

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Tip of the hat, kick in the pants



**A** kick in the pants to Umatilla County's low voter turnout. This week's election featured two bonds and many contested races of significance to the community. Hermiston and Pendleton school board members will shape most Umatilla County students' experience as those students try to catch up after a year of distance learning while COVID-19 still circulates in their communities. The Blue Mountain Community College board will tackle tough decisions that might make or break the college during a critical time in its history.

And yet a measly 19% of Umatilla County voters decided to exercise their right to have a say in who will be making those decisions. A total of 37,951 voters chose to forfeit their voice. That puts the county third to last, just above Crook and Linn counties.

Low voter turnout is a consistent problem for Umatilla County. The phenomenon can create unequal representation, as those most likely to vote often don't represent the general population. Their average age is far older, for example, and they tend to be less moderate.

Community leaders — elected officials, activists, church leaders, service club members — need to put their heads together and think about ways to increase participation in future elections.

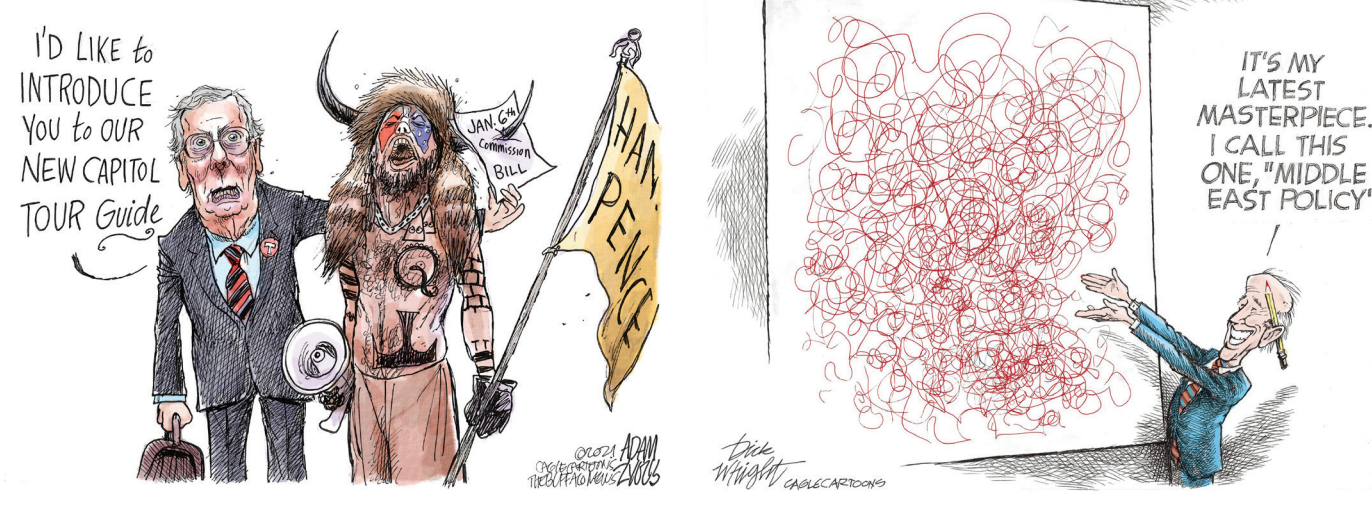
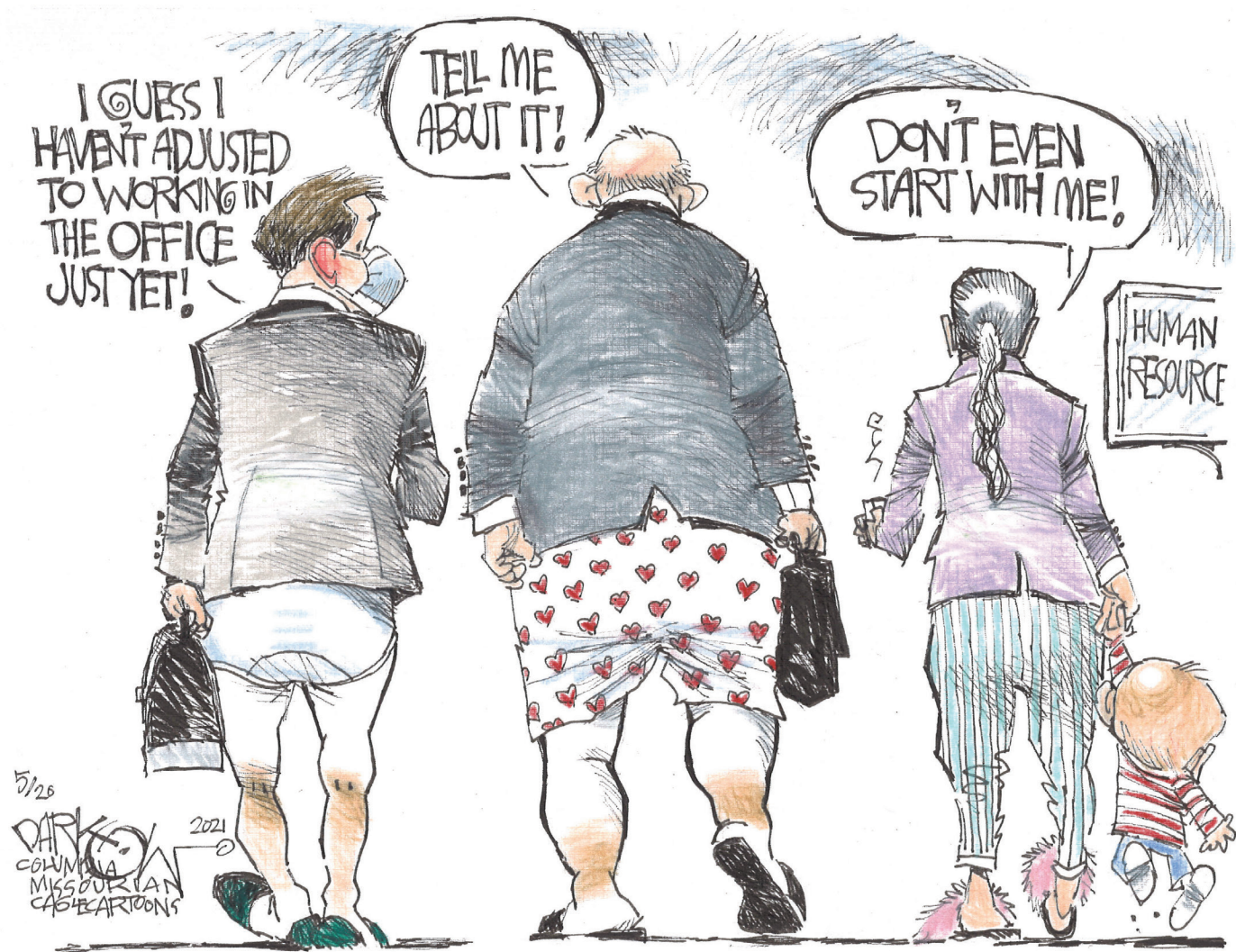
**A tip of the hat** to all those who ran for office in the May 18 election. Campaigning is a significant time commitment, whether candidates win or lose. We appreciate those willing to move away from simply complaining and actually do something to try and make their community a better place.

