting in person because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they can participate via phone by dialing 669-900-6833 or 253-215-8782. The meeting ID number is 814 2000 6863. To access the Zoom link, go to www.union-county.org/commissioners/agendaminutes and click on the meeting's agenda.

The concept of moving Idaho's border to include at least a dozen Oregon counties is the work of Citizens for Greater Idaho, a non-profit that began its campaign several years ago. The effort reflects in a real way the urban-rural divide in Oregon and the resulting frustration with Salem regarding a range of regulations and policies. Many in Eastern Oregon don't feel their values are represented in the Oregon Legislature.

The meeting Feb. 9 won't deliver any earth-shattering new concepts. The meeting is simply a session for local lawmakers to discuss the idea and gather input.

That's where area residents come in. If they have the opportunity, they should give reasoned input during the session that reflects the will of the people.

The idea to move Idaho's border deserves to be discussed and evaluated. While its merits may be self-evident to some, the fact is the idea has a long, long way to go before it could even get off the ground.

That's because any kind of border move would not only take the approval of the Idaho and Oregon legislatures but also the U.S. Congress. That's a heavy lift.

The idea, though, is beneficial in one way. It has the potential to create some buzz and force many urban lawmakers to start paying attention to the massive gap that has been created between certain sections of the state and Salem.

This divide has been growing for decades. It is unnecessary. We are all one state, and all geared to the same broad goals.

There is no getting around the fact that there are two very different ideologies at work in Oregon, and we need to work together to narrow the philosophical gap.

The Feb. 9 meeting will be a good time for lawmakers and voters to discuss and maybe come up with solutions that don't require moving the border.



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YOUR VIEWS

Mask mandates and social distancing are costing us our future

Oregon leaders have put schools in difficult positions at the expense of our children. As an educator in Northeastern Oregon I have watched my students and own children suffer as a result of mask mandates and social distancing rules for two years.

Students are demonstrating deficits in social/emotional skills, speech and language and in academics. There are increased mental health concerns among both students and school staff. School boards are tasked with enforcing the mandates or risk losing funding. Administrators "threaten" students with the loss of extracurricular activities and more online school due to school closures if they don't comply. The teacher's union continues to conspire with Oregon leaders as they control public schools. All while masked students and staff continue to fall ill with COVID, the flu and other normal illnesses that circulate through schools.

Mask mandates and social distancing rules are costing us our future. It's time schools, staff, parents and students demand local control and that mask wearing becomes an individual choice.

Allie Scott
Union

Oregon's urban/rural divide grows daily

I am a small-but-essential business owner in a small town in Eastern Oregon. I write this letter to address the urban/rural divide in Oregon. Dissatisfaction among the residents living in Eastern and Southern Oregon is growing daily. Currently, eight counties have voted to support Greater Idaho initiatives that explore incorporating the rural areas of Oregon into the state of Idaho. Additional counties will be voting on this initiative in 2022.

Additional evidence of support was collected by SurveyUSA during a survey of Northwestern Oregon

voters. Of the voters surveyed, 81% indicated that the Oregon government needs to investigate the concerns of rural Oregon communities. Furthermore, 68% of the surveyed participants indicated affirmative support for hearings on Eastern and Southern Oregon becoming a part of the state of Idaho.

Ultimately, I am surprised that the political leaders acting as representatives for the state of Oregon — including those representing areas that have already voted in support of these measures— continue to look the other way when it comes to the issues driving the disconnect between urban and rural areas of our state. Even though the Greater Idaho movement's success would benefit the needs of rural Oregon, some call into question our values. But then those leaders are still actively neglecting the true values of our community.

I urge the readers of this letter to really think about the urban/rural divide in Oregon.

Sandie Gilson
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