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OUR VIEW

BMCC pool needs a life raft

Blue Mountain Community College's pool is treading water — barely — and its future is in serious doubt.

Some members of the community have come to rely on the pool, built in 1974, for health and recreation and competition.

Yet during that same time, BMCC changed its focus and nixed all of its academic offerings at the pool.

Now that it is in need of serious repair, it is clear that fixing the pool is higher on the priority list of some community groups than BMCC's administration.

The cost of doing the fixing is significant — north of \$2 million — and that's not money the community college has laying around. Were it to somehow further delay needed and possibly required maintenance, BMCC estimated \$85,317 in annual costs for operating the pool and only \$2,960 in revenue.

Some disagree with those numbers. At Tuesday's Pendleton School Board meeting, superintendent Andy Kovach called the cost estimate "a little bit out there" and other board members insinuated inflation and questioned BMCC's desire to help find a solution.

But Kovach also noted that Pendleton has not been paying their fair share.

"You can't also deny that we, the Pendleton School District, aren't paying anything for use of the pool," he said. "We haven't for years. It has to cost something."

Perhaps some people took the pool for granted — few high school programs, and none in Eastern Oregon, have one as nice. And free

is a pretty darn good price for one of the best facilities in the region.

Yet it does seem unfair that those groups were not given advance warning of the pool's dire straits.

Casey White-Zollman, vice president of public relations at

BMCC, said the school first realized this winter the building had serious air circulation issues. Fixing those issues is most of the \$2.3 million cost, and they represent the biggest hurdle to opening the pool this year. Little

action has been taken thus far. And with the school year right around the corner and swim season close to diving in, there are plenty of unanswered questions.

Voters did have an opportunity to boost the pool's budget, and they chose not to.

The college floated a bond in 2013 that included an \$850,000 earmark for the pool. That money would have been used for maintenance, decking replacement and HVAC work. But voters rejected the bond, and the line item was removed in the later incarnation that passed in 2015.

White-Zollman said that pool upgrades were not important to many community members surveyed, and the college felt that leaving it out of the bond was prudent. That feeling has traveled to the college, where its board has to deal with the "have-to-haves and the like-to-haves." It's clear the pool is a "like to" and it's also clear the money doesn't go that far.

If Umatilla County wants an indoor, competition-quality pool, it can no longer expect BMCC to provide it.

Facing \$2.3 million in repair costs, the future of the pool is in doubt.

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

State timber harvest declines

The (Corvallis) Gazette-Times

The Oregon Department of Forestry last week announced that timber harvests in the state declined about 8 percent in 2015 when compared to the year before.

It was the first time in three years that Oregon's timber harvest came in at less than 4 billion board feet. Last year's tally from the state's forests worked out to be about 3.79 billion board feet.

If that sort of number boggles your mind, the state provided this helpful fact: One board foot of lumber is 1 foot wide, 1 foot long and 1 inch thick. The construction of a house that's about 1,800 square feet requires about 10,000 board feet. So now, we'll do the math for you: Oregon's 2015 timber harvest would be sufficient to build about 379,000 houses.

We often have argued that Oregon's economy would be healthier, especially in the state's rural areas, if we were able to put more people back to work in our forests. The report from the Department of Forestry starts to suggest some of the reasons why that isn't happening, and while some of those are our making, other factors are out of our control.

First, consider this: According to the state, about half of Oregon (49 percent) is forested. (It works out to be about 30.2 million acres of forested land.)

About 60 percent of those forests are under federal control, either by the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management. We already know how difficult it can be to get timber sales approved on federal lands. The harvest on BLM land dropped about 8 percent in 2015. The harvest on Forest Service land dropped about 5 percent.

In an ironic (but somewhat

encouraging) note, the Forest Service actually reported an increase in the harvest in certain eastern Oregon counties, notably Grant and Harney. That work there is being driven by stewardship contracts.

But the Forest Service harvest in western Oregon declined, dragging down the totals. It makes you wonder if the stewardship examples in eastern Oregon can help unlock the federal forests in the western part of the state.

