

EAST OREGONIAN
Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Vote yes on Hermiston, Stanfield fire district reformation plan

Back in 2014, we supported a plan to merge the Hermiston and Stanfield fire departments, which would have provided better emergency services in the county's west end.

The ballot measure failed. But now that the reformation plan is back in front of voters two years later — at a reduced cost and with clearer explanation of benefits — we find it worth supporting again.

Here's why:

The reformation will add personnel. For the first time, the Diagonal Road station in Hermiston would be staffed full-time. Administration duties will be simplified and centralized. A firefighter/medic will work 40 hours per week in Stanfield, and all fires in that city will receive response from Hermiston crews. And those crews will have more equipment at their disposal because there will be enough employees on hand to operate it. If two or three emergencies are happening at once — a growing concern in the growing Hermiston area — firefighters and paramedics will be able to deal with it without delay.

And those delays are happening, Hermiston Fire District Chief Scott Stanton told the editorial board. Although he is working hard to make sure it doesn't, Stanton said there are increasing odds that a delay will result in a death, or a devastating loss of property.

The cost for increased fire and emergency service coverage is lower than it was in 2014.

For those in the Stanfield Fire District, property taxes would be lowered by 31 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value. That more than

makes up for joining the local district with neighboring Hermiston.

In Hermiston, the tax rate for the fire district would increase from \$1.20 to \$1.75 per \$1,000 in assessed value. However, because of compression — which sets hard tax limits on municipalities — most property owners in the city would not see an initial increase in their taxes.

Those outside the city will see the biggest tax hike. The maximum increase would be 55 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value, which means the owner of a \$100,000 home could pay up to an additional \$55 annually in taxes.

Still, in our view, that's a low price to pay for better service and faster response times, while still coming in below the state average for fire district tax rates.

The issue does look confusing on the ballot, possibly one of the reasons why it failed in 2014. Voters who are in favor of the reformation will have to vote to dissolve their current fire district and then vote to create the new one.

If any of the votes fail, the whole plan collapses.

If none of the votes fail, voters have the ability on the May ballot to elect five board members for the new district.

And even though the new district will be called Umatilla County Fire District #1, it isn't a county service. Stanton said the name was just the simplest one they could come up with that didn't include Hermiston or Stanfield.

And that's what the new district will be — the simplest way to provide timely emergency response in both Hermiston and Stanfield.

We recommend a yes vote.

The issue looks confusing on the ballot, but its a simple way to decrease delayed responses to emergencies.

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.

YOUR VIEWS

A need in Pendleton for an off-leash dog park

Pendleton Parks is a collective in our community, involving and fostering a healthy and vibrant open area. Included in that community are our canine companions. They are considered beloved family members to many and are an integral part of their owners' daily lives.

The city of Pendleton is on track and in line with supporting a healthy outlet for our furry friends. Offering a dog park will be a valuable addition to Pendleton's already impressive array of neighborhood parks. A location on the Umatilla River, already owned by the city, is the perfect area for dogs to run free and get the needed exercise they desire. A recent letter to the editor suggests a lack of value in offering a place in our town for owners to exercise and enjoy the day outside with their animals. I am confident this dedicated area will foster a healthy community though the enjoyment of our beautiful outdoor areas.

We have all heard that exercise is good for us. In fact, the more exercise dogs receive the better behaved they will be (it likely works for humans as well). I agree 100 percent with the editorial comment made: "If you want a dog, take care of it."

Excellent point. Take them outside! Take care of them and yourself. Do a favor for your pet by introducing them to other dogs (socializing). How do you do this? Get outdoors and enjoy a run, throw a ball or jump in the river. We need a designated place to make this happen. There is now no legal, off-leash

property to socialize your dog with other dogs or even to let them run untethered. Now is the time to move forward with a location for dog owners to converge to enjoy the outdoors.

Pendleton Parks is working for you with this new offering. I hope animal lovers and outdoor enthusiast will see the value in a dog park as I have. Other communities throughout Oregon have seen the value and benefits to safe, off-leash areas. We have a great opportunity to provide such a space that will allow our animals access to the river and land to play, explore and socialize.

