

Quick takes

Drought in Umatilla County

Global warming (not sarcasm)
— Jose A. Molina Barahona

Billions or maybe trillions of gallons of good water on its way to become saltwater everyday.
— Justin Peek

People could start off by watering in the evening or early morning instead of in the middle of the day.
— Spencer-Racheal Gunn-Walker

Mark Hodges resigns

So sorry for you and the team. Take care of yourself.
— Chris Finley

Bummed. But “to everything there is a season.”
— Lisa Potter

Oh darn ... GO BUCKS!
— Bonnie Lindley

Pendleton talks infrastructure

They don't work on the streets here but they will sure put up another useless bronze statue on them!
— Shelley Seggerman

I find it interesting that they want to find new taxes or revenue sources, when if they had the ability to talk to their employees they may find that the boots on the ground have good ideas and may find some of these nickels and dimes.
— Kyle Morris Willman

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.

How to galvanize a classroom

By CRISTA WORTHY
Writers on the Range

Recently I devoured a short book of nonfiction with a very odd title: “The Committee for the Reburial of Liver-Eating Johnston: Memoirs of a Dyslexic Teacher,” by Tri Robinson. It’s a memoir, and it revolves around a teacher, his highly motivated seventh-graders, and the remains of a long-dead “Mountain Man.”

That man is John “Liver-Eating” Johnson, sometimes spelled Johnston, who was portrayed by Robert Redford in the classic film “Jeremiah Johnson.” I couldn’t put the book down, and despite the brief time I spent with its 128 pages, the story has yet to release me from its grip.

The audacious storyline is accompanied by a commentary on our educational system as it is today. Its message is this: Perceptive and imaginative teachers can turn lives around. Standardized tests have their place, but teachers, administrators and caring citizens need to take charge of our educational system.

In 1973, Robinson tells us, he was a new teacher in a small California town. Nervously facing his seventh-graders, he told them he was going to try to run a different kind of class. Instead of relying completely on dry, standardized textbooks, he said he’d also try to deliver “living history” lessons.

To do that, he began coming to class dressed up as various characters from U.S. history, occasionally bringing along three-dimensional illustrations, such as his Bowie knife and muzzle-loading rifle. Both made it into the classroom — try that nowadays!

One of his lessons focused on the story of the man called John “Liver-Eating” Johnston, who roamed the wilderness alone until a local Flathead tribal chief, concerned

about his loneliness, gave him an Indian wife. After Indians murdered his wife and unborn child, Johnston blamed the tragedy on the Crow Indian Nation, launching a vendetta that lasted decades and gave him his moniker — he was said to eat the livers of the Crow Indians he killed for revenge.

Finally, he buried the proverbial hatchet and made peace with the Crow. Robinson ended the lesson with the story of Johnston’s death and burial at a veteran’s cemetery, next to what is now a busy freeway in Los Angeles. When they heard this, Robinson’s 25 students became outraged. This was an injustice, they said; they felt he should have been buried in the Absaroka country of Wyoming that he loved.

The class launched a drive to have Johnston’s remains exhumed and reburied, a mission that took the rest of the school year, reached the highest levels of the U.S. State Department, and was seized upon by newspapers and television nationwide. After “Jeremiah Johnson” became a huge hit in movie theaters, a Montana town even resorted to subterfuge in an attempt to whisk away Johnston’s remains, rather than see him buried in Wyoming. When Johnson was at last reburied in Cody, Robert Redford flew in with his son to pay tribute.

In 2000, by sheer accident, I found myself at Johnston’s gravesite during a visit to Cody, where I stumbled across the Trail Town Mountain Man Cemetery. I

remembered the reburial ruckus but had forgotten where he’d ended up. A bronze statue of Johnston on horseback stood proudly above the resting places of all the mountain men buried there. Preserved 19th century buildings lined the dusty street of Trail Town, next to the cemetery.

Yes, he ended up in the right place. And the students who fought to have him buried there were profoundly changed by their experience. The group remains connected today, 40-plus years after the events Robinson described took place.

Now, as the world unfurls around me each day, I find myself measuring its progress, or lack thereof, against the events set in motion by a group of seventh-graders back in 1973.

I think of the experience of many students in school nowadays. I see them walk through metal detectors into crowded classrooms where some spend much of the day staring into computers. I see their overworked and underpaid teachers focusing on test scores; they have no choice, if they want to keep their jobs. I visualize scenes of Western history coming vividly alive from the book I just read, and I think: There’s a better way.

■ *Crista Worthy is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a column service of High Country News (hcn.org) She is a writer and pilot who lives in Idaho.*

Tribal member no fan of memorializing Requa

I am an Indian that went to Pendleton High School in the early 1950s and remember when Requa first came to town to coach the high school football team. I’ve read a lot of articles in the *East Oregonian* about the coach being some sort of hero or something.

I was a sophomore when the coach came to town and never gave much thought about the type of person he was, I just wanted to play football. I enjoyed the competition of sports and played football, basketball, and baseball at PHS for three years. Requa never really talked to me the three years I played football, on or off the field.

In my senior year after football season was over I was named to the football all-star team. Requa never said good job or shook my hand; that did not bother me, I was already playing basketball. The person that encouraged and coached me was a man by the name of Al Nixon, an assistant football coach, a good non-racist person, coach and teacher, on and off the field. Teachers like Al Nixon should be remembered.

After high school I joined the Marines and got trained, loaded on a troop ship and headed for the Far East. When I made it back home I told Requa what I thought of him.

Steve Sohappy
Suxappy Cayuse

Jesus taught the example of humility

I read with much interest David Brooks’ comments on “Love and Merit” in the *EO* April 25. May I suggest taking a biblical point of view?

Jesus made himself of no esteem — neither good nor bad. This is the reason he was able to humble himself and become our savior. Even though he was so powerful and great, he was still considered by followers as the most humble man who ever lived.

In Jesse Winchester’s words: “That’s what makes the meek come sit beside the king ... and that is what moves our soul and that’s what makes us sing.”

Janet Marie Miller
Hermiston

Public service a lifelong commitment

May 3-9 is Public Service Recognition Week. This year I would like to tell you that once public servants retire from their jobs, their public service doesn’t end. Now they begin volunteering in their communities where there is need (some volunteers were active while employed). Our local chapter of National Active and Retired Federal Employees (NARFE) has many members who volunteer throughout our community.

Our members worked for the USPS, Forest Service, IRS, Weather Service, Natural Resources and Rural Development. We volunteer at the museum, the Arts Center, church, library, rural fire districts, river walk cleanup day and many more opportunities

around our community, not to mention the hours we give to our organization.

We worked and raised our families here and we stayed here when we retired. Our communities are richer for the services we provided while we worked. And we continue to enrich our communities in retirement.

Colleen Hewes
Pendleton

BMCC bond has commissioner support

I am writing in support of the Blue Mountain Community College Bond.

Ordinarily, in writing on behalf of an education issue, I would focus primarily on the value of the bond measure as an investment in the future of our youth based upon four decades of personal involvement in public education. It is certainly that and more.

And, as Umatilla County moves closer to getting more water on tens of thousands of acres of farm ground, BMCC will be playing an even greater role in training the hundreds of new skilled workers who will be needed in all aspects of precision agriculture.

However, since there are a number of other people who are writing about the importance of a trained workforce, I’m going to focus on those aspects of the bond issue that deal with infrastructure.

Updating and improving things like HVAC systems and other infrastructure items are hardly hot button issues, and it’s hard to put a smiley face on such expenditures when compared with new classrooms. However, with many of the internal systems now half a century old, it is prudent for the college to make this proposal.

While infrastructure isn’t glitzy, if done properly it can make a huge difference in creating efficiencies for the college. Updating inefficient and outdated heating, cooling, lighting and energy control systems can cut the BMCC energy budget by as much as 20 percent. These upgrades will stretch the life of existing buildings and save nearly \$100,000 each year in energy costs at the Pendleton campus.

BMCC is also working with the Energy Trust of Oregon to access incentive dollars and engineering services to make the bond dollars go even further.

I applaud the fact the people at BMCC have spent so much time restructuring the bond issue and that they have given such thoughtful consideration to all aspects of the proposed measure. This investment will pay dividends to Eastern Oregon for generations to come.

George Murdock
Pendleton

Former employee supports BMCC bond

In the many years I worked for Blue Mountain Community College, I watched students pursue their dreams with affordable, accessible post-secondary education. For over 50 years, BMCC has provided quality instruction and training for local

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jobs and occupations in Eastern Oregon. The majority of BMCC students remains in the area and contribute positively to our communities.

Technology changed dramatically during my years at the college and continues to become more sophisticated. In order to provide students with the current technology and infrastructure, the bond on the May ballot will help fund these essential upgrades. Also, the buildings at all campuses are aging and some are in critical need of heating, plumbing and electrical retrofitting. Equally important are security and ADA compliance, which will also be improved with bond funding.

BMCC serves 10,000 students each year and 4 of 5 stay to live and work here. Let’s provide them with quality and relevant training leading to family wage jobs. Please join me in voting “YES” for the BMCC bond.

Margaret Saylor
Hermiston

BMCC teaches region the skills to succeed

Throughout history the primary job of a parent was to give their offspring survival skills. Today’s skill set for economic survival includes formal education and technical training so that young people can be productive and can assume their responsibilities.

Our continued support of Blue Mountain Community College has allowed our community to produce a pool of future leaders in many professional fields, including highly trained personnel for public employment, customized food production, agriculture and public health.

The legacy of our financial contribution is the product we produce. Our support of the BMCC bond is crucial to fulfilling our obligation to the next generation of successful wage earners. Please support the BMCC bond and continue being a reason our young people will be skilled and successful.

