

# Opinion / Politics

— EDITORIAL —

## The rat hole: part deux

If we were disappointed before with the Baker County Commissioners' decision to renew the contract for economic developer Gregory Smith and Company, LLC with a raise—for a total of \$108,000 this coming year—we were equally disappointed with their justification of that unanimous vote given during the next session.

The criticism being expressed community-wide over this decision is justified. Having come from a business development and marketing background at an executive level for larger corporations prior to entering the publishing industry, our editor is perhaps looking at this area of expertise in a far different way than our Commissioners.

You see, media relations goes hand in hand with business development and marketing, where even the greenest rookie is aware of a great little tactic involving deflection and distraction. This, amusingly enough, is the defense we heard given by Smith at this last meeting. To paraphrase, "I don't really have a performance problem—it's more of a communications problem. We just aren't able to great across all the great things we've done." The idea, using this media relations 101 tactic, is to take the attention off the fatal flaw (that of failing to bring in an adequate Return on Investment or ROI) and instead shift the focus onto correcting something more innocuous such as communication style.

Then, Smith laid that communication issue off on the need for confidentiality. Granted, his office *should* prize that quality. However, we've heard promises of great things just down the pike—things

that were too secret to disclose just yet—since 2011. Very little came to fruition.

Maintaining a web site does not cut it. Designing marketing materials does not cut it. In private industry, these are but two of the many tasks typically inside the scope of work assigned to a \$40K/year marketing employee in larger corporations—or personally done at the director level in smaller offices without layers of employees beneath. Having an assistant in an office here rather than the actual business development director here full-time also does not cut it. Pulling stats from the local employment office does not cut it—anyone can do this.

Contracting Smith as a middleman to schedule Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) trainings, which are already available free of charge, or directing potential local entrepreneurs toward loans or grants is also not a great ROI. Northeast Oregon Economic Development District and the loan officers at local banks provide these services for free—no middleman required.

Assigning Smith to roles in ongoing construction tasks is not business development. Contract with one of our local real estate agents to help rent those spaces out.

Bragging that one's office is "responsive" to every call it receives is not business development. Gifted marketers are not reactionary. Rather, they exist full-time emailing, calling and visiting with the singular relentless focus of inking contracts and selling their product. In our case, that product is Baker County.

Smith recently pointed out that maybe the County's expectations of him aren't clear enough. We agree. Let's make it simple: Bring in one, just one, out-of-area company into the County per year employing 20 people or more, a lead that Smith finds himself—and he's proven his worth. Maybe something grand—like a Cabela's—or even something lower key—such as Grocery Outlet—would be just fine by us.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

### Your voice needed re: B2H

To the Editor:

Monday, Aug. 14, 5 p.m, another 'last input' meeting will be at the courthouse concerning the proposed Boardman to Hemingway high voltage powerline. This Idaho Power boondoggle has been on the table for over ten years now, still threatening our county. We never were given a vote whether we wanted it or not and now we are being forced to choose between the lesser of evils: The final route through the county that, no matter where it goes is going to harm the entire county. Remember, Idaho Power is a for-profit company worth multi-million dollars earning healthy profits annually. The powers who run it don't live here nor do they care if a powerline runs through our front yards as they don't see it or deal with its consequences, like: Whether the lines are routed behind or in front of the BLM's Interpretive center it is an act of arrogance to even consider desecrating this view scape. It is a defilement of history and our heritage. Why did the BLM spend 16 million on the center then destroy its purpose by bisected this unique window into the past with pylons and wires?

Electric magnetic fields are not allowed as a complaint against powerlines yet damning evidence reveal powerlines emit harmful radiation to both humans and livestock.

There is little in Idaho Power's plan to check the spread of weeds. Building and maintenance will spread weeds like wildfire—just what an agricultural-based community needs.

Who pays for forest fires started by shorts or line breakage?

Idaho Power gives diddly back to the community.

Who pays for road damage caused by heavy equipment building and maintaining this project? And dust abatement? County Commissioners' comments are due to ODOE by Sept. 1. There are concerns Idaho Power has only paid lip service to so far—(Remember the contractual fish ladders that Idaho Power

were supposed to build at their dams?). Your concerns are important for the health of this community. Baker is a unique and special place to live: If you don't want this invasive development then please, it is easy, attend this meeting. Voice your concerns.

