

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Resolve to be more involved in 2020

A new year signals a new beginning for all of us. While many of us will make our standard new year resolutions, as a community there are several pledges we should make for 2020.

In the upcoming 12 months, local voters will once again secure an opportunity to get more involved in their city, county and state government.

Democracy should not chiefly be a spectator sport. Instead, the founders designed a framework that, in large part, depended upon the commitment and interest of voters. Our nation is divided along partisan lines, which isn't a good thing for democracy, but what could be even more troubling is a lack of interest in public business.

Getting involved is never easy and can be, at times, a downright challenge. After a long day of work, who wants to eat dinner, and then attend a city council meeting?

The truth is, though, that finding the time to participate in our government is crucial. We simply can't vote



Election specialist Debbie Swenson verifies the ballot count for a voting precinct in 2018 at the Umatilla County Elections Division office in Pendleton.

a lawmaker into office, and then turn our backs. Often that becomes the reality. We tend to make our decision at the ballot box, and then expect government to operate on autopilot. When a major issue seems to rise up like the

phoenix we are shocked, and suddenly the seemingly mundane acts of city government became critical.

Yet, most of those flashpoint issues that seemingly come out of nowhere are actually well-known to lawmakers

and have been debated and discussed at meetings. They should be no surprise, but often are because not enough of the body politic is participating in our democracy.

Becoming a small-town lawmaker isn't like serving on a high school student body elected board. It isn't a popularity contest. The job of a city council member or mayor is — or should be — serious business and our lawmakers need our input and our vigilance.

That means voters must keep a close eye on what is going on. That is also where the newspaper comes in handy. We also have an obligation to ensure the actions of our public leaders are well-known so that readers — voters — can debate them and fashion opinions.

This year we should all reflect on the state of our city and county and endeavor to work to ensure we participate. The founders bestowed upon us a rich tapestry of democracy, but that fabric remains strong only if voters remain vigilant and get involved.



YOUR VIEWS

Redistricting should be accomplished in a truly nonpartisan manner

Regarding your Nov. 19, 2019, article: Why does a diverse group of Oregon's political interests want to take redistricting out of the Legislature's hands?

In about 1998, Bill Westmiller proposed a computer programmed to apply several "good government" principles to the extent not mutually contradictory to redistricting congressional seats.

Somewhat later, George Clark tested the approach and reported the results in "Stealing Our Votes: How Politicians Conspire to Control Elections and How to Stop Them." While a single test in a single state is hardly sufficient, the results were promising and seem worth further testing, perhaps to provide a theoretically independent commission with the information needed for fair redistricting. I envision running the program four times using the northwest, northeast, southeast and southwest corners of Oregon as the starting point and debating the results on the basis of the good government criteria.

It seems to me to have more promise than any of the half-dozen or so alternative proposals commonly proposed that dubiously assume its members will not function in the same way as legislators to favor their own preferred party.

Full disclosure — I knew both West-

miller and Clark when I was living in California.

David Churchman Ashland

Vote now for Wild & Scenic Rivers additions

The wild rivers and streams east of the Cascades are lifelines — giving us the gift of cold, clean water to drink, late season flows for farms, havens for fish and wildlife, and places to fish, boat, camp, and rejuvenate our souls. When I moved from Eugene to Prairie City back in the early 1980s, I fell in love with the John Day River — one of Oregon's 70-plus designated Wild & Scenic Rivers (just 2% of the state's river miles). I also explored the not-yet-designated forks and tributaries — once finding a massive bull elk skeleton in a forested stream bottom off trail.

Decades later, I'm grateful to Sen. Ron Wyden for the opportunity to nominate favorite streams and rivers to be considered for additions to congressionally designated Wild & Scenic Rivers. His leadership and belief in the grass-roots to rise up and shape history are a heartening way to begin 2020. Please send in your river and stream entries through January 20th to: rivers@wyden.senate.gov.

Marina Richie Bend

HOMEGROWN Hermiston has arrived. Now what?

The 2010s began with Hermiston officially taking the mantle as largest city in Eastern Oregon. It's a point of pride for this small town that came into its own as an agricultural powerhouse at the crossroads of the Northwest over the last several generations.

But as much as Hermiston still maintains a small-town feel, much also has changed. Below are five developments, in no particular order, that have defined Hermiston in the past decade.

What's happening Hermiston?

Love it or hate it (and sometimes both in the same breath), the private Facebook group has nearly as many members as the city population. It's a loosely moderated community bulletin board that seeks to answer a simple question — what, indeed, is happening, Hermiston?

Aside from the shared community events, the posts that fill the page each day range from innocuous to highly suspect to downright divisive, with occasional moments of inspiration. It has also turbo-charged the local rumor mill by immediately inserting personal opinion into every event, regardless of fact or relevance.

We are beginning to understand how social media is shaping our daily lives, relationships and ideologies. It seems community groups and pages have the best chance of being a positive force in places like Hermiston on the wider web, but they're only as good as the people who post want them to be.



DANIEL WATTENBURGER
COMMENT

I love my city

It's the real-world antidote to the divisiveness of social media. This faith-based movement has aimed to put good intentions into practice and create a more engaged and compassionate community.

The projects themselves are simple — litter cleanup, landscaping, free car washes — but seeing an army of red T-shirts giving their time to unified service is inspiring. Adults, teenagers and children all pitch in, spending time with friends and neighbors doing good deeds.

There are many social issues this community faces, and this volunteer goodwill campaign has room to grow. Hermiston has been a giving community for far longer than a decade, and seeing that generosity and service come together for the greater good is worth celebrating and sharing with the next generation.

Hispanic involvement

About 44% of Hermiston's residents are Hispanic, up from 35% at the turn of the decade, and that population has seen increased representation in a number of ways. The Hispanic Advisory Committee has

established a voice on city policy, distributed information on city programs, and offered bilingual access for residents uncomfortable speaking directly to the city council. The Latino Business Network, a subsidiary of the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, has created a place for business owners who have felt disconnected from the greater community.

These groups and others that got their start in the past decade have helped make Hermiston a more inclusive community. While not an end solution, they create connections and establish an important mechanism for growing and empowering Hispanic leaders in Hermiston.

Sports capital

When Kennison Field at Hermiston High School got a remodel in 2013 to go along with three new schools (and gymnasiums) funded by the school bond, Hermiston officially became a high school sports destination. Not only was the field eligible to host OSAA playoff games, but the network of gyms gave the city the capacity to host large-scale AAU tournaments.

This coincided with the Hermiston Bulldogs' rise to the upper echelon of Oregon football, winning two 5A titles to add to its trophy case already heavily populated with wrestling honors. The cumulative effect was putting Hermiston on the map for a new statewide audience.

The decade also saw Hermiston High School join the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, opening the venues to the city's nearest metropolitan center and offering the chance to play host to visitors from across the river on a regular basis.

Steady economy

Two events in Hermiston's decade would have crippled many other small towns — the closure of the Umatilla Chemical Depot and the massive layoffs at the Hinkle Rail yard. While both certainly impacted many lives, and the Hinkle layoffs are still fresh, Hermiston has proven resilient in the face of change.

Jobs have come in to replace those lost, in Hermiston and the surrounding area. Housing has grown in leaps and bounds, with no signs of slowing. The tax base in Hermiston has increased substantially because of new development.

Hermiston is a city of opportunity, and we saw through the 2010s how the small town is growing into the 21st century.

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