

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Hermiston School District bond is a good deal for the community

Two years ago, Hermiston voters turned down a bond for Hermiston School District. The district is back on the ballot this November, with a better deal than it previously offered taxpayers.

The 2017 bond would have added 90 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value to local property taxes, adding to the \$4.09 per \$1,000 bill taxpayers were already receiving for past bonds.

This time around, the district recently paid off all of its pre-2008 bonds, which property owners can expect to see reflected in their next property tax bill, lowered to \$3.65 per \$1,000.

The bond that the school district is proposing would keep the new \$3.65 rate in place. Instead of raising the tax rate, it would extend the amount of time Hermiston residents will be paying school bond taxes from the current 10-year plan to 25. Rising property values spurred by Hermiston's rapid growth would also help raise money, as would a \$6.6 million grant from the state that will go to another community if voters do not pass a bond this year.

Even though it sounds inviting to be free of all school bond taxes within 10 years, it is unlikely that will happen. It seems far-fetched to imagine with



Rocky Heights Elementary School would be replaced with a new, larger school on the same property if a school bond is approved by voters in November.

Hermiston's current growth rate that the voters will truly go another full decade without passing another bond.

If they pass a bond now, current students will benefit. A new elementary school on Theater Lane and a new, larger Rocky Heights Elementary School will help "right-size" the rest of the elementary schools' populations, providing a safer, less crowded learning experience for students. The district

also plans to add a 12-classroom annex to Hermiston High School, purchase property to prepare for future growth and make some adjustments to drop-off and pick-up areas at elementary schools to decrease congestion — all without an increase in the current school bond tax rate.

Barring any billionaires taking a sudden interest in Hermiston, that seems about as good of an offer as Hermiston

will get on a project of this scope.

Newcomers and outsiders might look at the proposal and scoff that Hermiston's oldest school, Rocky Heights, is a mere 57 years old — decades newer than the buildings many Umatilla County residents attended during their own school years. That's a fair point, to be sure, and it is likely one of the reasons some people will vote no.

However, every community makes choices about where they invest their money in an effort to make their community an attractive place to visit, live and work.

Hermiston has always prided itself on premier educational facilities, and those facilities have proven a strength. They generate economic benefit by drawing flocks of visitors who fill hotels and restaurants during AAU basketball tournaments, district tennis meets and 1A football state championships. And many of those visitors come away with a positive impression of Hermiston, speaking in awed tones about Kennison Field or how nice the schools are.

The bond on the ballot in November gives Hermiston and opportunity to build on that strength and gives students a better learning environment, without raising anyone's tax bill next year. That seems like a win.

OTHER VIEWS

Republicans, in thrall to dear leader, dig a deeper bunker

We dare not contemplate what the Washington Republicans would say if Donald Trump were to actually shoot someone in the middle of Fifth Avenue.

In the wake of the impeachment inquiry, formally announced on Tuesday by Nancy Pelosi, Republicans still don't think their leader has done anything wrong. Yet here's the gist of what we already know: Trump, in the span of one July phone call to Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky, asked eight times for (fake) dirt on domestic opposition candidate Joe Biden.

With the release of a phone call summary, we have further confirmation. He sought a Ukrainian probe of Biden, and his son, Hunter, and he wanted Zelensky to collude with Bill Barr, Trump's chief law enforcement apparatchik.

A key quote from the summary: "There is a lot of talk about Biden's son, that Biden stopped the prosecution (of a company where his son was on the board — a fake charge), and a lot of people want to find out about that. So whatever you can do with the attorney general would be great."

So Trump has essentially admitted that he solicited foreign collusion. Aside from the obvious fact that he has already copped to an impeachable offense — under federal law, no one can "solicit, accept, or receive" foreign campaign donations "or other things of value ... in connection with a federal, state, or local election" — his betrayal of the oath of office has potentially far broader ramifications.

"Sending the signal that other governments can curry favor with a U.S. president by helping to dig up dirt on his or her political opponents would open our political system and foreign policy to intervention and manipulation on a global scale," said Robert Kagan, a foreign affairs specialist and State Department official during the Reagan administration. "Every government in the world wishing to influence U.S. foreign policy will have an incentive to come to a sitting president with information on his or her potential political opponents."

