

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

State money comes with a gag order

We read something peculiar in the *Malheur Enterprise*: The board of a public development company has dictated that a family in Nyssa is forbidden to talk to the media if it wants up to \$400,000 to help with an industrial road.

That's the government saying if you want a benefit, you get gagged.

The background: The Froerers farm about 4,000 acres. The plan is to close a railroad reload center and move it to another location. That means the Froerers must truck their goods several additional miles to get them loaded. The money is from the Malheur County Development Corp. to build a new access road for the Froerers. The state department of transportation is providing funding, according to the newspaper. The gag order expires when the project is completed.

The Froerers argue they were offered an unfair choice: Accept the gag order and get the money, or no money. They signed.

It's not clear exactly why a gag order was put in place, though one reason could be obvious. The Froerers have in the past criticized Greg Smith, the reload center project manager, director of the Malheur County Economic Development Department and a state representative. Smith said he didn't put the gag provision in the contract. Lawyers did.

Gag orders do occur in court cases to limit publicity and attempt to protect the right to a fair trial. And parties sometimes have similar provisions in legal settlements and nondisclosure agreements in development deals. For instance, Apple Inc. has had confidentiality agreements with Crook County and Prineville officials to keep them from talking about the company's plans there.

This seems different. State money is being spent only on condition that a family keep quiet, when the family has been outspoken in the past. Yes, the farmers are getting a benefit to compensate them for an expense they will pay because the reload center is moving. But it also looks like state dollars are being used to muzzle criticism. Is that OK with you?

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 services 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



A journey into Soviet life



BRIGIT FARLEY
PAST AND PROLOGUE

For this and next month's column, some personal history. This May marks 40 years since the end of my first extended stay in the Soviet Union. As this experience remains one of the most vivid I have had in decades of studying history, I thought I would revisit some memories of Soviet life in a particularly fraught period of the Cold War.

When I arrived with the Council on International Educational Exchange's spring 1981 Russian language semester at Leningrad State University, the Cold War was heating up fast. Ronald Reagan had settled into the White House. Solidarity was on the rise in Poland and the U.S. had begun a sharp escalation of the arms race.

Our reception at Leningrad airport reflected international tensions. Customs personnel subjected us to an extensive search, requiring each person to strip to their underwear and dump the contents of suitcases for thorough examination. Our director's experience was even more arduous, as officials insisted on listening to all 16 of his Willie Nelson tapes in search of subversive messages.

Welcome to the USSR.

Life for natives and foreigners alike in the Soviet Union had its well-chronicled problems, including cramped quarters, quarrelsome neighbors and substandard plumbing. Everyone in my group had read the standard works on life in the USSR, secretly confident that the authors had exaggerated the difficulties.

What we were actually in for was much worse — in fact, the only phrase that adequately described the living situation

was indoor camping. When we arrived at our dorm, which we later learned had once been a brothel, the dilapidated staircase reeked of urine. The mold-covered shower room was a shock: If you dropped your washrag on the floor, it would stay there. The toilets were disgusting — only half of them ever worked and presented interesting challenges when they did.

The women discovered that the USSR did not prioritize the production of sanitary products when they beheld both toilets and wastebaskets overflowing with bloody rags and cotton every morning. The men had to cope with disappearing toilet seats. Strong thighs were always in order.

The rooms themselves did not resemble the Ritz. My room was smaller than most, housing just one Soviet and one American roommate and me. It brought to mind a large closet, with extremely high ceilings accentuating the narrowness. It was intersected by a long clothesline, which usually featured someone's wet clothing — washing machines were unheard of — which, in turn, obscured our view when we sat down on one of the beds.

Our room offered one additional so-called advantage — a view of the surrounding neighborhood. Across the street there was a seedy bar, which disgorged its patrons nightly at 10 p.m. in various stages of inebriation. Sometimes drinking partners would go down in a heap with a misplaced foot on the icy street. Then they would begin cursing and fighting, bringing on the police and creating a lively street scene for our nightly amusement.

The cafeteria demonstrated that if you live to eat in some countries, you ate to live in the USSR. Breakfast featured kasha, a milk-based oat cereal, with a cutlet of mystery meat. The lunch and dinner cooks substituted potatoes or rice for kasha — sometimes — with filet of mystery meat.

Fish turned up occasionally on the menu, but you wondered about it when recalling the odor of gas wafting up from the holes in the ice-encrusted Neva river. Some of us swore off seafood altogether when a group member held up a piece of sole with what looked like a malignant tumor protruding from its left side.

If the food was questionable, the cafeteria was ... colorful.

The cooks had a soft spot for cats, we noticed. They could be seen wandering around on the cutting boards inside the kitchen, or crouched expectantly at diners' feet, or walking empty tables to pick at leftovers. If you didn't find the cats amusing, you could wait for the dishwasher to appear.

We didn't know her real name, so she became George Burns for us thanks to her centenarian visage, thick black glasses, raspy voice and canny skill in maneuvering the dish cart through unruly crowds of students. All she was missing was a Cuban cigar to make the analogy complete. And then there was Nina Petrovna, the Pavlova of the potatoes. She would sing and dance as she served our food.

Clearly, Soviet musical theater had missed a great talent when she opted for cafeteria service.

Winston Churchill famously described the USSR as "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." We could only agree after our first few weeks. How could the country responsible for Sputnik and the first man in space settle for such disorderly, even primitive, living conditions?

Answers to that question and many others awaited as we continued our journey into Soviet life.

Brigit Farley is a Washington State University professor, student of history, adventurer and Irish heritage girl living in Pendleton.

YOUR VIEWS

Spencer a great role model for children

I would like to throw my support for Briana Spencer who is running for Pendleton School Board Position 7. Having coached high school sports and worked with schools for over 20 years, I have never seen anyone more dedicated to helping our children than Briana.

She is very passionate about helping improve students well being, school experience, and overall quality of life. I have seen this first hand with her work at the Nixyaawii Community School Board.

Briana is a very strong and intelligent woman who has been a great example for my daughters and would be a tremendous asset for the Pendleton School Board.

Jeremy Maddern
Pendleton

Spencer is a woman of action

I write this letter as a show of support to Briana Spencer on her goal of being elected onto the Pendleton School Board, Position 7. Additionally, this letter is to show appreciation for Briana.

Briana is an active member of this community, even during the times of shutdowns and closures. There is an aura of determination that surrounds Briana. Briana wants to ensure those attending school in the Pendleton area are able to get

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.

the most out of their academic venture. From preschool students to the high school students, Briana has their best interest on her mind and in her heart. I truly believe in Briana's ambitions. Briana is a woman of action.

I believe, the energy Ms. Spencer has is contagious, and her spirit and will to work hard during challenging times is inspiring. Briana is strong and is attempting to use any avenue she can to give back to the community — something I hope inspires other young adults to take strides in bettering this area in the future.

To the readers who find this piece, go out and vote to determine who should be on the school board. Vote to show your support for the students going through school. The children in school currently have an uphill battle after having to adapt to school being closed down for a long while.

As a PHS graduate, as a community

member, and as a supporter of the kids, I am in full support of Briana Spencer being elected to the Pendleton School Board, Position 7.

Boots Pond
Pendleton

Spencer helped me find my voice

Briana has always been an accepting and kind person. She was one of the people to come out and accept me and has helped me a lot with my activism. She takes time to sit down and listen to a problem and concern and does whatever it takes to fix it.

She has helped a lot to use my voice and understand as someone who is part of LGBT community. I've always supported her; she is a mentor, friend, and family that I cherish.

Maxwell Maddern
Pendleton