

## Quick takes

### Umapine man gets 10 years for involvement in crime

Nobody in Eastern Oregon’s nearly as liberal as I am, but this guy should not get off so lightly.

— Chad Elliot DeFallo

Is that all? Justice has NOT been served.

— Roelle Seamount

### Tragedy avoided in Interstate-84 crash

Glad nobody was hurt! Look how close it is to the Columbia River! Thank goodness it wasn’t polluted anymore than it already is. (Metro area)

— J.j. Bell-Bronson

What a blessing on that stretch of highway. Kind of news I sure like to read or hear about. So grateful all were untouched by harm.

— Judie Oesterling

### Police body cameras

Good idea, except for the fact that it won’t keep the police honest. You really think they’re going to turn them on when they’re doing something illegal themselves?

— Tassa Potter

Personally, I don’t feel that the Hermiston PD needs the body cameras. They have always been very helpful when I have needed them. But if they will protect the police from idiots making false claims and the general public from the very few times that an officer steps out of line, then I can see the good in them.

— Kellye Connell Finch

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week’s takes. Tweet yours @Tim\_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

# Closing Pendleton’s mail distribution center will harm Eastern Oregonians

By FREDRIC ROLANDO

National Association of Letter Carriers

Though the U.S. Postal Service is based in the Constitution, delivers to 153 million homes and businesses six and increasingly seven days a week, and consistently ranks as the public’s most trusted federal agency, misleading “conventional wisdom” persists.

It goes something like this: Increasing use of the Internet to pay bills and send greetings is causing the Postal Service to lose billions of dollars a year, taxpayers are on the hook for this, and so — unfortunately — services need to be sharply reduced. Fortunately, none of this is true.

These issues are highly relevant to East Oregonians, with your many rural and often isolated areas, your state’s large size, and your many small businesses relying on prompt mail service. This is all the more so given plans to close mail distribution centers in Pendleton, Bend and Eugene, thereby slowing the mail.

I’d like to provide some pertinent facts as Oregonians — and your representatives in Washington — consider what to do.

For starters, the Postal Service — which earns its revenue from selling stamps, not from taxpayer money — is making a profit delivering the mail. It had a \$1.4 billion operating profit in Fiscal Year 2014, and already this year the black ink exceeds \$1.4 billion.

Why? As the economy improves from the Great Recession, letter revenue is again rising. And as folks in Pendleton, throughout Umatilla and Morrow counties and across the nation shop online, package revenue is skyrocketing — which makes the Internet a net positive, auguring well for the future.

What about the red ink you’ve heard

about? There is postal red ink — but here’s the key: It stems from politics, not from the mail. In 2006, a lame-duck Congress mandated that the Postal Service prefund future retiree health benefits. No other agency or company has to prefund for even one year; the Postal Service must prefund 75 years into the future and pay for it all in a 10-year period. That \$5.6 billion annual charge is the red ink.

Having created that artificial financial crisis, some in Congress now assert a need to cut services that Oregonians and others depend on. But degrading postal networks that have returned to profitability makes no sense — not only doesn’t it address the problem, it would hurt the public and the Postal Service itself.

Eliminating Saturday delivery would take a heavy toll on Oregon’s residents as well as its small businesses, which are open weekends and employ 757,132 people — and would see their costs rise if compelled to contract with private carriers to receive checks on Saturday. Ending door delivery would force people to traipse around neighborhoods in Oregon weather seeking “cluster boxes.” And slowing the mail by closing 82 processing plants around the country, as the Postal Service plans, is illogical.

Such actions would send the Postal Service into a downward spiral by driving mail — and revenue — away. And they’d cost jobs. The national mailing industry, which depends on a robust, six-days-a-week Postal Service, employs 7.5 million Americans in the private sector — including 121,763 Oregonians.

Private carriers like FedEx and UPS rely on the highly efficient Postal Service networks, bringing millions of their own packages to the post office for last-mile delivery, saving themselves and their customers money. Meanwhile, to better

serve its customers, Amazon has signed deals with the Postal Service to deliver goods on Sunday.

The Postal Service is the nation’s largest employer of military veterans, and letter carriers enhance both neighborhood and homeland security. Every day, letter carriers save the lives of elderly on their routes, stop crimes, put out fires or find missing children.