Whit Deschner  
Baker City

### Economic Development contract needs cancelled

To the Editor:

Representative Greg Smith should have disclosed to the Baker County Commissioners and the EDC board that he was a **full-time** employee of the Columbia Development Authority when his contract came up for renewal.

One wonders how a State Representative even in off-session, can work 40 hours a week for CDA and also fairly market Baker County, Malheur County and Umatilla County for business development in all three counties.

I have not heard of any success Mr. Smith has brought into Baker County. Of course he also represents a county in his district, in addition to Baker and Malheur Counties. How can he fairly represent any of the counties?

It was just announced Mr. Smith was successful at getting a \$7 million grant for Columbia Development Authority. Baker County is truly the stepchild of Mr. Smith.

I find it deceptive this important information was not shared with the Board and the Commissioners during contract negotiations. It also is completely inappropriate that Commissioner Nichols to meet for lunch with Smith prior to the vote to renew the contract. Seems like collusion to me.

This contract needs to be cancelled. The County Commissioners hold the purse strings on financial business and they need to protect Baker County from back door deals such as this.

Kasey Wright  
Halfway

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## Eastern Oregon will not get disaster aid for last winter's damages

Governor Kate Brown's request for federal disaster aid was approved for state, tribal, and local recovery efforts in four Oregon counties affected by the January 2017 severe winter storms.

While the storms impacted 12 Oregon counties this past year, including several in eastern Oregon, only Columbia, Deschutes, Hood River, and Josephine Counties are eligible for public assistance for emergency work and the repair or replacement of disaster-damaged facilities, as well as hazard mitigation funds. Hazard mitigation funds are available statewide; however, priority is given to counties impacted by the recent storms.

Hazard mitigation is assistance for actions taken to prevent or reduce long-term risk to life and property from natural hazards, and up to 75 percent in matching federal aid will be available for costs

incurred in recovering from storm damage.

"While it's disappointing Oregon did not get the full level of assistance we requested, I'll continue working with our federal partners to ensure the available aid supports state and local recovery efforts in areas of most need," said Governor Brown. "Our communities are resilient, and with support from the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, Department of Agriculture, and other state agencies, these communities are on the road to recovery. I appreciate the commitment of our state agencies to continue assisting local partners and thank the Office of Emergency Management for working to secure additional federal recovery funding."

Governor Brown declared a state of emergency in January due to the dangerous levels of snow accumulating and flood-

ing risks in the region. Record-breaking snow from consecutive winter storms crushed crop storage facilities, damaged homes and infrastructure, and negatively impacted the local economy.

Although a Presidential disaster declaration to assist with recovery was requested on March 8, 2017, the request was denied. However, the state appealed the denial on June 9.

In addition to continuing to pursue federal assistance, Governor Brown convened legislative leaders earlier this year and directed state agency directors to continue to explore options to streamline recovery and support rebuilding efforts.

The Governor also issued an executive order to accelerate DEQ-approved demolition and removal plans of buildings collapsed as result of Malheur County's severe winter storms.

## Zinke releases statement on sage-grouse report

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke received a report from the Department of the Interior Sage-Grouse Review Team (DOI Team) regarding possible plan and policy modifications to complement state efforts to improve Greater Sage-Grouse conservation and economic development on public lands.

The report is the final product required by Secretarial Order 3353 "Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation and Cooperation with Western States" issued June 7, 2017.

The report, the cover letter from the Bureau of Land Management to the Secretary, and the memo from Secretary Zinke to Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt are available at <https://on.doi.gov/2vGwuaif>.

"I'm thankful to all of the DOI team members as

well as the bureau staff and the state partners who put in the hard work and time to develop this report," said Secretary Zinke. "I've directed Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt to begin implementation of the recommendations and to direct the Bureau of Land Management, in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and other offices in the Department, to immediately follow through on the short- and long-term recommendations."

In addition to officials from the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, and the U.S. Forest Service, representatives from 11 states that have sage-grouse habitat were involved in the creation of the document.

Secretarial Order 3353 aims to improve sage-grouse conservation and to strengthen communication and collaboration between states and the federal government.

Together, the federal government and the states are working to conserve and protect sage-grouse and their habitat while also ensuring conservation efforts do not impede local economic opportunities.

In signing Secretarial Order 3353, Secretary Zinke established an internal review team that, among other things, evaluated both federal sage-grouse plans and state plans and programs to ensure they are complementary and explored possible plan modifications with local economic growth and job creation in mind.

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