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OUR VIEW

Fire season making an early entrance

It is dry out there. That is usually a common occurrence in Eastern Oregon as the summer heat scorches the high desert and Blue Mountain canyons.

Yet, we are not that far into spring and local and regional fire officials are already concerned about fire conditions.

Two recent fires — one near Perkins Avenue and another behind the Red Lion Hotel — are the best cases in point regarding just how dry conditions are becoming, and a very troubling preview of what could be the norm for this summer.

While conditions in the mountains may not be as treacherous fire-wise as they are in the lowlands, the fact that so many fire managers are concerned this early in the season should give readers pause.

Those types of dry conditions do impact the entire region because of the big draw outdoor recreation is to our piece of the heartland during the summer months. Thousands of people enjoy recreational activities — from boating to fishing to camping — all through the spring and summer and that means those dry conditions could impact the usual weekend campout.

Most people expect dry conditions in the summer and, usually, take measures to prevent an accidental fire. Yet, this year is already unusual, which means those who are used to taking precautions in mid-July need to be aware the landscape is as dry now as it would be in August.

Fire seasons can be and often are incredibly destructive. Last year, more than 1 million acres were scorched in Oregon and the cost to battle those blazes easily exceeded \$300 million. That money is not coming from the sky. It is taxpayer dollars. That means those fires we see on television or read about are essentially taking cash out of our wallets.

As always, there is hope that wet weather patterns will change the dynamic. It has happened in the past, but residents who want to visit and recreate in the area should not count on it.

With dry conditions so prevalent, recreationists need to take extra precautions. That means paying far better attention than usual this year to the actual conditions of the landscape. It also means checking in with the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management or your local fire department to get an accurate read on what types of precautions will be necessary.

Lightning notwithstanding, we can avoid large, destructive wildfires but we all must work together and ensure our actions don't create a costly, man-made disaster.



College is here for the long haul



CONNIE GREEN



JANE HILL

OTHER VIEWS

Blue Mountain Community College is still here, still employs hundreds of community members and still serves students all across the region. We've got our share of critics and tough revenue forecasts to work with, but we are working hard to pave the way forward and not look back.

In fact, over the last two months, the college approved a revised organization that has communities at the center supporting students. This reorganization addresses three key areas — right size, right direction, right growth.

The right size comes with organizational changes and a focus on a balanced budget. After much evaluation, examination and careful review of BMCC's enrollment, class fill rates and program interest, we had to make difficult decisions. The cuts — though heartbreaking — were identified to not only balance the budget,

but put the college on a path toward sustainability. The Board of Education addressed expenditures by approving the reduction of staff on Friday, April 30. On Monday, May 10, the Budget Committee began the process to approve a budget that is stable and flexible for growth.

These decisions were not easy, but essential to create a stable budget and predictable staffing for the next four years.

We are working with the resources we have, not those we wish we had. Our work has resulted in a budget that has been reduced by \$1.9 million for 2021-22. That means the budget — revenue and expenditures — is now balanced for the next four years and we have sustained the programs offered in 2018. With nearly \$4 million in reductions in the budget — \$2 million in 2020-21 and \$1.9 million in 2021-22 — the result is a stable budget.

Next is the right direction. Students are at the forefront of all decisions made at the college. We need strong wraparound support to increase retention and completion. By elevating best practices in curriculum, instruction and support services at the college, we will be better positioned to help students achieve their goals.

Our search for a new college president is vital to moving in the right direction. The college began the search for a new

president in April and candidates' materials will be reviewed in late May with finalist interviews the second week of June. The college is ready for a new president to lead the growth and opportunities that exist in Eastern Oregon.

So what does right growth look like for a college with a predictable, yet smaller budget and a brand new president coming on board? We need to bring in more students. We'll do that by providing more support to high school students to help them get a head start on their future. And we are streamlining the process to transfer to a university and easily map out technical degrees and workforce skills.

The staff, faculty, administrators, students and the board are on the path to a shared goal — become stable, predictable and move into growth to better serve students and the community.

BMCC is here for the long haul to support workforce needs and help students achieve their educational, career and personal goals. We're just going to look a little different while doing it. Come check us out — we are ready for you.

Connie Green is the interim president of Blue Mountain Community College, and Jane Hill is chair of the Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education.

YOUR VIEWS

Pendleton schools need Spencer's gifts

Briana Spencer has the qualities of an effective and caring leader. She has a passion for helping others that is evident by her many volunteer efforts throughout our region. Our schools need someone like Briana to help create that shift in the belief that all voices matter.

She has utilized her life experiences to become an outstanding advocate for youths and to address the needs of our community. We are very proud of her organizational abilities and the way she inspires us all to be better humans.

Please join us in voting for Briana for Pendleton School District Board Member, Position 7.

**Robby and Wendy Bill
Pendleton**

PSD needs Spencer's perspective

I endorse Briana Spencer for the Pendleton School District Position 7. I've had the opportunity of meeting Spencer at various community events. She is a persistent presence and involved with pretty much everything.

Throughout my time as a college student and *Confederated Umatilla Journal* intern, I have witnessed Spencer participate in various community events, which includes food distributions, advocating for social justice, virtual community events, and even a virtual discussion

LETTERS DEADLINE FOR MAY 18 ELECTIONS

The *East Oregonian* does not run endorsements of more than 400 words. The *East Oregonian* will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the letters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day, if necessary. We run local letters of endorsement on a first-come, first-served basis. Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by 5 p.m. on Friday, May 7. You can email them to editor@eastoregonian.com, or mail them to *East Oregonian*, c/o Andrew Cutler, 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801. We will publish our last letters on Saturday, May 15. Any letters received after the deadline will not run. Election Day is May 18.

with Nolan Bylenga hosted by Blue Mountain Community College (BMCC) Arts & Culture committee.

While the Black Lives Matter (BLM) March was undoubtedly one of Spencer's hugest debut, she has always been an active community member. The Pendleton School District needs Spencer's perspective, leadership skills and overall representation.

And to note, Spencer is a familiar face and has obtained momentous support from the surrounding communities in Pendleton.

Spencer has the capability and willingness to create change in the school system. Additionally, Spencer is a prominent advocate for BIPOC students at any educational level. I have faith that Spencer will contribute great strides and improvements in this position.

**Megan Van Pelt, BMCC Associated Student Government president and BMCC Native American Club member
Pendleton**

Let's shape the future for all students

I cannot think of anyone better suited to serve Pendleton School District and its students than Briana Spencer. She gives freely of her time to numerous local organizations and is passionate about making the world, as well as our local community, a better place, both now and for future generations. This is an excellent mindset for a school board member, as the entire purpose is to help shape the best possible experience for our students.

In addition to her drive and commitment, I absolutely think that Briana's new perspective and fresh ideas would benefit the school district. Organizations and especially leadership should be representative of those they serve. Briana Spencer is the clear choice for Pendleton School District Position 7. I hope you will join me in voting for her this May 18.

**Melissa Shumake
Pendleton**

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the *East Oregonian* editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the *East Oregonian*.

LETTERS

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 letters and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. 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:

editor@eastoregonian.com, or via mail to Andrew Cutler, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801