

Opinion / Local

Reminder note to readers

My apologies in advance, but due to family obligations, the June 16, 2017, issue of *The Baker County Press* will not be released on that Friday as usual.

I realize other weeklies occasionally skip a print run, but that practice is something I have always tried to avoid.

During that week I will be in Boise at

St. Luke's Children's Hospital while my five-year-old daughter has surgery, then caring for her afterward. Needless to say, my mind won't be on books or newspapers that week.

BCP reporters will continue to cover stories from that week—and I'll run them together with articles the following week in what is likely to be a larger paper, combining two issues.

To help make up for the inconvenience, I'm also bumping the subscription end-dates for subscribers back a week.

Thanks for your understanding. I'll print a reminder closer to June 16 (which would be this printing) so no one is caught off guard.

— Kerry McQuisten, Editor

— GUEST OPINION —

On the education budget

By Rep. Greg Barreto

This week, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means approved an \$8.2 billion K-12 education budget for the 2017-2019 budget cycle. The budget, which represents an 11.2% increase over the K-12 allocation in the 2015-2017 biennium, is the largest education budget in state history. Yet even with the increased funding, few are celebrating.

We had previously watched as this budget painfully clawed its way out of the Joint Ways and Means Education Subcommittee late last week. There were three members of the subcommittee who did not agree with the appropriation: Rep. Parrish (R-Tualatin/West Linn), Rep. Whisnant (R-Sunriver), and Rep. Hernandez (D-Portland). Rep. Hernandez's opposition meant that the budget did not have the necessary votes to pass out of committee. However, instead of going back to the drawing board to find a solution we could agree on, majority party Democrats simply replaced Rep. Hernandez with Rep. Nathanson (D-Eugene), who voted in his place to pass the bill out of committee.

What's interesting about this committee vote, aside from the obvious political maneuvering from the Democratic majority, was that the "no" votes were bipartisan. This is because education is not a partisan issue. The problem isn't that some are okay with being 47th worst in graduation rates, and some are not. There is not a single legislator in the Capitol who disagrees with the notion that our education system should be functioning for best results, and that our students and our teachers deserve better than what they are being given. We all want the best for our students and teachers, but the current system simply is not working.

Recently, The Oregonian/OregonLive published an editorial that touched on a few important elements in the conversation around education that deserve to be highlighted. Chief among them was the overwhelming and misplaced assignment of blame. Rep. Smith Warner (D-Portland) argued that Oregon students will receive a year's less instruction than will Washington students. The feeling of frustration, when we have a booming economy and not enough money to meet the desires of the state, lead her to the conclusion that we have a "broken revenue structure." As the editorial rightfully pointed out, the National Education Association recently found that Oregon currently outspends Washington by about \$2,000 per student. It is also worth mentioning that Oregon is 6th highest in the nation on overall per capita spending at \$9,245. The editorial goes on to ask: how do we use that money differently so students get the education Oregonians are paying for? This is a great question.

Rep. Smith Warner (D) also pointed to the school boards, asserting that they are charged with how the money is spent, rather than the Legislature, and that Oregonians should be looking to them instead. Rep. Parrish then reminded the committee that state interference often prohibits any real action from school boards to save money or to be more effective with their resources.

Her statement echoed a comment from a previous hearing this year in the Higher Education Committee. Rep.

Whisnant asked Oregon State University President, Ed Ray, what the higher education presidents are doing to address major cost drivers. President Ray answered, "We don't control the cost drivers. 70% of our costs are people. When we were allowed to have our own individual boards we were told, 'You will stay in PEBB, you will stay in PERS, and you will negotiate as a group with SEIU.' We had no latitude to do anything about what are, in fact, the main cost drivers that we face." I think this statement by President Ed Ray speaks volumes as to who really runs the state. When you follow the money trail, the public unions are the largest contributors to the Democratic Party campaign funds.

What we are seeing across the board in K-12 education, higher education, business, and beyond, are ever increasing mandates from the legislature on how they are to operate. This is complicated by an out of control public employee pension system that is going to continue to force massive cost increases well into the future. To put the blame anywhere but at the feet of the Legislature is irresponsible and unacceptable. We have been operating our state on ideals without any real plan on how to pay for them, fundamentally missing or, more likely, entirely ignoring that these things come at a massive cost. Without proper planning and budgeting, Oregonians will continue to pay a steep price. It would seem, with an over 30% increase in state revenue over the last six years that we should not be short on money. Yet, year after good year, rather than saving excess revenue, Democrats used it to create new programs and grow our bloated bureaucracy. This outcome was predicted when we first started outpacing our revenue with our spending, and we did nothing. We are simply watching it come to fruition today. Again, I will go back to Senator Devlin's comment at the beginning of the session when he said, "The scope of what we think we should provide we find we cannot afford." When it comes to the budget, the buck stops with lawmakers.