State-owned forests make up just 3 percent of the total in Oregon. Interestingly, the timber harvest on these state lands was up about 26 percent, according to the Department of Forestry, jumping from about 230 million board feet to about 290 million board feet — important, but just a fraction of the harvest from federal forests.

Industrial forests make up 19 percent of Oregon's total, and family forests add another 15 percent. Harvests on these private lands were down in 2015: Industrial harvest was down about 9 percent, the state said, while the harvest on nonindustrial private lands (essentially family forests) was about 453 million board feet, a decline of about 19 percent.

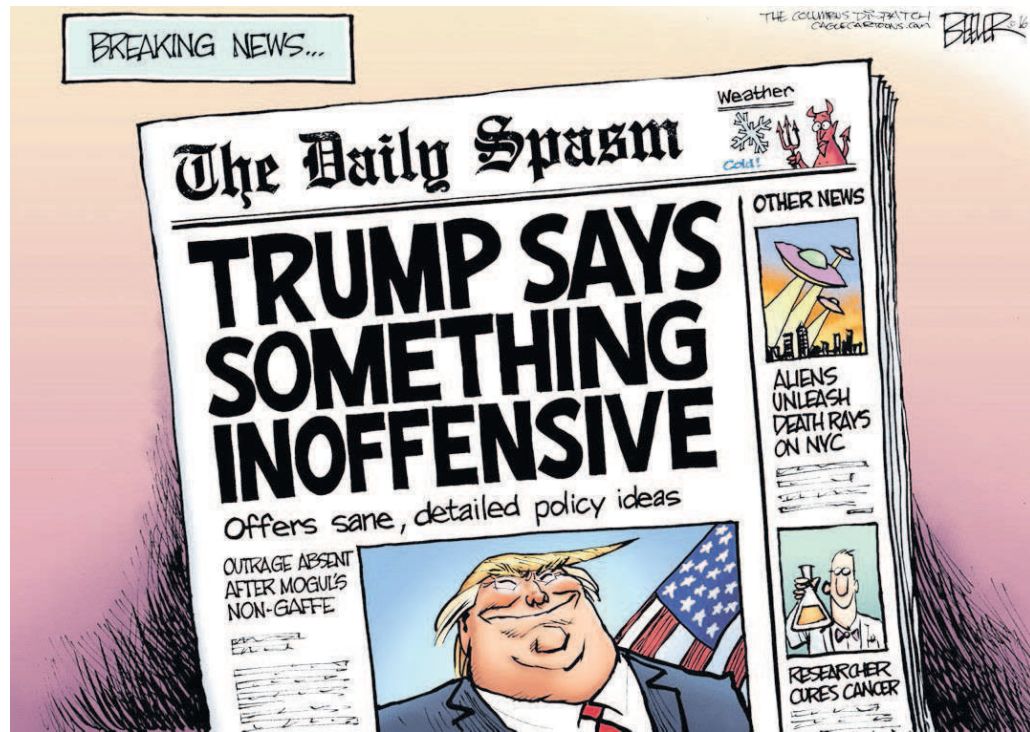
The Department of Forestry attributed much of the decline in the timber harvest to factors that have little, if anything, to do with the long-running environmental battles in the United States: The main culprit is the slowdown in timber exports to Asia. As Asian economies cool, so does the demand for logs.

We still believe that it would be helpful to Oregon's economy to get more people working in our forests. But the state report suggests some of the reasons why that task is more complex than it might appear.

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



How Clinton could knock Trump out

Maybe I just missed it. But in all the testimonials at the Democratic convention about what Hillary Clinton has done for other people, I don't recall anyone saying, "I started a business because of Hillary Clinton." Or, "I hired someone because of Hillary Clinton."

We heard from first responders, veterans, grieving parents and victims of terrorism, rape and various forms of discrimination. There was just one group that was conspicuously absent: the people who drive our economy by inventing things or by borrowing money to start companies that actually employ people.

