

## Quick takes

### PGG to sell grain department

Dang, just put up the going out of business forever sign now why don't ya.  
— **Scott Jacobson**

As a former employee: not surprising.  
— **Damon Long**

You can thank Capital Hill capitalism for this. Corporate America is just devouring us one community at a time.  
— **Skip Cripe**

End of an era?  
— **Stephanie Cheyenne Vize**

### Most property taxes jump

On my little 50x100 foot lot. Just the land increased in value \$6,000. Hmm. In town. That's not the rest, just the lot.  
— **John Ware**

Nope, the value on my house is more than last year and it seems to be a new way of looking at inflation is here and the costs of everything is going up.  
— **Jovanna Centre**

### Teen gets hubonic plague

Pretty scary with hunting season here. Second case I've heard of this year.  
— **Sherry A McClellan**

Be careful and wear lots of insect repellent.  
— **Mayra Verduzco**

### Drive-through flu shots

This was a wonderful way of doing it. I hope they do this again next year. Thanks for the great job of doing it this way.  
— **Donna Russell De Graw**

Looks very sanitary! No flu shots for my family, ever.  
— **Kassidee K. Hutchison**

Unfortunately, not getting the flu shot won't simply thin the herd of the people who can't science. Kids, elders and people with compromised immune systems are threatened by the jut-jawed ignorance as well.  
— **Liz McLellan**

*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.*

# Have coffee and conversation with the city

Coffee with the City kicked off on Oct. 5 with a good number of citizens and city officials drinking coffee, answering questions and sharing ideas. Sitting down for coffee is a way to foster more personal relationships between citizens and the people who work or volunteer on their behalf at the City.



ROBB CORBETT  
Comment

The first "Coffee with the City" was held at the Buckin' Bean on NW Despain thanks to the generosity of owners Winston and Kirbie Hill. Issues raised by citizens ranged from street sweeping to fee increases. We talked with people who appreciated the chance to visit and heard from others who really wanted to get some frustrations off their chest. Everyone left feeling they were heard.

We face a number of obstacles in reaching our residents with in depth information about issues that matter to them. People are busy and get their news from a wide variety of sources. Stopping

by a city council meeting or making an appointment to talk with a city staff person is not convenient or realistic for most people's schedules. The Internet gives constituents more options for news but we find it also paves the way for misinformation to "go viral." We want to do a better job of getting information to you — the people we serve.

While the City has long communicated with residents via our Facebook page and website, we really like the opportunity to build relationships with face to face conversations. It is important to us to put a face to a name, build trust within our community and make sure we provide more venues in which people can get accurate information.

The "Coffee with the City" concept was borrowed from a successful national program called "Coffee with a Cop." It has been shown that barriers are removed

by meeting in the casual atmosphere of a coffee shop. There is no agenda, no program. What you'll find are representatives from the city pouring coffee and listening to neighbors who want to talk about issues they are concerned about. In these monthly sessions we may be able to easily resolve a problem and we can always answer your questions.

**The Internet gives constituents more options for news, but we find it also paves the way for misinformation to "go viral."**

Next month, we'll host "Coffee with the City" on Southgate to talk with people at McDonald's on Nov. 2 from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. I hope you'll join us and remember — coffee is on us. These sessions will take place on the first Monday of every month at different locations around the city. Future locations can be found by visiting the city's website, Facebook page, or by calling City Hall at 541-966-0201.

Robb Corbett is Pendleton city manager.

# Gas tax a chance to save Pendleton roads

In the last article I said we would be on to infrastructure for the city. It seems only appropriate to start with the streets since the city is asking for a nickel a gallon on fuel to help maintain them. The state tax street fund provides for the maintenance of over 71 miles of paved city streets, including five miles of oil mat roads, three miles of gravel roads and a mile of dirt road, expenses for city streetlights and the inclement weather services necessary to keep the streets, public stairways, parking lots, bridges and public sidewalks passable.



AL PLUTE  
Comment

The proposed budget for fiscal year 2016 provides for ongoing maintenance and preservation projects related to arterial and collector streets. Preservation projects are about 10 percent of the level necessary to maintain the street system in "good" condition. There will be a large capital outlay based on carryover from previous years. The street assessment report completed May 2013 has the deferred maintenance of the streets at close to \$16 million and the cost

to maintain our street system at its current pavement condition is about \$700,000 per year. Our streets will continue to get worse and the deferred amount will be \$16.6 million and it will keep going up unless we can get ahead of it.

The beginning working capital for fiscal year 2016 is \$847,300. The city receives income from state and federal taxes, which amounts to approximately \$1.2 million. The two combined amounts to a total of \$2.1 million.

