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OUR VIEW

Pendleton schools at a precipice

A decade ago, the graduating classes of Pendleton and Hermiston high schools were nearly equal in size. But this June, when the Class of 2017 earns their diplomas, twice as many hats will be thrown in the air in Hermiston compared to their neighbors down the road.

Hermiston High will graduate more than 400 while Pendleton High just half that, according to our *East Oregonian* graduation section.

Those numbers speak volumes about the growth and health of both communities. Hermiston's school enrollment has soared while Pendleton is on a precipitous decline — down more than 30 graduates from last year alone.

Declining enrollment is a danger for every aspect of community life, from businesses to public safety to housing prices. But the effect is felt most immediately within the Pendleton School District itself.

Taxpayers forked over big bucks just two years ago to build three new schools, but a reduction in state funding combined with fewer students may soon mean those new buildings will not be adequately staffed. The district will lay off 10 when it's clear that more employees, not fewer, are needed to turn around the decline. Other important jobs will likely go unfilled after people leave or retire.

The reasons for the decline in

enrollment is multifaceted, and not solely the fault of the district. A lack of opportunities and leadership has hampered the city of Pendleton for much longer than a decade. A lack of jobs and housing, combined with a culture resistant to change, are the main culprits.

But the school district has lost students to online offerings, and

others who live in the district choosing to attend Helix or elsewhere, parents who chose instead to homeschool, others who have simply dropped out.

Increasing the number of students in the district was on the mind of school board members and the public as they peppered

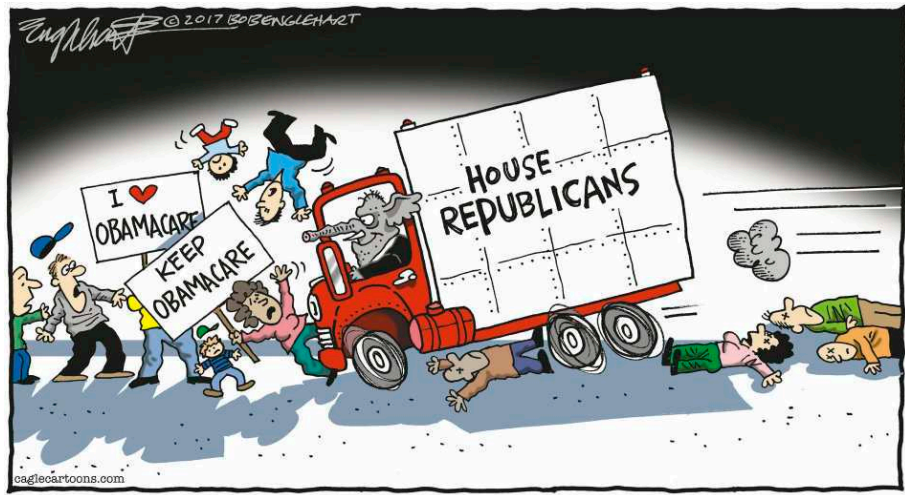
superintendent candidates last week. The winner of that four-man derby, Chris Fritsch, will have to deal with enrollment issues right away.

That means talking about development in Pendleton. Schools have largely been sidelined from this conversation, but they cannot afford to be sidelined any longer.

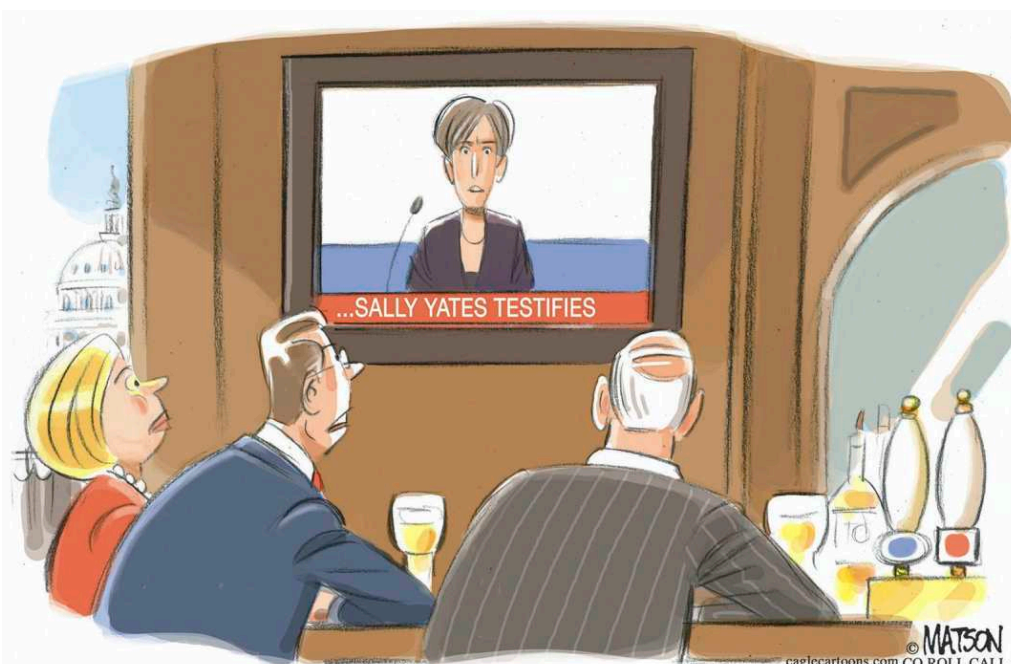
Creating a more stable district requires a stable, but preferably increasing number of pupils. Achieving that will take a stronger partnership with city government and development organizations, an improved classroom product, more state funding and more programs that keep reduce dropouts. It should be among the new superintendent's highest priorities.

Hermiston will graduate more than 400 students this year, Pendleton half that. A decade ago, the schools were almost even.

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.



Letters regarding the May election will not be published in print after Saturday's newspaper. To give your letter the best opportunity to be published, please email editor@eastoregonian.com by noon Thursday.



OTHER VIEWS

A French lesson for the American media

The hacked emails from Emmanuel Macron's French campaign appear to be spectacularly mundane, according to people who have read them. They include briefings on issues, personal exchanges and discussions of the weather. No doubt they also include some embarrassing thoughts, but so far they are notably lacking in scandal.

Does this description remind you of anything?

Ah, yes. Last year, Russian agents stole thousands of emails from Hillary Clinton's campaign and published them via WikiLeaks. The dominant feature of the emails was their ordinariness.

They contained no evidence of lawbreaking, major hypocrisy or tawdry scandal. Even the worst revelation — a Democratic official and CNN contributor fed a town hall question to the campaign in advance — qualified as small beer. Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign engaged in much more consequential debate skulduggery. The Clinton emails were instead full of staff members jockeying for position, agonizing over strategy, complaining about their bosses and offering advice to those same bosses.

Imagine for a moment that your inbox, or your boss', was released to the world. I'll guess that it would not be free of embarrassment.

Despite the mundane quality of the Clinton emails, the media covered them as a profound revelation. The tone often suggested a big investigative scoop. But this was no scoop. It was material stolen by a hostile foreign government, posted for all to see, and it was only occasionally revealing. It deserved some coverage, but far less.

I say this as someone who likes journalism so much that I've never had another full-time job. I also say it with reverence for the many journalists doing good, hard work that, as Thomas Jefferson explained, is vital to democracy. With a president who lies all the time, often about the media, journalism becomes all the more important. And because it's so important, those of us practicing it need to be open to reflection and criticism.

The overhyped coverage of the hacked emails was the media's worst mistake in 2016 — one sure to be repeated if not properly understood. Television was the biggest offender, but print media was hardly blameless. The sensationalism exacerbated a second problem with the coverage: the obsession with Clinton's private email server.

I disagree with people who say that the server was a nonstory. Clinton violated government policy and was not fully honest. The FBI conducted an investigation, whatever you think of it. All of that adds up to a real news story.

The question is scale. In the fall, Gallup asked Americans what they were hearing

about the candidates. The answers about Donald Trump were all over the place: immigration, his speeches and his criticism of Barack Obama, among other things. When people described what they were hearing about Clinton, by contrast, one subject towered over every other: email.

That's a pretty harsh indictment of the coverage (and Gallup's research was done well before James Comey wrote his infamous letter). It is a sign that Clinton's private server and the hacked emails crowded out everything else, including her plans for reducing inequality, addressing climate change and conducting a more hawkish foreign policy than Obama. It's a sign that the media failed to distinguish a subject that sounded important — secret emails! — from subjects that were in reality more important.

Last weekend, France's mainstream media showed how to exercise better judgment.

Late Friday, two days before the election, hackers released the Macron campaign emails. French media laws are stricter than American laws, and government officials argued against publication of the hacked information. But only the campaigns themselves were legally barred from making statements during the final weekend. Publications could have reported on the substance of the emails.

They largely did not. "It was a manipulation attempt — people trying to manipulate our voting process," Gilles van Kote, deputy chief editor of *Le Monde*, told me.

