

OUR VIEW

Funding public safety requires sacrifice

Tax hikes are never popular in a nation founded on the principal of limited government, but occasionally a sacrifice from taxpayers is necessary.

No better example of this theory are two bond measures in the county on the upcoming elections docket. One measure — sponsored by the Umatilla County Fire District No. 1 — will ask voters to fund a 20-year bond package to raise \$13.1 million. The measure, if passed, would add 23 cents per 1,000 of assessed value to property taxes in the fire district.

A second bond measure is backed by the city of Milton-Freewater. The city believes it needs \$7.7 million to build a 7,544-square-foot police station. The measure would boost taxes 87 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Both measures are asking a whole lot of voters, but there is one common theme with both — they will support public safety.

That fact means both are necessary and voters should support them.

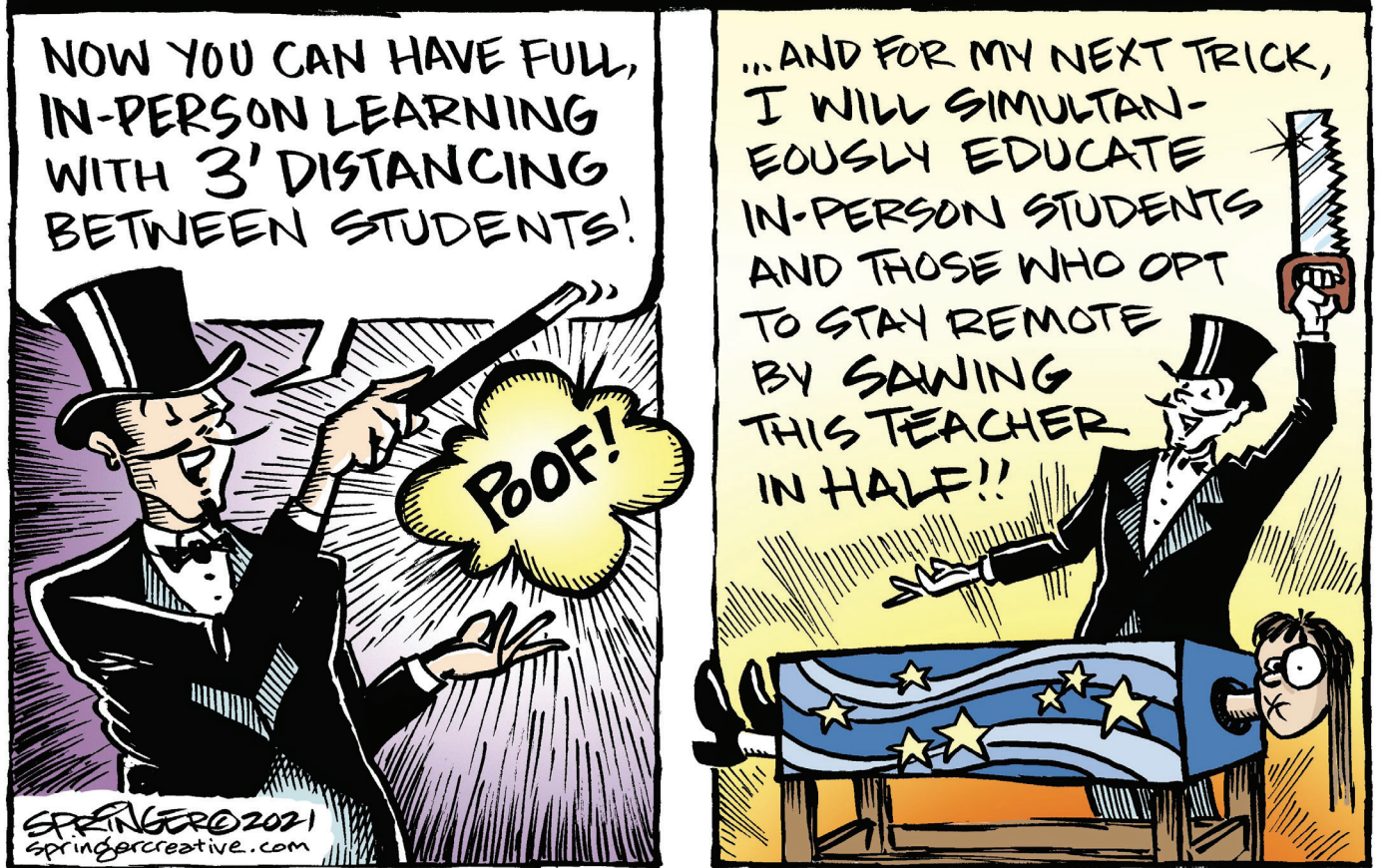
There are a very few issues that deserve nearly outright tax support from voters. One, of course, is national defense. We need a strong military to keep our nation — our democracy — safe. Yet another is public safety. Money spent to help a fire department, or a police agency, pays off for decades. Every community needs a strong and well-equipped fire department and police agency. Money spent on public safety is an investment in the overall health of a community. It isn't a blank check for an elected official to tinker with, but essential for our well-being.