Nevertheless, the party loyalists who hug the flag and tout traditional American values are so in thrall to Trump (or simply intimidated) that they claim to see and hear no evil, disgusting some GOP-friendly commentators. Mona Charen, a senior fellow at the conservative Ethics and Public Policy Cen-

ter, warned that "Republicans who continue to cover for Trump ... have abetted the delegitimization of the entire American system."

That's not stopping most of them from swilling the Kool-Aid.

Sen. John Kennedy said he didn't think Trump's solicitation of foreign dirt on Biden is "as newsworthy as some have argued." Sen. Lindsey Graham told a conservative radio host he thought Trump "did nothing wrong." Sen. Marco Rubio didn't think Trump should have raised the issue of Biden, but also said "that in and of itself is not an impeachable offense."

But the preferred Republican reaction is silence, to dig the bunker deeper and cover their ears. Since the whistleblower story broke one week ago, it's particularly noteworthy that we've heard virtually nothing from three key Republican senators: Cory Gardner, Martha McSally, and Susan Collins. That trio is on the ballot in 2020, running for re-election in Colorado, Arizona and Maine, respectively. Colorado and Maine vote blue in presidential elections, and Arizona is trending that way.

Their discomfort is understandable, because they, and many of their colleagues, may soon arrive at the moment of reckoning — an identity crisis forced upon them by the lawless president they have tragically indulged.

Republican strategist Mike Murphy, who believes, based on what we already know, that Trump has likely "committed a vividly impeachable offense," frames the stakes for his brethren:

"The easy-to-dodge days are coming to an end. ... Our entire national political debate is now centered squarely upon Trump and his fitness for office. It is a time for clarity ... an existential question for every Republican senator and representative: Why am I here? To serve my future or my country?"

Perhaps they should choose the latter. Perhaps they should heed the advice of the Republican senator who declared, back in December 2015, "You know how you make America great again? Tell Donald Trump to go to hell." So said Lindsey Graham. But alas, it may be too late for Trump's captive minions to redeem themselves.

What's more important, party or country?

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AND THEN CAME THE NEED FOR A DIFFERENT WHISTLEBLOWER...

YOUR VIEWS

Frustration builds; time to clear the table

Though you'd think a priority list of issues confronting our city officials would result in some quick action at city hall. Au contraire. Seems that from the latest study, the airport tops the priority list while Byers Avenue still languishes as possibly the worst street in the entire county, despite those claims that streets are the No. 1 priority.

Increased housing and other amenities aimed at supporting the projected increase in high paying jobs announced with such great fanfare earlier this year appear at a standstill. A recent drive by those projects revealed that there is essentially no activity on the airport hotel or the housing project across from the EOIC, and despite claims by city hall on the KUMA Coffee Hour that construction of the street in preparation for the expansion of the Pendleton Heights apartment complex was now underway, a visit to the site confirmed that it's just not happening.

City hall's record on large projects like the "road to nowhere" and the Eighth Street Bridge replacement, a proverbial "bridge to nowhere," has been nothing to write home about. When it comes to economic development, it seems the only bright spot is the turnaround in airport

operations lead by the successful drone program, primarily because of a talented airport manager and staff.

Performance by city hall on key issues has been less than stellar. The term "kicking the can down the road," frequently used in the past, has been replaced by "we'll table that for now." This caused delay after delay in repealing the unworkable River Quarter plan. The rewrite of the ordinance that would add parade fees to aid the police department's efforts to recover increasing costs to provide coverage was tabled.

Now, after ignoring the steady increase in homeless issues, acting as this phenomenon is something that's sprung up overnight, the city council has again "tabled" a revision of the ordinance giving the police department guidance on their responsibilities to address this issue with the only explanation being, "it's a complex issue."

A glance at the progress solving the issues of our deteriorating streets, even as a top priority, gives us little comfort for any immediate action on the homeless issue. Even our police department apparently has little faith in a remedy for the condition of the streets, as they've converted their entire fleet to four-wheel drive vehicles.

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