

Quick takes

First fire of the season

I kept seeing smoke as a backdrop behind my workplace. At first it was a beautiful white. Then turned gray and dark. It was baffling. Wasn't sure what was going on.

— Jasmine Landeros

It smelled like stinky feet ... my son said, not me!

— Tonya L Perkins

So difficult to fight fire in these conditions. Stay safe brothers and sisters.

— Levi Raber

Pendleton school district releases boundary proposal

So sad to see those schools go. I attended Lincoln as a child and can't imagine it not being a school. It's crazy that kids that are used to walking to school will have to be bused across town.

— Jennifer Bush

The school district held five different public meetings in April asking for feedback on the new proposed boundary lines. They did give everyone a chance to voice their opinions and I believe they did the best job they could in using the feedback.

— Karen Willis

There is very little state support for public education in Oregon. The lottery is supposed to help, but you can't provide quality education with an indirect tax like that. I would gladly pay a 5 or 6 percent state sales tax if a good solid piece went for public education.

— JD Smith

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.

Affordable housing key to attracting jobs

By ADAM DAVIS

Capital Insider/EO Media Group

One hundred million dollars of state funds for affordable housing, something Oregon voters do not mention as one of the most important problems they want their local and state government officials to do something about? Really?

The proposal is being championed by a governor facing a 2016 election in a state where existing services are likely to be cut because of the PERS decision, where high school graduation rates are among the worst in the nation, and where a crumbling infrastructure threatens the state's economy. Really?

Affordable housing? Really?

Our focus groups and surveys suggest that Gov. Kate Brown (and Gov. John Kitzhaber before her) isn't crazy. In a recent DHM Research statewide survey, 63 percent of Oregon voters agreed their community had a significant affordable housing problem, and 62 percent agreed that low-income working families cannot find affordable housing in their community. That's what we call "validation" in the opinion research business.

Among groups that are often skeptical on these types of issues, even men (57 percent compared to women 67 percent) and Republicans (50 percent compared to Democrats 75 percent) feel that affordable housing is a problem. Additionally, regardless of gender and party, Oregonians feel wages for middle income jobs have not kept up with the rise in home prices.

So far, so good: Salem, we have a problem.

Well, sort of. Despite agreement that there is a problem, only about a third of Oregon voters feel strongly about that agreement.

And in a trade-off context with other

public programs and services, affordable housing has never been a top tier concern.

The upshot is that affordable housing is a concern of Oregon voters. Just perhaps not as big a concern as other problems.

What can the governor and her allies do to increase voters' concern and sense of urgency about affordable housing? Link it to something Oregonians care about more — jobs, for example.

Forty-eight percent of voters agree that local governments should prioritize investments in housing because it creates local jobs, 40 percent say they shouldn't, and 12 percent are unsure. So the governor making the connection to 11,000 new jobs, direct or indirect, is good.

But our research suggests the connection would be stronger if instead of "local government" she said "local government working in partnership with the community and the non-profit sector." Voters are placing a lot more trust in the non-profit sector these days than in the public sector.

Strengthen it even more by talking at the same time about what the money would mean for Oregon's small businesses across the state and you have the jobs angle covered.

The governor and her supporters can make strong connections to other issues Oregonians care about as well, such as helping children succeed in school and life, and making it possible for hard-working families to get the housing they need without sacrificing food and basic necessities.

Support for working families is particularly appealing to moderate and more

conservative Oregonians.

So Gov. (and soon-to-be candidate) Brown has herself an issue of concern to Oregonians, without a doubt.

However, the million dollar question about the \$100 million investment is how the program will be developed and presented to Oregonians.

And even if that is done perfectly, we must still ask whether affordable housing will be able to beat back the competition for infrastructure funding from such heavy hitters as school buildings, water and sewer systems, and the new Multnomah County Courthouse.

It remains to be seen whether her handling of affordable housing will

help her win money and votes next year, or help her opponents gain advantage against her.

Gov. Brown and affordable housing advocates need to be sure the program does not become the latest poster child for government wastefulness and unintended negative consequences. (Does the energy credits program ring a bell?)

Instead, make it a partnership with the public and private sectors and talk about its importance for jobs and economic justice among hard-working Oregonians. Be creative, leverage other funding, and seek independent oversight. With these foundations, those thousands of new homes may get built well after all.