No one likes to pay more taxes. One of the pillars of the birth of our nation was an outright resistance to paying taxes to the English crown. So an anti-tax sentiment runs deep in our national collective consciousness. We can all relate. Often it seems like the government is thrusting its hands into our wallets and purses on a regular basis, and sometimes there isn't a whole lot to show for it.

But funding public safety is a different issue.

Most of us can do the math and understand that a fire department or the police are two of the most important publicly funded institutions. Without either, our cities are vulnerable. None of us wants that. And most importantly, none of us can afford it. We can't afford to expect our emergency service responders to react to an emergency with outdated equipment. When lives are potentially at stake, no price is too high.

THE C.D.C. MAGIC SHOW COMES TO OREGON SCHOOLS...



College remains committed to students, community



DR. CONNIE GREEN

OTHER VIEWS

In 1962, our community took on the courageous challenge of opening one of the first community colleges in Oregon. In the nearly 60 years since Blue Mountain Community College first opened its doors and began serving students, much has changed.

The college has celebrated triumphs and weathered challenges. The past year has brought about a particularly challenging time for our faculty and staff, students, and the communities we serve.

BMCC is working to address the issues that most rural community colleges in 2021 face — enrollment decline, budget challenges, poverty and COVID-limited contact that has resulted in decreased connections to high schools, universities, and businesses. Despite these challenges, and what you may have read elsewhere, BMCC is committed to being your college and meeting the needs of the communities we serve in Umatilla, Morrow and Baker counties.

Failing you is not an option.

As the interim president at BMCC, my agreement with the Board of Education is to address these issues openly, and with the campus team and our community partners working together to create a stable two-year budget that will provide predictable and stable learning opportunities. This step will ensure BMCC's programs and services to our students and partners are strong and vibrant. In doing so, we will also become flexible and nimble to ensure the connections and the results increase as we all work together to support communities and individuals that thrive in Eastern Oregon.

So, yes, BMCC is experiencing significant transition and change to meet the

current reality. The college will begin a search for a new president. The intent is to not pass on current budget challenges for a new president to handle. The college and its Board of Education recognize that for BMCC to continue to meet the evolving needs of its students and communities, it, too, must adapt. That means BMCC will change how we are organized, how we operate and how we partner. This can be a scary endeavor.

It can also be an opportunity.

BMCC has an opportunity to renew its commitment to students and the community while reviewing its internal organization and structure, and right-sizing. It has an opportunity to serve students in new ways in a post-pandemic era that will see our economy in recovery and our local industries adapting to the challenges of the past year.

So how did BMCC end up in its current financial challenge? The answer is multi-pronged.

Like most community colleges across the country, BMCC has experienced enrollment decline for the past several years. This was exacerbated by the pandemic over the past year, which forced us into virtual learning, and became a major challenge for the hands-on Career Technical Education programs. Since community colleges rely on enrollment for tuition revenue and state funding, fewer students mean less revenue.