Operating expenses are budgeted at \$553,380.

Street lights: \$195,000.

Improvements to city streets were: \$1 million.

Contingency fund: \$191,415.

This year's street budget was approximately \$2 million. This was because they used \$655,885 of the beginning working capital. This enabled us to spend \$1 million on street repairs. We won't be able to do that next year and the budget will go back to spending \$300,000 on arterial and collector streets. Residential streets will

receive nothing unless the nickel a gallon fee on fuel passes. We will open next year's budget with \$191,415 in working capital dedicated to streets and that will be added to the state and federal fuel tax income received. Again, none of this money will be used for residential streets.

**Residential streets will receive nothing unless the nickel a gallon tax on fuel passes.**

On another note, Sam Byrnes wrote an article this week. The one thing I disagree with Sam on is that he noted their association would welcome a statewide tax but not a local one.

The whole point of having a local tax is that we receive the benefit of the whole amount instead of a fractional one. The present 48 cent tax a gallon state and federal tax gives Pendleton approximately \$950,000. While a five cents a gallon city tax gives us \$550,000. The state would have to raise the gas tax 24 cents a gallon to yield the same result of \$550,000 for Pendleton. I'd rather pay a nickel.

Al Plute is a Pendleton city councilor.

# A summer of fire and smoke

By **PAUL LINDHOLDT**  
*High Country News*

On Spokane's west side, the Houston Fire was growing fast. If a wind were to come up and whip flames across a field of weeds, the gate that keeps the world at bay at the entrance to Erika and Andrea Zaman's lane would do no good. Just in time, Andrea blasted back from the airport, scooped up her sitter and the two kids. The sitter's mom took them in while firefighters worked hard to turn the blaze away.

This past summer was tense. I live just four miles from what became known as the Houston Fire, and I speculated that its flames might gallop along our street, leaving me little to do but climb a ladder to the roof with a garden hose, wet down the house and hope for the best.

Back in 1902, a wildfire near Yaacolt, Washington, ravaged 370 square miles. That fire reigned as the largest in state history until 2014, when the Carlton Complex Fire assailed Brewster and Pateros in the north-central part of the state. At 391 square miles, the Carlton out-burned the Yaacolt Fire, destroying 353 homes and causing \$100 million in damage.

This year, in yet another symptom of the impacts of climate change, the Okanogan Complex of fires surpassed them both by growing to 400 square miles. Some climate skeptics — the deniers — claim that warming and turmoil are natural. They are willing to finger anything else — oceanic oscillations, volcanic eruptions, even sunspots — as probable triggers. They cite anything outside of human-brewed pollution as a cause. Those who deny we are experiencing anthropogenic climate change want to damn all contradictory opinions, even the newest research from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Meanwhile, every year wildfires in the West start earlier, burn hotter, grow in acreage and last longer. Spent fuels heat the planet, drive regional droughts and cause vaster fires to destroy more trees. The causes are reciprocal. Pollution begets wildfires, which in turn beget more pollution. And yet, ironically, global forests are ideal carbon sinks for renegade carbon. I like to call them absorption organs. Instead of doing their job of "sinking" or absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>, though, our forests are turning rapidly into ash.

Climate disruption is a kind of ice age in reverse. As the planet warms and polar ice caps melt at hastening rates, weird weather increasingly becomes the norm.

The anthropogenic argument on climate change holds that petrochemicals generate planetary grief — that carbon pollution spreads misery beyond the rural-urban interface where wildfires do most damage. We mine oil and gas under the planet's surface, we eradicate the cleansing vegetation that surrounds the mines, we refine crude to make ever more-flammable stuff in districts known as cancer alleys, we contaminate the environment in unsustainable ways when we combust that stuff. We are the "weather-makers,"

the "future eaters," in the fine phrases of writer and scientist Tim Flannery.

Aware Americans would like to curtail carbon generation in every way. They would put the brakes on the coal being transported by trains and burnt to make electricity, slow the highly combustible oil being pumped from Midwest fields, limit the homes popping up so far from urban cores and thereby necessitating long commutes, create incentives for carmakers to manufacture models that exceed miles-per-gallon averages in the low 20s.

For weeks on end this summer, assailed by wildfire smoke, we residents of the inland Northwest kept hoping for rain. When at last a summer shower arrived, raindrops atomized the dust and made every parched thing pungent. People fairly spun with bliss; it had been so long, they did not know what they'd been missing.

In the shadow of the Houston Fire, residents returned home the same day. They were luckier than many people have been these last two years. No houses or lives were lost. Andrea, Erika and their children breathed relief, thanked the brave firefighters, kept the windows closed and ran the AC.

