

Opinion / Local

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

Nonpartisan is bad for Baker County

To the Editor:
The effort to change Baker County to nonpartisan voting of County Commissioners brings concern to me as a citizen of Oregon. I have spent time as a City Councilor and Candidate for County Commissioner in Benton County. I have watched the patterns throughout Oregon with great concern.

I have personally seen the downfall of the County Commissioners change from partisan to nonpartisan. Polk County had two Republicans and one Democrat with great success. The movement to change to nonpartisan at Polk County has created an undertaking to stop Commissioners from making sound financial decisions. There was a close election for a first-term Commissioner who made the decision to allow an operating levy for the Sheriff's Department to go to ballot. An organized group changed the election by building their strength in public visibility against the needs of the County and the Freshman Commissioner.

Baker County has a history of Commissioner resignations. Specifically, Rod McCullough, Ben Dunleavy, Paul York, and Dr. Carl Stiff. We do not need the Governor appointing County Commissioners if one or two were to resign. It is important to strengthen the two-party system keeping the people involved in the process.

We are currently suffering from the efforts of special interest groups on both sides spending a great amount of energy to make it less about the people and more about their agenda.

*Jerry Jackson
Philomath*

Nonpartisan change has been horrible in Josephine County

To the Editor:
Dear Baker County Residents, I urge you to vote NO in switching to a non-Partisan Commissioner office on Measure 1-63.

In the early 90s Josephine County switched to nonpartisan and we have had nothing but trouble ever since.

Josephine County has made worldwide news due to the lack of funding of the O&C funds and other overall ramifications for nonpartisan Commissioners. It may seem like a great idea, but our County has been suffering ever since it has been adopted.

We have lost almost all of our Sheriff's Department and those Union employees. A better system is for each party (there are more than two) to put forth their best candidate, and hold them accountable.

Non-Affiliated candidates can still run.

The way our current system is set up we have on average eight people running for one position, so when two positions are open we could have a field of sixteen candidates, four or five who run every single time and only receive a small percentage of the votes.

With so many candidates running it often discourages good people from running and those who do run have the votes scattered throughout all the candidates—and this has been know to take away from the good candidates.

With the lack of good candidates, we have had two Commissioners recalled and our current board with an overreaching power that has cost the County in a referendum vote to overturn the ordinances, because they would not listen to the people.

Many residents in the our County attempted to activate another recall, which ended up costing the County even more money.

As you can see that most of this causes discontent with Commissioners who are not held accountable. I urge you to think twice and vote no for nonpartisan commissioners offices as you can see it is a bad idea. Please vote no on Measure 1-63.

*Keith Trahern
Grants Pass*

1-63 is dirty politics

To the Editor:
Please vote NO on Measure 1 - 63. My friends, please don't vote to change the positions of county commissioners from partisan to nonpartisan.

I am voting no on this measure for many reasons. I can see no benefit to anyone for a change. It has no effect on anyone's right to vote. What I believe passing this measure would do is make it harder for us in the outlying districts to learn who the candidates for commissioner are, what they stand for, and leave us short of a source of valuable information.

I consider one's political leanings as a measure to judge what we can expect of anyone, to decide whether to vote for them or not.

I believe that passing this measure would result in many people giving up trying to vote and losing out—the opposite of what the backers of this measure claim.

In my view, it is wrong to tell anyone that people have not been able to vote when they have. This is dirty politics.

The right thing to do is to vote no on Measure 1-63.

*Carmelita Holland
Richland*

Irvine appointed to 5J School Board

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She has served twice on the Baker 5J Budget Board and has two young children, kindergarten and pre-school age, attending classes in the Baker School District.

Board Chairman Andrew Bryan, who also runs in the May 19 special election, prefers working with a full roster of board members, he said. The appointment of Irvine fills all spots on the five-member school board. Bryan and fellow board members are now concentrating on filling all seats on the District's budget board.

The 5J Budget Board meets on May 12 at 5 p.m. to discuss the budget for the July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016 fiscal year.

Oregon State legislators have settled on a final budget number to fund schools for the next two years.

The total biennium budget for Oregon schools is pegged at \$7.255 billion, according to Doug Dalton, 5J Financial Director.

Each student represents a \$7,000 payment to school districts. One large funding change coming next years includes the addition of full-time kindergarten.