Watching the convention, you would never know that what also makes America great is that generation after generation, people full of ideas risk their savings to start companies that provide work and paychecks. And only by generating more of these risk-takers will more people get hired for the good jobs Clinton promised.

The only things that were remotely growth-related in her speech were glancing references to a government-led infrastructure investment program (Go for it!) and her vow "to give small businesses a boost. Make it easier to get credit."

To do that, though, would run smack into the anti-bank sentiment of the Democratic Party, since small community banks provide about half the loans to small businesses, and it is precisely those banks that have been most choked by the post-2008 regulations. We need to prevent recklessness, not risk-taking.

I raise this for two reasons. The first: Donald Trump may not stay stupid forever (although he might!), and therefore Hillary will have to beat him on the central economic issue of growth. Trump spent the past few days trashing the parents of a heroic Muslim American soldier who lost his life in Iraq. The parents had — rightly — criticized Trump. But in his return fire, Trump shot himself in both feet, losing support in his own party.

Trump defended his Twitter tantrum against the soldier's parents with a sixth-grader's playground defense: "He called me a name." He forgot that his own convention engaged in a mad chant of "lock her up" about Clinton, but she ignored it and stayed on her message. That's what adults do.

Mind you, I hope Trump remains in his total whack-job mode, because it distracted attention from the latest economic news — that was perfectly set up for Trump to take political advantage of — that the economy grew an anemic 1.2 percent in the second quarter, and growth in the first quarter was revised downward. That economic news was teed up for Trump, the self-styled job-creator, and he shanked it deep into the woods, for it never to be heard from again.

Trump has gone amazingly far without having done an ounce of homework in

preparation for the presidency, relying instead on feeding tweets to an anxious Republican base. His candidacy should be over by now. But it isn't.

It scares me that people are so fed up with elites, so hate and mistrust Clinton and are so worried about the future — jobs, globalization and terrorism — that a bare majority could still fall for this self-infatuated carnival barker if he exhibited half a political brain.

And that leads to my second reason for pushing Clinton to inject some capitalism into her economic plan: The coalition she could lead. If there is one thing that is not going to revive growth right now, it is an anti-trade, regulatory heavy, socialist-lite agenda the Democratic Party has drifted to under the sway of Bernie Sanders. Socialism is the greatest system ever invented for making people equally poor. Capitalism makes people unequally rich, but I would much rather grow our pie bigger and faster and better adjust the slices than redivide a shrinking one.

There are a lot of center-right, business Republicans today feeling orphaned by Trump. They can't vote for him — but a lot of them still claim they can't bring themselves to vote for Hillary, either. Clinton should be reaching out to them with a real pro-growth, startup, deregulation, entrepreneurship agenda and give them a positive reason to vote for her.

It makes sense politically: Take Trump on at his self-proclaimed strength. And it makes sense economically: If Clinton wins, she will need to get stuff done, not just give stuff away.

I get that she had to lean toward Sanders and his voters to win the nomination; their concerns with fairness and inequality are honorable. But those concerns can be addressed only with economic growth; the rising anti-immigration sentiments in the country can be defused only with economic growth; the general anxiety feeding Trumpism can be eased only with economic growth.

Sanders had no plan whatsoever for growth. Trump doesn't, either, but he can fake it. It's time that Hillary pivoted. The country today doesn't need the first female president. It needs the first president in a long time who can govern with a center-left, center-right coalition, and actually end the gridlock on fiscal policy in a smart way.

If Trump continues to melt down into a puddle of bile, more and more Republicans will be up for grabs. With the right pro-growth economic policies, Clinton would have an opening to not only enlist them to help her win, but to build a governing coalition for the morning after.

Thomas L. Friedman won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, his third Pulitzer for The New York Times. He became the paper's foreign-affairs Op-Ed columnist in 1995.



THOMAS FRIEDMAN
Comment

Trump may not stay stupid forever and Hillary will have to beat him on the central economic issue of growth.

Olympic hurdles 2016

