

# EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

**KATHRYN B. BROWN**  
Publisher

**DANIEL WATTENBURGER**  
Managing Editor

**JENNINE PERKINSON**  
Advertising Director

**TIM TRAINOR**  
Opinion Page Editor

## OUR VIEW

# Celebrate summer safely

Although the first day of summer isn't technically until June 21, last week's triple-digit temperatures made it clear the season arrived early.

Summer is many things — freedom from the classroom, more time for vacation and long evenings of good light that set people to recreating and working outdoors.

That all sounds pretty great. But as we've learned already, some of our favorite summer activities can also be dangerous and even deadly.

Some of this should go without saying, but annual reminders to be conscious and considerate of those dangers is necessary. Here are a few tips about how to get through this summer suntanned but safe:

### • Know your limits while swimming, especially in unsupervised locations.

We've had a disastrous start to the swimming season across Oregon, with multiple losses of life. Tragedy has already struck locally, too, claiming the life of an Irrigon teen who drowned earlier this month in the Columbia.

Especially when you are swimming in unsupervised rivers and lakes, take stock of the condition and depth of the bottom, the visibility of the water, obstructions that could make swimming and diving dangerous, cold temperatures that can have debilitating effect on muscles and the possibility of inclement weather. When going for a dip in a river or stream or into the Pacific off Oregon's beautiful coast, remember that moving water is a powerful thing. If you can't easily maintain footing in the current or waves, you had better be an expert swimmer able to recover from wherever the water wants to take you.

If you're in doubt about anything above, play it safe and wear a life jacket. If you're boating or rafting or kayaking, having a flotation device is a state law that must be followed.

### • Be smart atop a bike — pedal or motor — and be considerate behind a steering wheel.

Eastern Oregon's country roads can be a haven for cyclists, both for those who like to power themselves and those who like to have an engine do the work for them.

But these roads were designed for a narrow range of uses, and cars often dominate the landscape. That might not be the best travel plan for our planet or our health, but it's what we're working with now.

We don't want to discourage cyclists, but want to remind them to take every precaution. Make sure your bike is outfitted with blinking lights and reflectors. Know your route. Wear a helmet and never lose focus on your surroundings.

And remember, this is working country. Log trucks rumble down our Forest Service roads, combines

rumble over our gravel, tractors occasionally take to the highway to cover ground. Be ready for it.

And if you're one of those cars zooming by, slow down and give space to bicyclists. We like to say that every rider you see on the roadway is one less car to be stuck behind at the next stoplight. Encourage more biking by making them feel safe.

### • Never leave a child or a pet in a hot car.

People of a certain age can all remember their mother or father leaving them in the car while they ran errands. It was a simpler time when errands were faster and cars had manual windows.

Now, leaving a living thing inside a vehicle can be a fatal decision, and sometimes a criminal one.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, hundreds of pets die each year due to being left inside a hot car. In just 20 minutes the temperature inside a vehicle on a 90 degree day rises to a brutal 119 degrees. In 40 minutes, the thermometer rises to a possibly fatal 128 degrees.

That's no place for a pet or — heaven forbid — a child.

A few high-profile cases have educated the American public on what a terrible mistake it can be to leave a child in a vehicle. Take this as another reminder not to make it.

### • Have a plan for your child.

If your child is of an age where they need adult supervision, summer can be a challenge. Those wonderful teachers who took on the workload during the school year are now out basking on beaches and trying to reconnect with their sanity.

But don't panic, because you've got options.

Year-round day care facilities have openings in most cities in Eastern Oregon, but in addition there are a multitude of seasonal options.