And after 9/11, when President George W. Bush sought to protect metropolitan areas from a potential bioterrorist attack, he turned to the nation’s only universal delivery network. On a volunteer basis, letter carriers have stockpiled and trained to deliver medicines to every household in several cities within 48 hours of an attack.

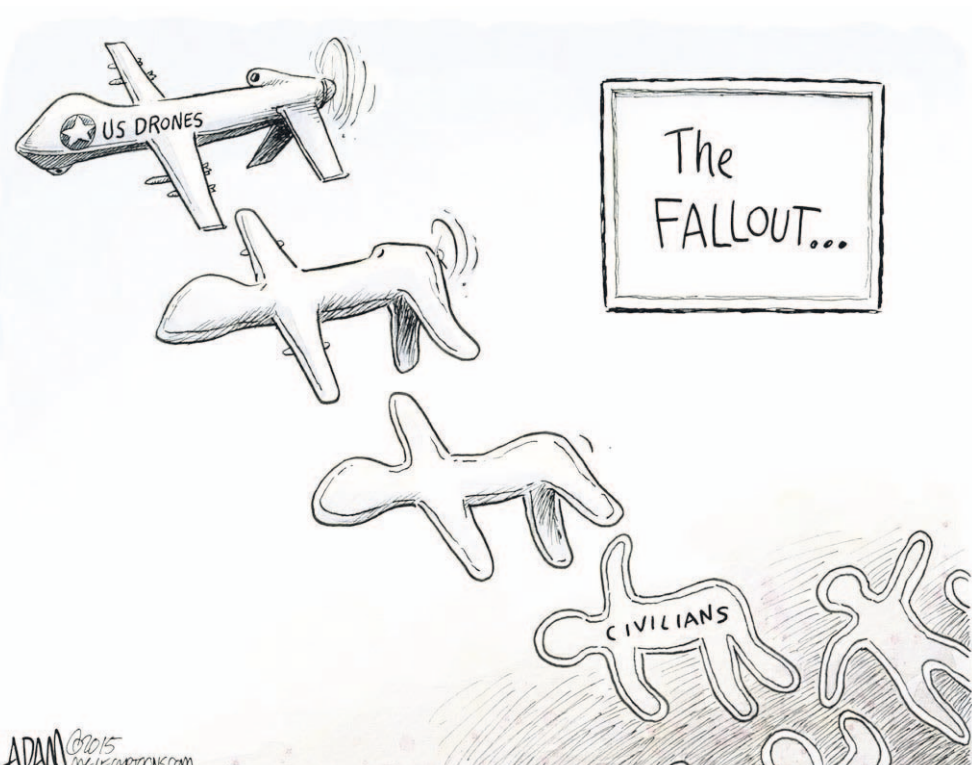
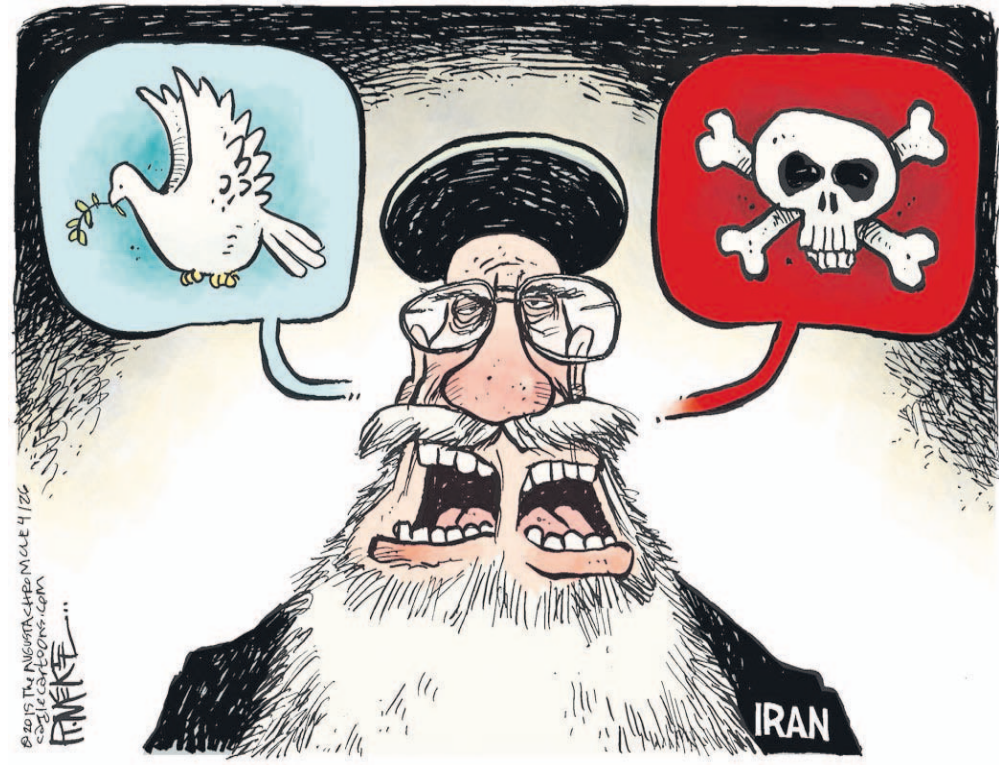
Next month, on May 9, you’ll see letter carriers collecting food left near mailboxes by families up and down the block. Every year, letter carriers conduct the nation’s largest single-day food drive on the second Saturday in May.