Scott and Bonnie Sager
Pilot Rock

Plass will be proactive, fair advocate for school

I have known Susan Plass for over ten years. One of Susan’s finest attributes is her ability to listen intently and to respond thoughtfully. She analyzes carefully and during the 10 years she was at Blue Mountain Community College this strength helped her in applying for and raising \$9.1 million in external funding for the college. As a result, she can identify the many issues affecting higher education today.

Her own post-high school education started when she earned her AA degree at a two-year college, College of the Siskiyous. She appreciates the importance of a smooth transition from high school to a college or university.

She states particular interest in encouraging the BMCC Board to become more visible and engaged in the community.

By better understanding the varying issues that touch the lives of everyday citizens of all ages and backgrounds, BMCC can better respond with policies that encourage educational and economic opportunities.

Susan will be proactive, fair, and an advocate for higher education. Please join me in supporting Susan Plass for the Board of Blue Mountain Community College.

Mary L. Davis
Pendleton

BMCC most deserving of regional support

Today, there are plenty of important matters deserving one’s concern, passion and support; however, nothing deserves attention more than support for education and continuing education of persons in this region. Blue Mountain Community College has served us well for over 50 years and now is the time for us to support BMCC reinvestment in programs and facilities that are vastly important to this region’s economy.

The time to keep these vital educational, cultural and economic options available in our region is now. Therefore, we urge you to reflect on how BMCC has added value or quality of life opportunities to your life or to the life of someone you know. Please confirm your interest in BMCC with your vote for their bond.

Make your mark in support of the BMCC bond today.

David and Alice Nelson
Pendleton

Hermiston area will benefit from bond

We would like to urge voters to support the Blue Mountain Community College bond, found on the current ballot. BMCC has served our region’s students of all ages for over 50 years, providing convenient, affordable and quality educational opportunities and training while continuing to work and live in our area.

We believe support of the BMCC bond is important because it will provide new state-of-the-art training in job areas critical to our unique agricultural and manufacturing needs as well as enhance existing programs in key areas of nursing, dental and diesel tech. Agriculture and manufacturing are the backbone of our Eastern Oregon economy. A trained workforce in specific areas is critical to the economic development essential to continue our region’s growth. BMCC is partnering with our region’s agriculture and manufacturing communities to address needs for our growing economy.

Hermiston will benefit with a new, Precision Irrigated Agriculture Center. Boardman will receive an Advanced Manufacturing: Workforce Training and Early Learning Center. Pendleton will have a renovated Agriculture Center to support livestock, soil and horticulture agriculture curriculum. In addition, the school can be a better steward of taxpayer

money by cutting operational costs of its facilities by replacing aging and inefficient heating, cooling, plumbing and electrical systems at all BMCC locations.

BMCC has listened to community members and responded to concerns by offering a leaner, more targeted budget. This new bond will come onto the tax rolls at a rate less than the bond that expired in 2014.

Support of the BMCC bond is an investment in the future.

Ann and Dean Fialka
Hermiston

Mistake of past ballot measures stings now

This letter is directed at those who voted yes on ballot measures 5 and 50, and who voted yes on the super majority ballot measure.

When you voted yes on Ballot Measure 50 you said, “Yes, I can do with potholes in my street and crumbling parking lots downtown and yes, I’ll pay the bills for residents who have to have their car’s front end alignment redone.”

When you voted yes on Ballot Measure 50 you said, “Yes, it’s OK for the police to take 45 minutes to answer my call because they are busy on other issues.” When you voted yes on Ballot Measure 50 you said, “Yes, it’s OK that we do no maintenance on the existing fire station and yes, it’s OK that we can’t have enough firemen to man both stations 1 and 2.” You also said, “Yes, it’s OK that the current fire station is too small to accommodate the new bigger trucks.”

You who thought that Ballot Measure 5 was going to be manna from heaven when it came to property tax relief now know it wasn’t. We who were running for state representative and state senator at the time told you so, and you turned a deaf ear. We told you that it was only a matter of time before there were problems and we were right. The actuaries in Salem said it would only be a matter of about five years before we started seeing the results and they were pretty close to being on track. Thanks to a robust economy in Oregon it took a little longer, but it has happened.

We have streets with potholes the size of dinner plates that make driving on those streets a hazard. We will have a beautiful new school between Alexander and Byers with streets that are nothing more than glorified cow trails because we have no money to pave them, yet Pacific Power, Cascade Gas and Nike reap bigger and bigger profits. When do we say enough is enough?

Ballot Measure 50 must be repealed before Pendleton, Umatilla County and the state of Oregon go broke.

When it comes to supporting Pendleton schools vote yes, and when it comes to approving the street bond issue and the new fire station vote yes. We can no longer do without better roads, more police and fire department personnel. Vote yes.

Barbara Wright
Pendleton