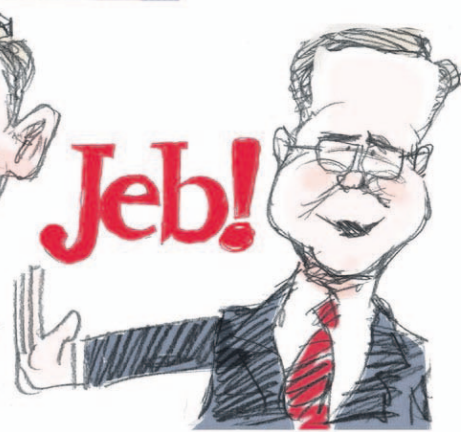
There is a 4-H camp in Heppner, a multitude of fun choices in Hermiston and Pendleton, out-of-town getaways, outdoor camps, church camps, sports camps, music camps, science camps, overnight and day camps. (If you're still on the lookout for a good summer camp, though some deadlines have passed, we recommend typing "2015 summer camp preview + EO Parent" into your Internet search bar, for a boatload of information.)

The city of Pendleton, for instance runs an exceedingly affordable summer adventure camp at Pioneer Park. Call Parks and Recreation directly at 276-8100 for more info on that.

Obviously, things can go wrong any time of the year. But summer is a good time to be aware of your surroundings, of rising temperatures and the risks we take to entertain ourselves. Stay safe this summer, and enjoy it.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

# BUSH BUSH



## OTHER VIEWS

# How to grade a teacher

This is the second column I've written about Deborah Loewenberg Ball, the dean of the University of Michigan's School of Education. Ball believes the training that teachers get while they are in school needs to be drastically improved. Last year, I wrote about her effort to develop a professional training curriculum that would allow beginning teachers to be far better grounded in their craft than they are now.

Recently, I learned about another effort she has led, which I also think deserves wider attention. It tackles one of the most divisive topics in K-12 education: how to evaluate teachers so that the best can be rewarded and the worst fired.

In New York — a state where the issue has been especially contentious — Gov.

Andrew Cuomo earlier this year pushed through legislation that calls for student test scores to count for as much as 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation, up from the current 20 percent. The teachers' unions were incensed, believing that test scores are a simplistic and unfair means of assessing teachers. So were many parents, who joined a boycott movement that resulted in an estimated 165,000 students opting out of this year's standardized tests.

A teacher evaluation system "is only good if the teachers respect it and trust it," says Vicki Phillips, a director of education for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Teachers are convinced that evaluation systems that overly rely on test scores are punitive, which the political rhetoric often underscores. For instance, Cuomo's stated reason for changing the state's teacher evaluation was that some 96 percent of teachers got top grades under the old process. He scoffed at those results as "baloney." That's hardly going to get teachers to buy into your new evaluation system.

Which brings me back to Michigan. In 2011, the state Legislature there changed the tenure law, making it easier to fire incompetent teachers. But it also set up the Michigan Council for Educator Effectiveness, which was charged with coming up with its first-ever statewide evaluation system. Ball was named chairwoman of the council. Two years later, it came back with its recommendations.

The first thing I noticed about the council's recommendations is that they completely avoid the divisive political language that has alienated teachers. Instead of casting teacher evaluation as primarily being about getting rid of bad teachers, they instead recast it to put the emphasis on teacher improvement. An evaluation system that stresses improvement instead of punishment has a much better chance of being embraced by teachers.



**JOE NOCERA**  
Comment

Such an emphasis isn't just good politics. It's also an important way to help make schools better. "Very few teachers can't improve," Ball told me recently. And most teachers want to improve — but have no means of getting useful feedback. The council's idea was that the evaluations could be used not just to rid the system of incompetent teachers — though it would certainly do that — but also to give all the other teachers critical feedback. It also envisions

transforming professional development, which is now mostly a wasteland, into a mechanism to put that feedback into practice.

There are two fundamental pieces to the Michigan council's plan. The first piece is teacher observation. In most schools, it's the principal who observes the teacher, often haphazardly, and rates him or her based on

personal biases, which may or may not be sound. Ball and her colleagues would instead rely on observers who have been trained in using certain tools that have been proved effective. These observations would be the basis for the teacher's feedback — feedback meant to encourage and help, rather than threaten.