Given the growing hunger problem in our country, the generous contributions of people in Eastern Oregon help us restock local food and church pantries in need of food as summer approaches — a critical period because school meal programs aren’t available.

It would be absurd to jeopardize all this simply because of political dysfunction in Washington. Beaver State residents should press their representatives to take a common-sense approach — preserve and strengthen the now-profitable postal networks, while addressing the pre-funding fiasco. Then the Postal Service can continue to provide Americans and their businesses with the world’s most affordable delivery network.

■

Fredric Rolando is president of the National Association of Letter Carriers.



# BMCC helps things grow

by PHIL HAMM

Voters in Umatilla and Morrow counties are being asked in May to pass the Blue Mountain Community College bond. One of the pieces of this bond includes the construction of a precision irrigated agriculture center, which — if the bond is approved — would be erected on Oregon State University’s Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center (HAREC) property. My personal belief is that this collaborative partnership between BMCC and HAREC would provide significant benefits to the students and agricultural producers in our region, which also supports our local economy.

HAREC is a modern research and extension facility covering nearly 300 acres with 13 computer-controlled center pivot irrigation systems, 5 modern research laboratories, greenhouses, screen houses and employed 62 people last summer. This facility is highly supported and funded by the region’s irrigated-crop producers, and the center supports crops grown on over 500,000 acres in Oregon and Washington.

Agriculture is the life blood of our region. We boast one of the most important dry land wheat and livestock production areas in the state, if not the Pacific Northwest. Irrigated agriculture in northern Umatilla and Morrow counties is so unique that few, if any, agricultural production areas in the world can compare. This is an area of very high yields and a large diversity of crops (at least 207).

The use of modern technology is a mainstay in this region for keeping farms profitable while protecting our environment, whether the farm is 500 acres in size to the largest in the region of over 60,000 acres, and technology is always changing and improving.

HAREC, in partnership with many business and grower groups, is helping to understand the most efficient use of water, how to better apply fertilizers while protecting ground water, determine better methods to assess and manage disease and insects, breeding new and vitamin enriched potatoes, and helping to protect our rivers and streams, to name a few. New technology is at the heart of these projects.

The partnership between BMCC and OSU HAREC brings together the opportunity to uniquely train future technicians/agronomists needed today and into the future. Students would learn first-hand the methods and procedures of a modern farm. BMCC and OSU

already have a Memorandum of Agreement in place for a small, but similar, program from funding BMCC has from a Meyer Memorial Trust grant.

The bond would build an approximately 12,000 square foot facility on land in close proximity to the main buildings at HAREC. The total cost is estimated at \$3.2 million and would provide several modern classrooms, a conference room, a large equipment room where machinery could be brought indoors, restrooms and parking. While BMCC would be the primary user of the center, the classrooms would also be available for OSU faculty at HAREC to conduct local and on-line teaching and provide for a needed and much larger conference room than is currently available at HAREC.