The increase in funding for full day kindergarten should cover the costs of additional personnel and implementation of the expanded program, according to Dalton.

The Baker School District budget for 2015-2016 becomes available to the public on May 8. Copies may be obtained at the district office, 2090 Fourth Street, Baker City.

At 1,676 students attending classes this April in the Baker School District, enrollment has remained at about the same numbers as this time last year. September marked the high point in enrollment this year with 1,721 students. Brooklyn continues bursting at the seams with 471 students and expects erection of another modular classroom this summer; Baker High School has 475 students; Baker Web Academy teaches 583 enrolled students from across the state; Baker All-Prep



Brian Addison / The Baker County Press

Newly hired 5J superintendent Mark Witty meets with school board member Melissa Irvine, executive secretary Norma Nemeck, board member Chris Hawkins, and board member Kevin Cassidy before the April 21, school board meeting.

and Early College program has 180 enrolled; South Baker has 316 students; Baker Middle School has 239 students; Eagle Cap with 31 students; and, Elkhorn Adolescent with 11 enrolled.

Frisbee Golf may be coming to the Baker Sports Complex.

A new attraction may soon be available to Baker City residents. Baker High School student Dani McCauley gave the school board members a detailed description of a plan to plot a nine-hole Frisbee Golf Course within the Baker Sports Complex.

McCauley said the Ford Family Foundation has offered a \$5,000 matching grant and the total budget for the project equals \$12,000. The course would be owned and maintained by the Baker School District, said McCauley. The district's finance department has done preliminary work on the proposed project. McCauley asked the school district to act as fiscal sponsor on the project and asked for permission to move forward. While no final vote was made, McCauley received encouragement to continue putting together details such as hours of operations and conferring on the project with community partners.

Students of the Month.

Promise of Baker intermediate student of the month was awarded to South Baker sixth grader

Gabe Gambleton. Gabe was commended for his focus on academics, demonstrating applicable skills that he has learned, and for his "gentle, helpful attitude".

Promise of Baker primary student of the month was awarded to Henry Hester, a first grader at Brooklyn. Henry was noted for his honesty, politeness, and great sense of humor.

No shortage of Superintendents.

The April 21 school board meeting may have had more superintendents in attendance than normal. And, all three attending are either working for the district or preparing to take the helm.

The school board meeting was led by interim superintendent Betty Palmer. Superintendent Walt Wegener, who retires from the job on June 30, attended the meeting but sat in the public seating section. Newly hired superintendent Mark Witty began the school board meeting with a presentation of his participation in the China Exchange educational program and his recent trip to China.

Witty has been hired as the 5J District's next Superintendent and begins in that role on July 1, 2015. When Witty takes over the top job Palmer then assumes the newly created position Assistant Superintendent/Director of Curriculum.

OTEC places first in safety award contest

Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative placed 1st in the 2015 Northwest Public Power Administration (NWPPA) Safety Awards contest.

General Manager Werner Buehler was delighted with the notification received earlier last month. "This is a big deal for us. While this is not the first time OTEC has received this honor, it acknowledges our continued perseverance and commitment to safety. It is priority number one."

In 2014, between the 150,000-500,000 hour category, OTEC had no lost time accidents. This paired with the lack of injury cases is what put OTEC in the lead for the recognition.

"Utilities from across the Pacific Northwest,

Alaska and California compete in this annual safety contest and it is a great honor to be recognized," said Buehler.

The awards ceremony was held at NWPPA's Engineering and Operations Conference on April 9, 2015 at the Tacoma Convention Center in Washington and a small representative group from OTEC traveled to accept the award.

"The timing couldn't have been more perfect as we are coming up on National Electric Safety Month in May," Buehler said.

"While safety for our employees, co-workers and members is a top priority year-round, Electrical Safety Month is a time to acknowledge the impor-

tance of safety excellence. Our safety record is well above average and that is attributed to the culture of care we have for one another and a healthy respect we have for the incredible power of electricity. If there is any metric that we as a cooperative want to succeed at it is no lost time accidents."

Additional benefits are the savings in the form of lower insurance premiums for employees and remaining in good standing with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

"This is just another way we are continually fulfilling the vision of our member-owned cooperative," Buehler said. "To deliver safe, reliable and affordable energy. It's what we are all about."



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