Pendleton is a healthy vibrate community, a place where bike trails, dog parks, river walks and community programs bring us together.

**Dawn DiFuria McClendon, commissioner
Parks, Recreation & Cemetery
Pendleton**

Wolves staying busy, even when in the limelight

Wow, we have received a lot of press lately. Someone even started an ugly rumor about us being poached — the correct term is hunted. We hunt game and livestock and humans hunt us.

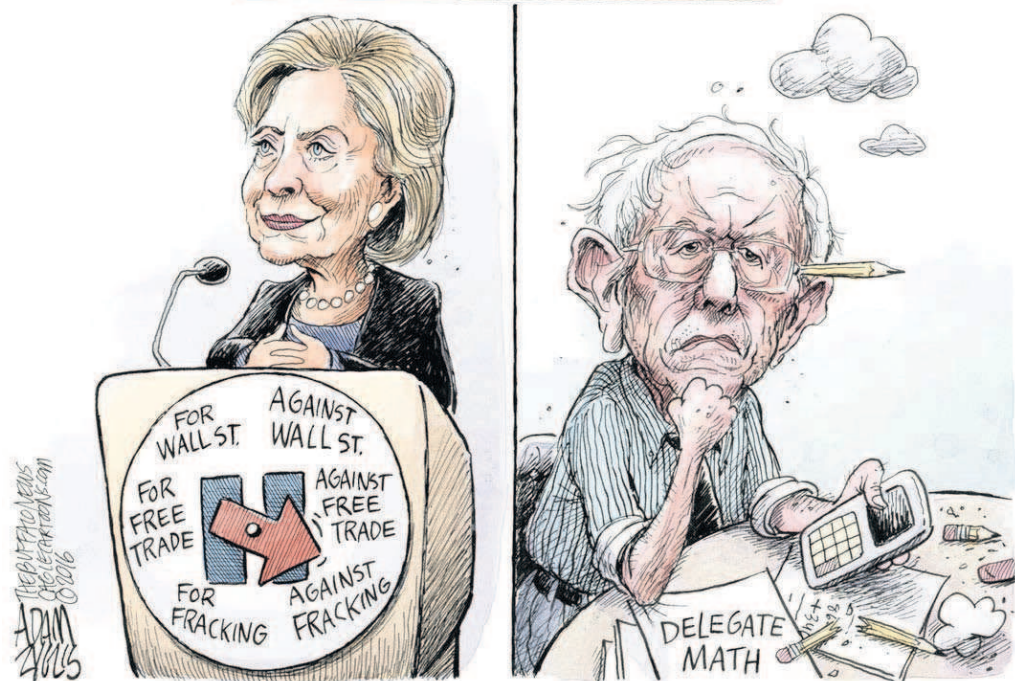
I'd like to correct a misconception about confirmed kills. The fish and wildlife people go to great lengths to confirm our kills, but they miss about half of them because we eat the evidence. Comments about our kills being down this past year are direct insults to our pack skills and my training. We will hunt harder this year.

**Alpha Wolf, Grand Packmaster
(as told to Mike Mehren, the wolf listener)
Hermiston**

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 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

CALCULATING



OTHER VIEWS

Trump flip-flops on key immigration issue

DETROIT — Donald Trump won the South Carolina primary across the board, but he did particularly well with the 10 percent of voters who named immigration as the nation's top issue.

In addition, some who named other issues — the economy, national security — were undoubtedly also concerned about immigration, and Trump's hard line likely helped him with them, too.

Which is why people who follow immigration closely were stunned Thursday night when Trump, at the Fox News debate here in Detroit, announced that he has changed his position on one key element of the immigration debate — the use of H-1B visas to bring skilled foreign workers into the United States.

In the distant past — say, yesterday — Trump focused on abuses in the system, in which some big companies have been caught using H-1Bs to bring in foreign workers, force American employees to train their own replacements, and then pay the foreign worker less than the American had made — all to do mostly routine jobs in the tech industry.