Students would work with the experienced OSU operations crew to plant, maintain, and harvest crops grown at HAREC. They would learn how to maintain, program, and use technology currently used on farms and be part of research developing and testing new technology.

OSU faculty would also be involved by providing guest lectures as appropriate.

In other words, students would not only “book learn” about precision irrigation, but experience it first hand by doing it. At the completion of their program, students would be ready to join the workforce or finish their 4-year degree elsewhere.

Who wins in this partnership? My personal opinion is everyone to some extent. These include: 1) Local students who want to learn a new trade while living at home; 2) HAREC benefits from having more hands installing, maintaining and programming our equipment as students learn the processes; 3) the community keeps these workers, and the farmers who grow crops in the region would receive well-trained employees; 4) BMCC and OSU benefit from the recognition of the development and execution of a truly one-of-a-kind curriculum; 5) tax payers would save money through the shared use of facilities and equipment; and 6) there is the opportunity of students from outside the region coming here and spending dollars as they attend the program.

This seems to be a win for all at a very modest price and that is why I personally believe supporting the BMCC bond measure is so important.

■

Phil Hamm lives in Hermiston.

# After the education wars

For the last dozen years, waves of idealistic Americans have campaigned to reform and improve K-12 education.

Armies of college graduates joined Teach for America. Zillionaires invested in charter schools. Liberals and conservatives, holding their noses and agreeing on nothing else, cooperated to proclaim education the civil rights issue of our time. Yet I wonder if the education reform movement hasn’t peaked.

The zillionaires are bruised. The idealists are dispirited. The number of young people applying for Teach for America, after 15 years of growth, has dropped for the last two years. The Common Core curriculum is now an orphan, with politicians vigorously denying paternity.

K-12 education is an exhausted, bloodsoaked battlefield. It’s Agincourt, the day after. So a suggestion: Refocus some reformist passions on early childhood.

I say that for three reasons. First, there is mounting evidence that early childhood is a crucial period when the brain is most malleable, when interventions are most cost-effective for at-risk kids. Researchers are finding that poverty can harm the brains of small children, perhaps because their brains are subjected to excessive cortisol (a stress hormone) and exposed less to conversation and reading. One study just published in Nature Neuroscience found that children in low-income families had a brain surface area on average 6 percent smaller than that of children in high-income families.

Growing evidence suggests what does work to break the poverty cycle: Start early in life, and coach parents to stimulate their children. Randomized controlled trials, the gold standard of evidence, have shown this with programs like Nurse-Family Partnership, Reach Out and Read, and high-quality preschool. These kinds of interventions typically produce cognitive gains that last a few years and then fade — but, more important, also produce better life



NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
Comment

outcomes, such as less crime, fewer teenage pregnancies, higher high school graduation rates, and higher incomes.

The second reason to focus on early interventions is that the low-hanging fruit has already been picked in the K-12 world. Charter schools like KIPP showed that even in high-poverty environments, students can excel. In New York, which under Michael Bloomberg became a center for education reform, high school graduation rates rose to 66 percent in 2013 from 47 percent in 2005.

I support education reform. Yet the brawls have left everyone battered and bloodied, from reformers to teachers unions. I’m not advising surrender. Education inequity is America’s original sin. A majority of American children in public schools are eligible for free or reduced price lunches, and they often get second-rate teachers in second-rate schools — even as privileged kids get superb teachers. This perpetuates class and racial inequity and arises in part from a failed system of school financing.

But fixing K-12 education will be a long slog, so let’s redirect some energy to children aged 0 to 5. Early education is where we have the greatest chance of progress because it’s not politically polarized. New York City liberals have embraced preschool, but so have Oklahoma conservatives. Teacher unions will flinch at some of what I say, but they have been great advocates for early education. Congress can’t agree on much, but Republicans and Democrats just approved new funding for home visitation for low-income toddlers.

Even within early education, there will be battles. Some advocates emphasize the first three years of life, while others focus on 4-year-olds. Some seek to target the most at-risk children, while others emphasize universality.

So let’s redeploy some of our education passions, on all sides, to an area where we just may be able to find common ground: providing a foundation for young children aged 0 to 5.

■

Nicholas Kristof, New York Times.