Adam Davis, who has been conducting opinion research in Oregon for more than 35 years, is a founding principal in DHM Research, an independent, non-partisan firm. Visit www.dhmresearch.com

Tea Party: May election defeat due to voter malaise

By ELI STEPHENS, ROB LOVETT AND LARRY NYE

Local Tea Party Leaders

Did anyone read the May 21 *East Oregonian* newspaper? Many things pop out. One, if you're competing, you never brag about beating second string.

It's always your closest competitor. So thanks for the acknowledgment, *East Oregonian*. Yes, we are a force!

Your statement of anti-tax is only half true. We know taxes are a necessary evil, but when is enough, enough? Especially when 51 percent of our tax dollars go to schools and we're not getting our money's worth. If government would turn from its socialist agenda and go back to its roots, they would have enough! The bond is bondage. Just look at your home mortgage, when you borrow \$100,000 you pay back \$178,000 on a 20-year loan. Is the bond any different? There is a truth in lending law. Why does this law only apply to free enterprise and not to our government?

Even the school levy passed in part because of the endless supply of money they have, and human nature. If you want something, you go all out for it. If you don't want something, you ignore it and hope it will go away, i.e. 33 percent voter turnout with the

deception that it won't cost anything. Thirty-three percent voter turnout is the problem. That is not 33 percent of the population, but rather 33 percent of registered voters. Sixty-seven percent of the people say, "What good does it do, because they are going to do what they want anyway?" When a bond or

levy is repeatedly run and run until it passes; honest people simply give up. Well, shame on us. As I walked around the county, everywhere I went people said, "No way will it pass," but unfortunately, it did pass and only with a mere 33 percent voter turnout.

Compassionate conservative was the birth of modern ideology, which morphed into wishy-washy. Wishy-washy breeds apathy and indecisiveness, which in turn results in the 33 percent voter turnout that we witnessed during the election process last month.

To date, I have not found a tea party member who is anti-community and compassionateness as the *EO* describes. We understand the importance of education and we've pointed out how value is reduced by inefficiencies. Why are those qualities described as abrasive or paranoid when in truth, they aren't? Tea Party looks ahead at what's coming down the pike and alerts voters to be prepared for the results of their

decisions.

It would be nice if the *EO* would report the news instead of trying to make it. Budget cuts are made often, but taxes continue to increase. Maybe that is the new math our schools are teaching. What's the point of cutting budgets if taxpayers see continual raises in taxes? Cut the problems off at the roots — if you can't afford a higher standard of living, don't buy unnecessary things and expect taxpayers to cover the cost. The tea party is refreshing its cup by trying to filter out all those things that muddy the tea (i.e. daycare in BMCC, fire station, new yellow sidewalk approaches for the handicapped that now must be removed due to surfaces that impede wheelchair access). Compassion is shown by trying to make the "tea" more palatable for taxpayers, who are choking on raising taxes that eat into our living cost.

To charge that Tea Party is entirely unwilling to recognize the benefits we receive from taxes was a totally biased statement from the *EO*. We are a vital part of the friends and neighbors that make our world go 'round.

Compassionate conservatism is alive and doing well in Pendleton. Unfortunately, the *EO* and others are blinded by their abrasive and paranoid feelings toward the tea party opposing their ideas and views.

Eli Stephens leads the Pendleton Tea Party Patriots, Rob Lovett leads Greater Hermiston Area Tea Party and Larry Nye the Milton-Freewater Tea Party.

Poor management of library district affecting community

By SUE OLIVER

On May 22, visitors to the Heppner library found the door locked on a day the library should have been open. The current situation with the operation of the Oregon Trail Library District will likely result in more unscheduled closures, or even a reduction in the number of hours the libraries in Boardman, Heppner, and Irrigon are able to operate.

The OTLD is overseen by a five-member board of directors elected at large by the district taxpayers. Although all of us should be extremely grateful to those who are willing to volunteer to serve on boards like this one, it is not unreasonable to expect even volunteers to responsibly manage district funds, build community partnerships, conduct meetings in accordance with Oregon law, and be responsive to the needs and desires of the people who elected them.

The OTLD expended many thousands of dollars in legal fees in a drawn-out and unnecessary dispute with an important community partner over the Irrigon library. Although the library did eventually open, most people are probably unaware that several months after finally "opening," there are only a limited number of shelves installed, there is no furniture in the meeting room, and no display cases or chairs in the lobby. No answer has been forthcoming as to why the library has not been finished.

The actions (and in some cases, the inaction) of the district over the last several years have severely damaged many of the community relationships that are vital to the success of a library. Volunteer groups, potential funding partners, and other local governing bodies are now wary of involvement with the district.

