

EAST OREGONIAN

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OUR VIEW

Ode to PGG

Pendleton Grain Growers, an Eastern Oregon institution since 1930, may not last another month.

It will be an ignoble end to a co-op that helped build Umatilla County farmers into some of the world's most productive and prosperous.

It's also an indictment of poor management, dishonest or at the very least incompetent financial appraisals and a failure to adapt to a changing world. Pendleton Grain Growers

refused to confront its problems until it was too late. And now it is.

PGG's 1,079 voting members will have the final say about what will happen to the co-op on May 2. At least two-thirds of all votes will be required to dissolve the organization and start divvying up the assets. If the members do not vote to dissolve, the co-op would likely still fold and members would be less likely to recoup their equity, according to a letter from PGG.

Costs are too high, revenue is too low. The longer PGG is in business, the more money it is losing.

The *East Oregonian* continues to dig into the reasons for PGG's precipitous collapse. We are not ready to publish them yet, but have been working for months in advance

of last week's release.

But we can mark this moment in history.

If PGG is to be no more, it marks a tremendous loss for the region — and for Pendleton in particular.

Over much of the last century, hundreds of Pendletonians used the co-op to rise up in the ranks of business and politics. Pendleton Grain Growers could always be counted on to support good causes in the area. They were a cultural touchstone and a sense of pride for the area's farming community.

It's clear that pride in PGG has been eroding for decades. Last harvest season, farmers made it known that they had lost faith in the co-op, unloading and selling a majority of their grain elsewhere.

The agriculture industry is changing rapidly — it's among the last to become mostly mechanized. The future farm will look vastly different than Old MacDonald's. There will be drones and laptops and soil sensors, but not as many laborers.

The collapse of PGG is a reminder that looking forward, not looking back, is the only way to keep your feet in an always-changing world.

The longer the co-op is in business, the more money it is losing.

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.

OTHER VIEWS

Liquor laws don't need mixing

The Oregonian

Ever notice how some bad ideas refuse to die?

Take, for example, the initiative being bandied about again by the large grocery retailers to grab some of the state's lucrative market in alcoholic spirits.

We wrote back in December 2013 that this is a bad idea. Consider what happened with the liquor industry in Washington state when it let large grocers into the business in 2011. Since opening liquor sales to large grocers there, prices have gone up, while availability of variety and the number of independent sales outlets have shrunk.

All that would probably be fine in any other economic scenario. But Oregon makes a lot of tax dollars from the state controlled industry.

For the latest biennium, liquor sales topped \$1 billion for the first time ever. The result was more than \$435 million in tax revenue to be divided between the state and local governments, and toward mental health and addiction treatment services.

The latest initiative wants to eliminate the state's role in liquor distribution and turn the industry private. Then, the idea is that state lawmakers would simply

establish a new liquor tax to replace the revenue lost when the state is out of the business.

But there's no guarantee that would happen.

There's also no guarantee that prices wouldn't rise precipitously once the market shakes out the smaller operators, just as what happened up north.

And perhaps the biggest concern for the consumer (besides the prices increases) and small spirits producer is loss of shelf space. Oregon's rich diversity in small craft brewers and distillers survive because the state-operated system makes sure they have equal access to shelf space. But large retailers survive on volume and what sells best. That means there's a high likelihood that your favorite small batch brewer or distiller may get crowded off the shelf.

Fact is that the current system is working. Liquor prices are consistent throughout the state; revenues continue to grow and help us all; and small, private distributors are free to grow their businesses as they see fit.

If you don't believe that, visit the Beverage Barn in Bandon on U.S. Highway 101. Proof enough that Oregon's liquor industry is doing fine just as it is.

Vote Lindsay for Morrow County judge

Morrow County deserves a judge that has energy, vision, and passion. The candidate needs experience in working with our local businesses, communities, families and schools.

Most importantly, the person needs to share our values. Melissa Lindsay embodies all of these traits, and that is why my wife Sherri and I could not be prouder to support her for Morrow County Judge.

Melissa was born and raised in Morrow County. She is a woman of hard work and strong values. With over 25 years of finance, banking and private sector experience, she understands what it means to operate a business. She and her family can often be seen volunteering and promoting our county throughout the region at various events.

However, Melissa's passion is only outperformed by her energy. She has a "can-do" attitude and works to bring partners together to find solutions. Whether you live in Boardman, Heppner, Ione, Irrigon, Lexington or outside of town, I can

guarantee you that Melissa will put all of her energy into serving you and your family.

Please join my family, along with citizens, business leaders, and elected officials across the county, in voting Melissa Lindsay for Morrow County Judge.

Rep. Greg Smith
Heppner

Marks best choice left in Ward 1 council race

This letter is in reference to the May election for the Pendleton City Council Ward 1 seat and my support of Becky Marks in that race.

You will see three names on the ballot; however only two are running for the seat. Renee Caubisons decided to not continue to pursue the seat for personal reasons. She would have been an excellent choice; however, with the incumbent Beck Marks in the race, she has earned my respect to serve another term.

Becky is always prepared for meetings and willing to share her thoughts in order to move the city forward. Her constituency is one that needs to be represented and

Becky does that well.

Please vote Becky Marks for Ward 1 in the Pendleton City Council race.

Phillip W. Houk, mayor
Pendleton

Primmer a good choice for Pendleton council

I have known Dale Primmer for 16 years. As sheriff and in past positions, I've worked with Dale in my law enforcement duties going back nearly two decades. I know him to be committed, honest, ethical and hard-working in his efforts. I've also known him to have the ability to get along well with a broad section of personalities.