The primary sources of funding for Oregon's 17 community colleges come from three revenue sources. In 2019-20, the College received 31.03% from state funding, 32.38% from student tuition and fees, and 36.59% from local property tax revenue.

Many community colleges, including BMCC, have had to raise tuition to help cover costs. BMCC has also taken steps to reduce its expenses over the past year, reducing nearly \$2 million for the 2020-21 budget. These reductions were in materials and services and staff development, as

well as a reduction of 24 positions. Last year had difficult decisions. The intent of the Board is for the college to make any additional reductions for the 2021-22 budget so that the expenditures and revenues balance and the College is "right-sized" for the future.

How does BMCC do this? Through inclusive conversations with faculty, staff, students and the community. BMCC has already begun intensive work internally, reviewing department budgets, organizational structures, and potential revenue options. Nothing is off the table for discussion as we review budgets and options.

Now, a discussion does not necessarily mean all things change. A discussion means we learn, listen, and consider implications so that we can make informed decisions moving forward. We need a structural organization, plan and budget that is sustainable and provides students and the community with college programs and services that are stable and predictable, as well as flexible and nimble.

While this process will be challenging — and even heart-breaking — for many, BMCC's faculty and staff are resilient. They have weathered past storms, and each time the college comes out stronger.

With these impending changes, there remains one constant — BMCC is committed to the students and communities it serves. Our administration, faculty, staff and Board of Education are committed to strengthening BMCC so that it can thrive and be the affordable, high-quality educational option for Eastern Oregon. We are committed to working with local industries to put Eastern Oregonians back to work and reinvigorate our local economy. We are committed to being "Students First."

And, just like when we first opened our doors in 1962, we are committed at BMCC to you — our community.

Dr. Connie Green is the interim president of Blue Mountain Community College.

YOUR VIEWS

A return to free exchange of beliefs needed

We are traversing challenging times. In part, this is due to a direct assault on the concepts that underlie the First Amendment assurance of freedom of speech. We can continue to utilize the Socratic method or abandon it. We can continue to play the devil's advocate or abandon it. But if we choose abandonment, we are worse off for that decision. The benefit of freely, and without fear of retaliation, expressing our viewpoint is to make both the speaker and the listener better informed. How do I know that my opinion or fact assumptions are flawed, absent carefully listening to opposing views? And, perchance, my contrarian opinion might persuade others. Unfortunately, we are living in an era in which conflicting views are enforced by shaming, threat of boycott, personal injury and worse. It brings to mind the brown shirts of Nazi Germany. We need to return to free exchange of thoughts, facts and beliefs to salvage the freedom that our Found-

ers held dear to a functioning republic.

Thomas Triplett
Bend

Why the secrecy and ban on media access?

In September 2019, I traveled to El Paso, Texas, as part of a delegation from the National Association of Counties Immigration Task Force. The trip was arranged in the wake of concerns about issues at the border and our hosts included Homeland Security, the Border Patrol, the El Paso County Board of Commissioners, as well as Mexican state officials.

We visited the actual border crossing, accompanied the border patrol to the banks of the Rio Grande River where we witnessed several apprehensions, and followed the individuals apprehended to a federal processing center. We also visited holding facilities in Juarez. I was permitted to photograph everything we saw. I was deeply moved as I learned about conditions of violence and poverty

that would cause fellow human beings to travel 3,000 miles with only a few personal items.

Following my return, I subsequently published three articles about my experiences and observations and also shared pictures of refugees on both sides of the border. We were given full and total access to every inch of the federal facilities and the opportunity to mingle with refugees and see the conditions they were experiencing. That access included all facilities holding migrant children.

As we consider immigration policy, particularly in the midst of a pandemic, it is an issue that should be considered thoughtfully and openly, as well as devoid of political manifestations.

If there is no crisis at the border and no sudden influx of individuals coming north, then I wonder why the secrecy and why the ban on media access? And, if thousands of unaccompanied minors are being treated in a fair, safe and humane manner, why hide it or pretend something of this magnitude isn't happening?

George Murdock
Pendleton

EDITORIALS

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