

# Opinion

— EDITORIAL —

## 5J needs to clarify their clarification

We were excited by the 5J Board of Directors' decision to hire Mark Witty of John Day as our school district's new Superintendent.

As Grant County is just a hop, skip and a jump from our own county line, so many of our readers in south Baker County know him and his family. Not only do Witty's credentials look good on paper, but we've heard nothing but positive from those who do know him.

5J needs a breath of fresh air, and we're certain the vast majority of parents, teachers, staff and students are looking forward to his arrival at the end of June. We know we are, and offer him a warm welcome.

However, on the heels of that positive decision, the 5J Board turned around and made a second decision that has puzzled almost everyone.

The Board met with one singular duty: hire a new Superintendent. They had three finalists. One dropped out. Yet somehow, the other remaining finalist, Betty Palme, was also offered a new position at the conclusion of that meeting.

As far as we recall, an opening for an "Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction" position was never announced or advertised—and therefore no candidates applied. So Palmer was offered a position that didn't exist prior to that evening, and for which she didn't apply.

Why?

Then comes the claim on a Facebook post from Board Director Rich McKim that "appearances can be deceiving" and the insinuation that Palmer's position in reality, won't be a new one. This post was quickly followed by a statement from Chair Andrew Bryan that Palmer's promotion was intended to replace that of retiring Curriculum Director Anthony Johnson.

We say if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck—well ...

Think about it. We have a position with a new title that has never been used before. A new salary. A new job description. A new amalgamation of duties, those of the Superintendent and Curriculum Director, never before outlined in one position. But that's not new? Outgoing Superin-

tendent Wegener made the statement that he wouldn't call the position "new"—just "different."

Also in Bryan's statement was the announcement that Palmer would assume her new duties "immediately" and Wegener would be relegated to "legislative" work, meaning he will no longer perform the usual day-to-day duties of his position at the 5J office. He will continue this way until the end of June.

Anthony Johnson's retirement, if it goes forward, will also not occur until June 30.

This leaves a four-month period of time with payroll and benefits expense duplication in Administration. This decision also leaves an immediate vacancy in the Principal position at South Baker Intermediate for the rest of the school year. How will those duties be handled?

In July of this year, if all this shakes out as announced, 5J will then have one Superintendent: Mark Witty. The existing Curriculum Director position will be gone, and in its place the slightly amped up "different" Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction position, which, with a full-time Superintendent in place in a district this size, has the distinct potential for superfluit .

Will the title and duties of this position then be adjusted July 1?

We certainly hope the salary, which has yet to be announced, is not also slightly amped up.

We're not in favor of any administration spending increases when so often "we don't have the money" is heard regarding decisions that affect our children's educations.

If there was some urgent situation unfolding behind the scenes at 5J that required Wegener to be shifted to "legislative" work, or if Johnson was leaving immediately, then maybe these decisions would make more sense. As it stands, the public is left wanting a little more explanation—even after the explanation came.

We would have preferred seeing the Board simply hire Witty. Then, when Johnson retires, it would have been nice to see his former position advertised as it was, with multiple qualified applicants considered. If that position remained vacant for a time while a proper hiring process was conducted, we're pretty sure the district wouldn't collapse like a house of cards.

It would have also been more considerate for incoming Superintendent Witty to have been involved in that process so that he could help shape the positions and staff he'll be responsible for directly supervising.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

## — LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

### Supporting Baker County

To the Editor:

Sometimes the numbers are everything. On February 5, the Baker Board of Commissioners voted to reject the Wallowa-Whitman proposal by a unanimous vote of 3-0. As I say, sometimes the numbers just add up, and they're "everything." But in this case, and little more than seven days after the Baker Commissioners acted, the Regional Forester cited "concerns expressed by some county commissioners" and said the Forest Service would not at present pursue the MOU. In this case, I

suspect the courage of these three (Commissioners Harvey, Bennett, and Kerns) to stand up early and strongly was more important than waiting to see what the numbers, dates, and head counts would say.

I want to commend these leaders for doing something that speaks well of why county government is still so close to what makes American government great. Standing up and actually leading.

**Jack Howard**  
Union County Commissioner

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— GUEST OPINION —

## Taxes, fees, regulations, corruption—and that's only the first month

By Rep. Greg Barreto

Okay, it's been one month since I've been in Salem in this new vocation. It has been fast and furious. The veteran legislators are saying that sessions have never started this fast and that the smell of blood in the water is leading to a feeding frenzy. I have nothing to compare it to. For me, it feels like I am settling into a workable schedule as I get more familiar with the process. Days are full and as we were warned in our orientation to the legislature, it will take everything that you are willing to give it; and more if you allow, so hold back some for family and other important areas in your life or it will consume you. It seems that one never has the necessary time to review the bills as thoroughly as you would like to before committee. It is comforting though that my fellow freshman comrades all feel the same way.

Week two ended with Governor Kitzhaber's resignation. There were mixed feelings that surrounded the issue as to the process regarding the many allegations. The Republican Caucus did not throw any stones or make any accusations. The press and the Democratic Caucus took the lead from what had already been admitted to by Cylvia Hayes. The Governor's resignation was finally pressed by his own party when the request by the Governor to destroy all of his personal emails was made public by the press.

Week three had several big events. The Senate passed SB-324, which is the low carbon fuels standard even though they still don't have the technology to make it work and don't know what the process will add to a gallon of fuel.

Estimates have been listed at between .06 cents to \$1.20 a gallon.

What appears to be insanity to any normal person was voted on and passed on a partisan vote, apart from Betsy Johnson, the lone Democrat who stands like a stone wall. The bill is also tied to the Governor and



Submitted Photo

Rep. Greg Barreto of Cove represents House District 58.

Cylvia Hayes in that she was paid as a consultant by environmental groups who were pushing for this specific standard. On top of that, the bill will have the most adverse effect on low income and rural Oregonians as well as affecting business transportation in the state.

SB-324 has now come over to the House, and was heard in committee during week five. It is on a fast track. Right now would be a good time to write every Democratic Representative and let them know how you feel.

On Wednesday the 18th, Governor Kate Brown was sworn in during a short inauguration under solemn circumstances. Her speech consisted of several comments on building back the public's trust in government. All the kings' horses and all the kings' men may not be able to fix the breach in this dam.

On last Friday, the House voted on the Motor/Voter bill HB-2177. This was Kate Brown's signature bill and it passed on party line vote after an hour of floor speeches "to the bill." It will mean that when someone gets a drivers license, they will automatically get signed up to vote. If they are sixteen, they will go in the system and be sent a ballot when they turn 18. This will cost the counties thousands and thousands of dollars in postage and extra manpower. It's a bad bill. I would love to see everyone educated and eager to vote and exercise their constitutional right. But, if people want to vote and exercise that privilege, it's really pretty easy. We don't need to incur extra costs to the counties by sending out ballots to people who don't want them.

Thank you for your patience with me as I settle into this new job. I hope to be in constant touch with you through regular emails, but if you would like to contact me immediately, please do so at Rep.GregBarreto@state.or.us.

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