

OUR VIEW

# Improved public safety building is crucial

Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen made the right decision to put ambitious plans for a new public safety building on hold, but the issue is one local elected leaders must solve sooner rather than later.

Bowen is spearheading a move to construct a new public safety building in an effort to solve overcrowding issues. Last year the Union County Board of Commissioners OK'd a plan to hire a design firm to develop a blueprint for a new public safety building.

Bowen's plan includes a public safety center that will encompass the sheriff's office, the La Grande Police Department, the Union County Jail and Union County Parole and Probation. The center could also be equipped to handle mental health issues.

Bowen's plan is, of course, ambitious, but it is the right concept. However, Bowen said recently he doesn't believe now is the right time as inflation continues to build and the cost of materials climbs.

Bowen's decision to hold off means the sheriff is conscious of the wise use of taxpayer dollars. That, in and of itself, should be a good sign to area voters. The reality is the county needs a new public safety building, and investing in public safety, while often expensive, is one of the best moves a county can make at any time.

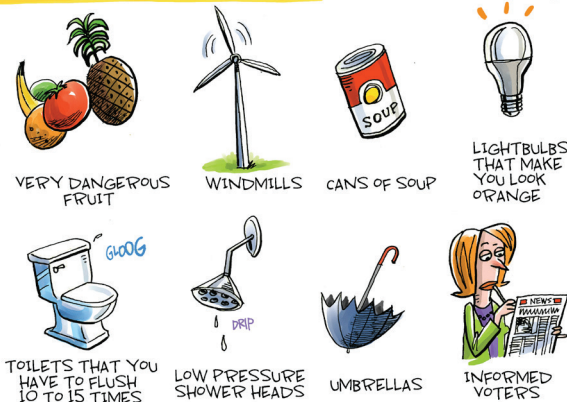
Bowen said he wants a building that can be expected to last for at least 50 years and we agree. We also agree that while Bowen's decision is wise, some type of new facility is needed. Putting off needed infrastructure investment — especially for public safety — is never a good idea.

Public safety is one of those cornerstones of a thriving community. The ability to serve and protect the community is crucial, and our police and fire personnel should be able to count on the best equipment and facilities voters can provide.

Bowen is correct in his plan to reevaluate but, in the end, a new public safety building is needed as soon as possible.



THINGS DONALD TRUMP IS AFRAID OF



YOUR VIEWS

## Wyden protects forest health through advocacy and legislation

I am grateful for Sen. Ron Wyden's for longtime support of forest health and wildfire suppression issues. We have a long list of ways he's supported Oregon forestry businesses.

The bipartisan infrastructure bill will allow businesses like Grayback Forestry to hire more firefighters at better wages.

Wyden's consistent advocacy and support over the last few years have ensured bipartisan funding for wildfire prevention and sustainable funding for the 10-year stewardship project on the Malheur National Forest, which has brought jobs back to rural counties in Eastern Oregon.

Oregon is fortunate to have Sen. Wyden in our corner protecting the health of our forests through meaningful advocacy and legislation.

Mike Wheelock  
John Day

## Let's get our priorities straight

Ukrainians are being killed; their homes, farms, businesses are being obliterated by Putin. In the U.S., even if we were not appalled by this moral outrage, we would be disgruntled that this war affects our cost of living. We want to blame someone for making us pay more for gasoline to get to work or to vacation.

The one to blame for this situation is the president of Russia, not the president of the United States. Putin sent his military forces to invade Ukraine for no other reason than to gain power over more territory.

There is every reason to believe that taking over Ukraine would not satisfy his greed for power, and if he is successful, he will con-

tinue overtaking other countries. The whole world is in danger of economic destruction and worse because of this man.

President Biden is bringing together the countries of the free world in opposition to Russia's threat. It makes sense that the citizens of the United States would support freedom and democracy on the planet. It does not make sense for people of good will to ignore the overwhelming destruction and loss of life when Russia is threatening the entire world. It does not make sense to condemn the U.S. leader who is championing freedom. Nor does it make sense to approve of Putin and those who support him.

In the face of domination by greedy oligarchs and the possibility of losing our Constitution and our freedom, it seems so petty to be obsessed with concerns like being asked to wear masks in order to help stop the pandemic, or require others to live their lives a certain way, or move a state boundary, or accept a majority vote, or pay taxes that allow us to have the conveniences our society demands.

If humankind survives the present threat of authoritarian control and nuclear disaster, we will be able to work on solving other threatening issues, like having air to breathe, clean water to drink and sustaining life on Earth.

Let's get our priorities straight and stop whining about lesser things.

Evelyn Swart  
Joseph

## Maintaining separate VA health care system is costly and redundant

The article "VA plan calls for big changes" (The Observer, April 23, 2022) states: "The VA in mid-March released a report from the

Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission to modernize and realign the VA health care system. The AIR Commission listed among its recommendations that the Walla Walla VA reduce services to primary care and mental health, which could result in the facility being reclassified as a community-based outpatient clinic, known better as a CBOC, rather than a full medical center."

The article says Sen. Ron Wyden "plans to personally visit the Department of Veterans Affairs regarding recommendations to reduce services to the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center in Walla Walla."

I am a veteran, and I am also a member of the Veterans Advisory Council in Union County. And although I appreciate Sen. Wyden's desire to protect the veterans health care system, there are two reasons why I am opposed to the veterans health care system being separate from the civilian health care system: (1) The VA doesn't have any medical services that the civilian medical world doesn't have. (2) The current VA health care system doesn't include all veterans because a veteran's income has to fall below a certain level for him or her to qualify, even though we all served.

Therefore, the VA modernization should be to give all veterans an identification card (similar to an insurance card); give the veterans a list of what the VA will pay for; and allow veterans to go to any health care facility, just like civilians do for any other insurance coverage.

To maintain a separate VA health care entity from the civilian health care system costs the taxpayers too much money, and is redundantly redundant.

Lucy Gilchrist Lauman  
Summerville

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Phone: 541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

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STAFF

Regional publisher ..... Karrine Brogotti Home delivery adviser..... Amanda Turkington  
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