Those who lost their races helped prompt more discussion and scrutiny, and gave voters a choice that may have helped spur more people to turn in a ballot.

Those who won their races will now face even more time commitments, but also the opportunity to make a real difference. We hope they approach their office with wisdom and integrity.

**A tip of the hat** to InterMountain Education Service District's Migrant Education Program, which recognized its graduating seniors on May 15.

Seniors there shared how much the program's additional support meant to them during their education. One student said it helped her not only feel more at ease as she started at a new school, but inspired her to pursue a teaching degree. It seems the program is working as intended.



## YOUR VIEWS

### 'Free' money would bolster city budget

It's that time of the year — budget time. Due to the pandemic and the resulting stimulus funds from the federal government, for the first time under current management, money will not be a problem when preparing our next budget.

A recent East Oregonian editorial characterized this windfall as "free" money, although we all know it's far from being free since it comes from the income taxes we pay to support our federal and state governments.

Speaking of those stimulus funds, the question arises on how it will be spent. One request comes straight from the city manager. In his own words, the general fund, that pot of money that funds services like police, fire and parks, has shrunk in recent years and the city could use the stimulus to help shore it up.

That's an interesting statement in itself as it would seem that with all the new construction projects, rapidly rising real estate values, a significant increase in marijuana and alcohol tax revenue, another increase in the utility fee on your water bill, plus federal and state of Oregon grants, common sense says the available general fund dollars should actually be increasing.

So where's the money going? That's a question that only city hall can answer.

So where does this new \$3.4 million of federal stimulus money fit into the

new budget? It appears that the bulk of the funding will end up in the General Fund and aimed at reducing the backlog of maintenance on the city's vast real estate holdings and infrastructure.

However, with that much cash on hand, the temptation to dip into the pot to cover the cost of some new project proposed by a special interest group, like that new dog park that admittedly the Parks Department can't afford because of cost overruns on the new Til Taylor Park splashpad, or the latest housing crisis facing the city for more high-dollar housing, may be just too great.

It could turn into another slush fund, much like the Pendleton Development Commission (PDC) has become. Borrowing money to support the PDC projects will be providing a tidy little profit of \$200,000 for Banner Bank in coming year's proposed budget.

**Rick Rohde  
Pendleton**

### Investing in families provides many benefits

After living in Hermiston for 20 years, I have noticed how much our small town has grown in multiple aspects.

I have seen Hermiston better its schools, open new businesses and create a community. I have also seen levels of crime, homelessness and cost of living

increases. With President Joe Biden's proposed American Family Plan, I can see these unwanted characteristics of Hermiston minimize.

Biden's American Family Plan suggests providing free universal preschool. As I'm sure you all know, preschool is seen as a luxury and not an accessible option for all families. After studying at Oregon State University with a focus on child development, I have seen the positive influence early education has on society. Early childhood education has been seen to positively impact their adulthood in many aspects, such as reducing risky behaviors, achieving school readiness, and better employment outcomes.

In addition to universal preschool, Biden also introduces the idea of extending tax cuts that will benefit a vast majority of the Hermiston population. It also supports the idea of providing direct support to children and families. These two ideas will decrease the homelessness rates in Hermiston as well as help with the costs of living.

In my class on family policy this term, we have examined how providing direct help does not discourage work as many may assume, but lessens financial stress on individuals.

Although these policies may seem a far reach, it is an effort to invest in our families, which will only benefit our community.

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### LETTERS

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