At his recent rally in Alabama — the one in which Trump received the endorsement of Sen. Jeff Sessions, Congress' strongest voice against expanding the troubled H-1B program — Trump also won the endorsement of some American workers who were victims of H-1B abuse at Disney.

"The fact is that Americans are losing their jobs to foreigners," one of the laid-off workers told the crowd. "I believe Mr. Trump is for Americans first."

In Detroit, Fox News' Megyn Kelly pointed out that Trump's campaign website has a strong statement against increasing the number of H-1Bs, saying it would "decimate American workers," and yet in one debate Trump spoke favorably of the program. "So, which is it?" Kelly asked.

"I'm changing," Trump said. "I'm changing. We need highly skilled people in this country, and if we can't do it, we'll get them in. But, and we do need in Silicon Valley, we absolutely have to have."

"So, we do need highly skilled," Trump continued, "and one of the biggest problems we have is people go to the best colleges. They'll go to Harvard, they'll go to Stanford, they'll go to Wharton, as soon as they're finished they'll get shoved out. They want to stay in this country. They want to stay here desperately, they're not able to stay here. For that purpose, we absolutely have to be able to keep the brain power in this country."

"So you are abandoning the position on your website?" asked Kelly.

"I'm changing it," Trump said, "and I'm softening the position because we have to have talented people in this country."

Trump's turnaround sent a jolt through the group of policy wonks and activists who have opposed Gang of Eight-style comprehensive immigration reform. "I've heard from enough tech workers displaced by H-1Bs that Trump's apparent answer very dispiriting," tweeted the writer Mickey Kaus. "Clarification?"

Mark Krikorian, head of the Center for

Immigration Studies, which favors reducing levels of immigration into the U.S., was not impressed. "(Trump) made clear in October he didn't believe what's in his immigration paper about skilled immigration," Krikorian told me by email after the debate, "and at the last debate he showed he buys the 'jobs Americans won't do' line on unskilled workers too."

"So will he 'clarify' his 'I'm softening' comment tomorrow, like he did after the October debate?" Krikorian continued. "His embrace of foreign tech workers is particularly shocking given that just days ago he featured American workers replaced by Disney at one of his rallies."

Even as Krikorian was typing his email to me, Trump was at work doing just what Krikorian predicted. "Megyn Kelly asked about highly skilled immigration," Trump said in a clarification statement sent to reporters about an hour after the debate ended. "The H-1B program is neither high-skilled nor immigration: these are temporary foreign workers, imported from abroad, for the explicit purpose of substituting for American workers at lower pay. I remain totally committed to eliminating rampant, widespread H-1B abuse and ending outrageous practices such as those that occurred at Disney in Florida when Americans were forced to train their foreign replacements. I will end forever the use of the H-1B as a cheap labor program, and institute an absolute requirement to hire American workers first for every visa and immigration program. No exceptions."

It would be hard to imagine a quicker or more complete flip-flop.

Sen. Marco Rubio, co-author of the Gang of Eight bill, wants to increase the number of H-1Bs; he's a co-sponsor of another bill to do just that. After the debate, top Rubio campaign aide Todd Harris was happy to entertain questions about Trump's changing positions.

"First of all, I'm not surprised that he so easily took what yesterday was something that he had said was a core principle and threw it out the window, because the fact is that Donald Trump has no core principles," Harris told me. "One of the hallmarks of a con man is to say whatever it is that you need to say in order to fool somebody, and he obviously feels that what he needs to say to fool the people now is different than what it was yesterday."

I asked whether Sen. Rubio is happy to have Trump join him in advocating for H-1Bs. "Sen. Rubio supports the H-1B program," Harris said. "The problem is we have no idea where Donald Trump is going to be tomorrow on this issue or frankly, any other issue."

A short time later, Rubio himself issued a statement noting that in the debate Trump "finally took an actual position, but as soon as the debate was over, his handlers made him reverse himself."

"The Republican nominee," Rubio said, "cannot be somebody who is totally clueless on so many issues, including his signature issue."

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