French journalists rightly did not focus on what seemed like big news, because the emails surely did. They evaluated what truly was major news.

Material released by a hostile foreign government, with the aim of confusing voters and evidently without significant new information, failed to qualify. Van Kote said reporters are continuing to read the emails to see if they warrant future stories.

The two cases obviously are not identical. (And van Kote wasn't criticizing American journalism; the criticisms are mine.) But they are similar enough to say that the French media exercised better, more sober judgment than the American media.

This issue isn't going away. Our digital world ensures that the private information of public figures, and not-so-public ones, will be released again in the future.

The media cannot always ignore that information, tempting as it may seem. But it also should not pretend that the only two options are neglect and sensationalism. There is a middle ground, one where journalistic judgment should prioritize news over the whiff of news.

David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.

YOUR VIEWS

Pendleton fire station too big for small town

I grew up in Pendleton but now live in Boise, Idaho. Boise recently passed a \$17 million fire station bond that will build three new fire stations, remodel a fourth and also build a training facility on 17 acres. The detailed specifications and master plan can be found on the city website.

I found information on Pendleton's city website, but there are no specifications, no details or drawings of the project. It would be interesting to get similar information from Pendleton and lay them down side to side to compare what you are getting for your money.

Boise is a fast-growing community that has high rise buildings, warehouses, various manufacturing facilities, multi-level residential condominiums and a wide assortment of diverse structures that our firefighters need to have a facility to train for.

Boise also has a population of about 225,000, so the \$17 million dollar bond is at a cost approximately \$76 per person.

Pendleton has a population of about 16,000, so the \$10 million projection would cost around \$625 per man, woman and child.

Again, for our money, we are getting four new or remodeled stations and training center. I have no doubt Pendleton needs to update their fire facilities, but it appears you are paying for a Mercedes on a Ford pickup truck budget.

Kelly Temple
Boise

Pendleton community supports its own

My husband is a lieutenant/paramedic at Pendleton Fire and Ambulance. Our family moved here just before our first daughter's first birthday, over 19 years ago. We have had the opportunity to raise our family in the beautiful area among a community committed to rolling up their sleeves and working shoulder to shoulder to make sure needs within the community are fulfilled.

It's really incredible if one looks at all this community accomplishes by its members: The Pendleton Round-Up, Happy Canyon, Cattle

Barons, Farmer's Market, Doolittle Raiders Gala, Whiskey Music Festival, Oktoberfest, Movies in the Park, free classes at the Arts Center and library, etc. And just a few short years ago, we saw how this community rallied around repairing and painting an elderly man's home.

Now, as a community we are being asked to rally around a group of men and women who serve and protect this community 24/7, our firefighter/paramedics. Outside reports and assessments have been done, showing the fire station is insufficient for appropriate sleeping quarters, training capabilities, and also contains hazardous materials and carcinogens. When we are presented with a house too small for our family or it's determined that our home contains toxins such as a gas leak or black mold that is known to cause health issues and diseases, we would do everything within our power to get our loved ones to a new home and a safe environment.

The firefighters in our community chose their profession. Ask any one of them and they will tell you how much they love their job and are grateful for the

opportunity to serve and help this community on their worst day. They did not choose and should not have to be made to live one-third of their lives in station that is compromising their health. On behalf of the men and women who proudly serve Pendleton, and their families, I ask that you would please rally together once again and vote yes for the fire station bond.

Kristi Keene
Pendleton

Scientific research a bipartisan concern

This week in a show of bipartisan commitment Congress voted to increase the National Institutes of Health budget by \$2 billion. OHSU is deeply grateful to our entire Oregon Congressional delegation for recognizing that NIH funding allows for lifesaving scientific discoveries that improve the health and well-being of all Oregonians.

OHSU scientists rely heavily on NIH funding to carry out life-saving scientific research, and to make that research available for

the benefit of patients across the entire state of Oregon. More than 50 percent of OHSU's patients come from outside the Portland metro region and many of these patients are receiving treatments and cures that would have not been possible without NIH funding of research discoveries that happen in the lab. NIH funding also helps OHSU train the next generation of research scientists, while working to ensure that scientific discoveries benefit urban and rural America equally.

Cuts to NIH would also have an economic impact to the state of Oregon. Besides funding university research, these dollars create jobs and foster new businesses that spur economic growth. Simply put, cuts to NIH would have a ripple effect across the entire state.

We know that the President's budget has proposed cuts to NIH and we in Oregon are fortunate to have members of Congress like Rep. Greg Walden and Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden who stand up for science and the promise of cures.

Joe Robertson
President, OHSU