On April 30 the board (only three of the five members attended) accepted the resignation of its current district director, effective June 1. The board took no formal action to enter into an employment agreement based on the outgoing director's offer to work part time in June. Although there was a brief discussion about the director's recommendation to consider hiring an interim director, the board did not discuss what the selection and hiring process would be for either

an interim or permanent director. Amazingly, the agenda for its next regularly scheduled meeting on May 20 did not include anything related to the imminent departure of the director; nor discussion of who would be managing employees as of June 1. Not that it really mattered, because the meeting was canceled with just a few hours' notice.

In addition to the departure of the director, a new board member will take office on July 1 (replacing the member currently serving as chair), and another board member has announced he will be resigning in August (which will leave a vacancy to be filled by appointment). Most organizations facing such a significant leadership change would see it as an opportunity to review the organization and its functions, determine both short- and long-term needs and priorities, and develop a list of skills and qualifications that would be necessary to implement the organization's current priorities. The board has done none of that.

The board's budget committee meeting was also canceled on May 20 and has been re-scheduled for 6 p.m. on June 10 at the Heppner library. The board apparently also intends to review applications and decide on a new director at a special meeting to be held after the budget committee meeting. I urge everyone in the district to come to both meetings on June 10.

I have spoken to a great many people across the district in the last few months. It was very sad to learn that the completion of the Irrigon library came at such a high cost — money wasted on lawyers, angry patrons, annoyed community partners, frustrated employees, and an exhausted director and board. It is time to take a deep breath and begin the recovery process. If you can't make the meeting, please email the board your thoughts at otldboard@centurylink.net. Alternatively, speak to the board members personally. In either case, please be polite and respectful—they are all volunteers doing a very tough job with no compensation.

Sue Oliver lives near Irrigon and is an applicant for the Oregon Trail Library's director position.

Capitol renovation worth the price tag

By GARY WILHELMS

It seems the Capitol Renovation Project has been getting a little more attention recently. That's good even though some of the attention indicates we have work to do.

We knew all along that there would be reluctance by some because of the cost of the project or being dislocated from the Capitol Building for a lengthy period or their belief that public schools should be seismically retrofitted first — all legitimate concerns.

What I've learned in over a decade of involvement in the project is that it is truly an expensive project at about \$337 million, but that is not out of line with similar projects around the country or even right here in Oregon. The project will not become less expensive with time. We should act now while the construction industry is looking for projects, while many in our work force are still looking for jobs and while bond rates remain favorable. The Capitol Building is the only state building for which the Legislature has total responsibility. The building is over 75 years old and needs work. But, more importantly, we have all seen enough information by now to realize the building is unsafe

in terms of its ability to withstand a significant seismic event. I, for one, am unwilling to simply roll the dice as to whether the building will be occupied by employees, public officials, school kids and others during our next earthquake. I am likewise unwilling to guess what the Richter scale is going to say — 5.0, 6.0, 7.0, 8.0, 9.0? I want to know that, as a concerned citizen and taxpayer, I have met my responsibility.

With regard to being dislocated from the Capitol Building for over three years, it has been determined to be the most efficient, cost-effective and safest way to proceed with this very complex project. Delaying the project will simply delay the inconvenience. Somebody someday is going to deal with it. Shouldn't we step up, accept the responsibility and get the job done?

How we deal with the seismic retrofitting of our public school (and also public safety) buildings is a high priority and somewhat daunting challenge. There are over 2,000 public school buildings and nearly 1,000 public safety buildings in Oregon, while the primary responsibility for these buildings lies with the local taxing districts, it is certainly reasonable to look to the state for help. To that end, the Legislature has

previously created a program to assist local government and school districts with the cost of seismic retrofits. Currently, there are proposals from legislators in both political parties to significantly increase the financial support available in that program. As with the OSCRP, primary funding for this program is through the sale of bonds. There are, of course, other worthwhile legislative proposals requiring the sale of bonds. The state of Oregon, thankfully, is limited on the amount of its bonded indebtedness. So, all these many worthwhile programs must compete to be included in the Legislative Session's Capital Construction Bill. Since most of these projects, and especially the public schools, are long-term, it seems to me the responsible approach would be to formulate a Capital Construction package that accommodates the OSCRP, the public schools/public safety buildings and other priorities determined by the Legislature on a structured long-term basis. It shouldn't be a question of all or nothing for either the public schools or the OSCRP. A responsible Capital Construction package can and should be done.

Republican Gary Wilhelms served four sessions in the Oregon House.