A week later, I biked the road that had split the 60-acre burn site. The scent of ash and chemicals tainted the air. One barn had been leveled, another scorched. Bulldozers had punched roads through the forest to give the firefighters access, and barbed wire slumped where posts once held it. On both sides of rural Grove Road, blackened trees and grasslands spread as far as the eye could see, and on the asphalt and the pastures lay red stains from the fire repellent — battle scars from a battle we've yet to acknowledge we're fighting.

*Paul Lindholdt is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a column service of High Country News (hcn.org). He lives and bikes in Spokane, Washington, and is a professor of English at Eastern Washington University.*

# Oh, those debating Republicans

On his way into the big presidential debate, Ben Carson told reporters his plan was "to be me." Excellent idea — way better than planning to be Chris Christie.

"We are on the verge, perhaps, of picking someone who cannot do this job!" cried Gov. John Kasich of Ohio at the moment the contest began. Kasich had actually been asked to name his biggest weakness, but the thought of Carson's tax plan and Donald Trump's immigration plan seemed to send him a little off topic.

"He was so nice, he was such a nice guy," sneered Trump at Kasich's howling. "But then his poll numbers tanked."

Hard to believe the race is still barely beginning — one week until one year until presidential Election Day! But you can't say things have been boring. "What the hell are you people doing to me?" Trump demanded in Iowa, where he's no longer in the lead. Perhaps we will look back on this as the moment when the former star of "The Apprentice" fired a state.

But about Wednesday night's debate — the topic was economics, and the big takeaway was probably that when there are 10 people onstage, nobody is going to have to explain how that flat tax plan adds up. When in doubt, complain about government regulations.

Carson appears to have a particular genius on this front. Asked what to do about the pharmaceutical industry's outrageous pricing policies, he mildly said: "No question that some people go overboard when it comes to trying to make profits," and then he careened off to the cost of government rules on "the average small manufacturer."

Every seasoned politician is good at answering a difficult question with the answer to something entirely different. But Carson — who isn't supposed to be a politician at all — was possibly the champ. Where do you think he picked that up? It's a little unnerving to think this kind of talent is useful in the operating room.

Because Carson's voice always sounds so moderate, responses that make no sense whatsoever can sound sort of thoughtful until you replay them in your head. Asked why, as an opponent of gay marriage, he serves on the board of a company that offers domestic partner benefits, Carson said that he believed "marriage is between one man and one woman and there is no reason that you can't be perfectly fair to the gay community." He then proposed, in his measured tones, that "the PC culture ... it's destroying this nation."

Republicans who have been terrified by Trump and Carson, and in despair over Jeb



GAIL COLLINS  
Comment

Bush, keep pointing hopefully to Marco Rubio. During the debate, Rubio demonstrated great verbal talent when it came to explaining why he seems so bad at things like, say, managing his personal finances. (His parents were humble working folk who did not leave him a fortune.) Also, his stupendous absentee record in the Senate is not all that much worse than some other people who have run for president.

"But Marco, when you signed up for this — this was a six-year term and you should be showing up to work," interjected Bush, who seemed as if he had suddenly shaken himself from a nap. Bush's only two moments of energy involved Rubio, who he seems to hate, and fantasy football, which he really, really enjoys.

**Every seasoned politician is good at answering a difficult question with the answer to something entirely different.**

Jeb Bush is not going to be the Republican presidential nominee. Neither is, let's see — Christie, Rand Paul, Carly Fiorina or any of the other supporting cast members. Ted Cruz did have a big moment when he answered a question about raising the debt limit by attacking the questioner. That went over so well that by the end of the two-hour session, the left-wing media had overtaken government regulators as the greatest threat to the future of American democracy.

Or do you think it could actually be Carson? The guy who seems to blame gun control for the Holocaust?

One of the theories on why Carson can't win — besides the fact that he's utterly loopy — is that even a lot of Republican voters will be unnerved by his plans to undermine Social Security and Medicare.

But his ideas aren't actually all that different from those of most of the other candidates, who want to raise retirement rates or cut out everybody under, say, 45. "It's not too much to ask of our generation after everything our parents and our grandparents did for us," said Rubio.

Hard to imagine this going over well in middle-aged America, but the whole party is on the same page. Except for Mike Huckabee who — yes! — is still in the race, out there somewhere. And Trump, who says everything will be fine after he makes "a really dynamic economy from what we have right now" and builds that wall at the border.

Somebody has got to be nominated. Happy Halloween.

*Gail Collins joined The New York Times in 1995 as a member of the editorial board and later as an Op-Ed columnist. In 2001 she became the first woman ever appointed editor of the Times's editorial page.*