Investing in education is critical to the future of our state. More allocation of dollars to education would be well worth it if we could count on that money getting to the classrooms, to the students, and to provide better outcomes. But, when we outspend nearby states by thousands per student, continue to cut programs and teachers, and then lag sorely behind in graduation rates, it does not logically follow that pumping more money into the same system is the answer.

We won't feel any better in the next biennium if we produce the same outcome and continue in our search for more revenue because we didn't manage the taxpayers' dollars well.



Submitted Photo

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County hears Lime, watershed update



Todd Arriola / The Baker County Press

Christo Morris, Executive Director of PBWC.

BY TODD ARRIOLA
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The Baker County Board of Commissioners held its first, regular session of the month, on Wednesday, June 7, 2017, 9 a.m., in the Commission Chambers of the Baker County Courthouse, which included a Powder Basin Watershed Council update, from Executive Director Christo Morris.

Present from the Board were Chair Bill Harvey, Commissioner Bruce Nichols, and Executive Assistant Heidi Martin. Commissioner Mark Bennett was absent.

Attendance also included Baker County Planning Director Holly Kerns, Baker County Planner Carson Quam, Baker County District Attorney Matt Shirtcliff, Baker County Juvenile Court Supervisor, Baker County Road Master Jeff Smith, Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, Baker County IT Director Bill Lee, Ed Hardt, Ken Anderson, Randy Joseph, and Lori and Rich Daniels.

The session was called to order, and Harvey provided the Invocation, and led in the Pledge of Allegiance. The agenda was adopted, with one addition, with a motion from Nichols, and a second from Harvey. Citizen Participation

included Joseph, who discussed two issues, the first of which is a concern of his regarding a road access gate to a wind turbine site in the area of Lime. He said, "That gate's always been problematic; it's in a bad spot, but, it's never really been used..." He asked about anyone expressing any interest in leasing property there, which would mean the gate would be kept closed if cattle were around, and Harvey said that only Ed Trindle had spoken to the County about that interest.

Joseph's second issue is a concern of his with the Planning Department-related fees, according to the County Fee Schedule, and that there had been some complicated Plan Amendments and Conditional Use Permits, requiring more time, staff work, and funds. "There's no mechanism for the County to recoup that..." He said that the budget and time constraints limit what the Planning Department can accomplish, and he suggested the County investigate a Fee Schedule that could "...keep the County neutral."

The minutes from the Tuesday, May 30, 2017 special session were approved, with a couple of noted changes, with a motion from Harvey, and a

second from Nichols.

A public hearing was held in the matter of Ordinance No. 2017-03, Adopting An Ordinance Authorizing The Operation Of All-Terrain Vehicles On County Roadways, which included Smith, who explained some details in the ordinance. These include two changes, regarding seat belts (they're required if they were installed by the manufacturer, or installed later), and Attachment A, which lists roadways closed to ATVs (there's an exception for County commercial use, and agricultural use). These closed roadways include Hughes Lane, Cedar Street, Pocahontas Road, West Campbell Loop, Wingville Lane, Chandler Lane, and Anthony Lakes Highway. The ordinance was adopted, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Nichols.

Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) No. 148536, between Shirtcliff, and the Oregon State Department of Human Services (DHS) for the services of local court case handling, was approved, with a motion from Harvey, and a second from Nichols.

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Letter to the Editor Policy: The Baker County Press reserves the right not to publish letters containing factual falsehoods or incoherent narrative. Letters promoting or detracting from specific for-profit businesses will not be published. Word limit is 375 words per letter. Letters are limited to one every other week per author. Letters should be submitted to Editor@TheBakerCountyPress.com.

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Published weekly every Friday.
Subscription rates per year are \$29.95 all areas, e-mail delivery. \$39.95 print issue, home delivery, Baker City city limits only. \$49.95 print issue, mail delivery, outside Baker City city limits only.
Payment in advance.

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