Dale and his family are long-term Eastern Oregon residents and are committed to the success of the city of Pendleton and Umatilla County. I know that Dale brings a temperament and skill set that Pendleton would benefit from. Please join me in supporting Dale Primmer for Pendleton City Council Ward 3.

Terry L. Rowan,
Umatilla County Sheriff
Pendleton

Fairley will make good addition to city council

Please join me in voting for Scott Fairley for Pendleton City Council, Ward 2.

For four years I worked with Scott on the Pendleton Planning Commission and saw first-hand his ability to build consensus and bring positive change to our city. Included among his strengths is his role as the Greater Eastern Oregon Regional Solutions Coordinator representing Umatilla and six other Eastern Oregon counties to address local and regional concerns. In this role, Scott is responsible for covering a wide range of regional economic development interests important to Pendleton.

An example of his effectiveness was Scott's role to bring together local and legislative stakeholders to secure over \$1 million in state funding to demolish the buildings of the former Eastern Oregon Training and Blue Mountain Recovery Centers, which had been abandoned by the state, and transferring the property to the city for industrial and housing needs.

I urge your vote for positive, creative leadership. Vote Scott

Fairley for Pendleton City Council.
Chuck Wood
Pendleton

Dig deep to understand city budgets

Mr. Kishpaugh is correct in his condemnation of the oligarchs playing hide the money so they can do what they want, but he is wrong in relying on the oligarchs to tell him where the money is.

For instance, the city budget running this year (2015-16) shows budgeted wage increases of \$50,000 in finance (to fund a \$6,000 increase), and \$50,000 in engineering (to fund a \$6,000 increase), among other padding, and permanent increases in employees of one in police and three in fire departments for the same city population. The city central services (read overall administration) spends almost \$3.5 million (total property taxes are \$5.1 million).

If you want to find where the city money is, you must follow David Brooks' admonition: "Dogged work is the prerequisite to success."

Bob Ehmann, Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS



No way to elect a president

With Donald Trump's and Hillary Clinton's victories in New York, we're one furious contest closer to the end of this spectacle. But we've known for a while now where we're headed, and it isn't anyplace good.

American voters are displeased with the candidates they've been given. They're disengaged from the process that winnows the field.

And that process disregards the political center, erodes common ground and leaves us with a government that can't build the necessary consensus for, let alone implement, sensible action in regard to taxes, to infrastructure, to immigration, to guns, to just about anything.

Make America great again? We need to start by making it functional.

This election has certainly been extraordinary for its characters, but it's equally remarkable for its context, one of profound, paralyzing sourness.

A poll released by NBC News and *The Wall Street Journal* on Sunday showed that 68 percent of American voters couldn't imagine themselves casting a vote in the general election for Trump, while 61 percent said the same about Ted Cruz and 58 percent about Clinton.

A much, much higher percentage of voters viewed each of these three unfavorably than favorably. "Unpopularity Contest" was the headline on the story on the NBC News website, which rightly asked how well any president of such polarizing effect would be able to govern.

We've had such presidents (and candidates) before. And pessimism isn't new.

But there have been developments and differences in 2016 that may well be making the situation worse.

The media, for one. This election isn't being covered so much as marketed, by news organizations whose desperation for eyeballs has turned many of them into drama queens. Each new poll is a major scoop. There are countdown clocks for events as humdrum as candidate town halls. Debates are teased with ominous soundtracks and photographs better befitting prizefights.

When you treat a campaign as if it were an athletic competition, you turn it into more of a blood sport than it already is. And when you breathlessly promote it the way you would a hit TV show's season finale, it becomes just another piece of theater. Neither approach encourages sober-minded engagement.

Nor does the manner in which so many voters use the Internet in general and social media in particular, to curate and wallow in echo chambers that amplify their prejudices, exacerbate their tribalism and widen the fault



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

lines between us. The online behavior of the Bernie Bros is a great example, but it's hardly the only one.

Additionally, the precise unfolding of the Republican and Democratic races this time around, along with complaints from the candidates themselves, has exposed the undemocratic quirks and mess of the process: the peculiarity of caucuses; the seduction of delegates and superdelegates; closed versus open primaries; states that are winner-take-all as opposed to states that are winner-take-most; the possibility of a brokered convention at which an interloper could be crowned.

To prevail, a candidate doesn't even have to persuade an especially large share of the electorate, given how splintered and detached voters are. In an important commentary published in *The Hill* on Monday, the Democratic pollster and strategist Mark Penn extrapolated from

Trump's and Clinton's vote tallies to note that, in his estimation, "We now have a system in which it takes just 10 million votes out of 321 million people to seize one of the two coveted nominations."

"The result," he wrote, "is a democracy that is veering off course, increasingly reflecting the will of powerful activist groups and the political extremes." Would-be nominees needn't worry much about the roughly 40 percent of Americans who at least technically consider themselves independents — a group that's grown over the last decade — or the 60 percent who say that a third political party is needed.

No, these candidates "can just double down on elements of their base," Penn observed. "Rather than bring the country together, they demonize their opponents to hype turnout among select groups, targeted by race, religion or ethnicity."

Penn suggested several smart reforms to increase voters' participation and sense of investment, including the abolition of caucuses and a rotation of the order in which states vote, so that Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina don't always get such outside sway.

I wish we could also find a way to shorten these presidential campaigns significantly, so that they're not such a soul-draining, throat-ravaging turnoff to almost anyone who's not an epic narcissist or mired in politics to the point of no return.

Then maybe we'd look up one of these years and be choosing among the greater of goods, not the lesser of evils, and the victor would be left, physically and ideologically, with a voice that still carries.

Frank Bruni has been an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since June 2011.

LETTERS POLICY

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YOUR VIEWS