The second piece is what the council calls evaluating "student growth." Here the point would be not to measure student achievement in absolute terms — Does Johnny read at a fourth-grade level? — but rather to measure whether Johnny had made a year's worth of improvement from the level he was reading at when he was in the third grade. This would be a more accurate representation of the difference the teacher made, and would take into account the wide range of learning levels teachers often have to contend with.

Some of this growth evaluation would undoubtedly be done through tests. But not all of it, or even most of it. "You have to look at objectives for students for the year and see if they made progress," says Ball. There are ways to do that that don't require standardized testing.

I wish I could tell you that this story has a happy ending, but it doesn't. Legislation that embodied the work of the council failed to pass the Michigan Legislature in the last session. More recently, the chairman of a related Senate committee, Phil Pavlov, has essentially tossed the council's work aside in favor of "local control."

That is Michigan's loss. But perhaps other states and school districts can look at the work of the Michigan council and learn from it. In which case, it could still be America's gain.

Joe Nocera is an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times. He joined The Opinion Pages in April 2011.

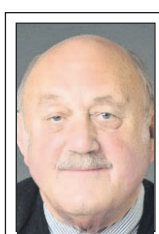
## LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

## OTHER VIEWS

# County looks to add employees that bring in new revenue

The headline in the *East Oregonian* noting Umatilla County has budgeted for 17 new positions is, at face value, a bit misleading. Unfortunately, in an age of knee-jerk reactions to government growth, it becomes necessary to submit some clarifications.



**GEORGE MURDOCK**  
Comment

Umatilla County has been engaged in several initiatives that are not related to the general fund. Among those are efforts to return oversight of both the developmental disabilities program and oversight of mental health to the county. That's because the county wants to assure its citizens are receiving quality services.

Many of the new positions — a third or more to be exact — are in

human services and outside of the general fund. Those positions are proposed in the budget should special funding materialize. They have not been filled and will not be filled unless that funding becomes available. There is also provision for added staff in the development disabilities budget with state funding supporting that move.

There are also several new positions in public health. In those cases there are two driving forces — an expansion of school-based health programs, which are supported primarily by outside entities, and an expansion of maternal child health programs. In actuality, through new approaches and management, the cost to the general fund for 2015-2016 has

been reduced by \$165,000.

There are four new positions being added in the general fund. Three of those four are in the public safety budget. In this case, the new positions are primarily a result of contracting with both the cities of Athena and Weston for patrol services.

And, again, the added positions are accompanied by payments from the entities receiving the services. Plus, as we have noted publicly, we also have a need to augment court security.

In the case of the district attorney's office, several positions have been added. A part of those positions should be covered by funds from local entities who have called upon the county to provide services previously provided by those local entities. But in addition, by doubling the patrol force in the

county, there is a significant impact on the prosecuting attorney's office in terms of additional arrests — sort of a cause and effect idea.

Finally, there is a half time employee added to the county in the land use planning office, which is a good news/bad news thing. Umatilla County is now at or about 80,000 residents and continuing to lead Eastern Oregon in economic growth. Prosperity often breeds dramatic demands on the system. The department most impacted by growth is land use planning. Frankly, we hope that demand continues.

Umatilla County remains committed to the idea of operating efficiently and effectively. Our primary focus is on limiting personnel growth in the general fund unless it is accompanied by a new revenue stream. As we have

noted, the actual net increase to the general fund in the new budget is one FTE. But we also believe we have a commitment to the residents of this county and when we find opportunities to expand programs and services without adding additional tax burdens, we are willing to do so.

We are proud of the fact we set aside funds in case the PERS decision went south (which it did) and we will continue to explore other avenues of enhancing county services through both thoughtful and innovative approaches.

Every department in the county has been encouraged to think creatively about how we can make a positive and profound difference.

George Murdock is chair of the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners.