

OUR VIEW

Public has right to know how government spends money

Any time a voter hears the words “economic development” linked to “general fund” they should sit up and take notice.

And there is not better case in point than the recent brush up with the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners and a vote to furnish Pendleton with \$2 million to trigger a new road connecting Highway 11 to Highway 30 on the city’s south hill. Pendleton city officials believe the new road will spark a new single family housing development on bare land in the area.

The yet unnamed, unbuilt development will be a “huge economic booster to our community,” according to Pendleton Mayor John Turner.

Recently, the commissioners voted twice to provide the city with the \$2 million. The first time the commissioners did so was in November. Then, your elected leaders approved the deal but did so without releasing a written agreement to the public before, or during, their regular meeting. At the time, Commissioner Dan Dorrán voted “no” on the measure because he did not feel he could cast a vote without seeing the agreement.

Commission Chair George Murdock, at the time, said the written agreement wasn’t available because county counsel Doug Olsen was out of the office. But Murdock apparently did provide information about the agreement in a weekly email he sends out to specific people. None of what Murdock explained in the email about the deal was accessible to voters on the county board’s online meeting agenda.

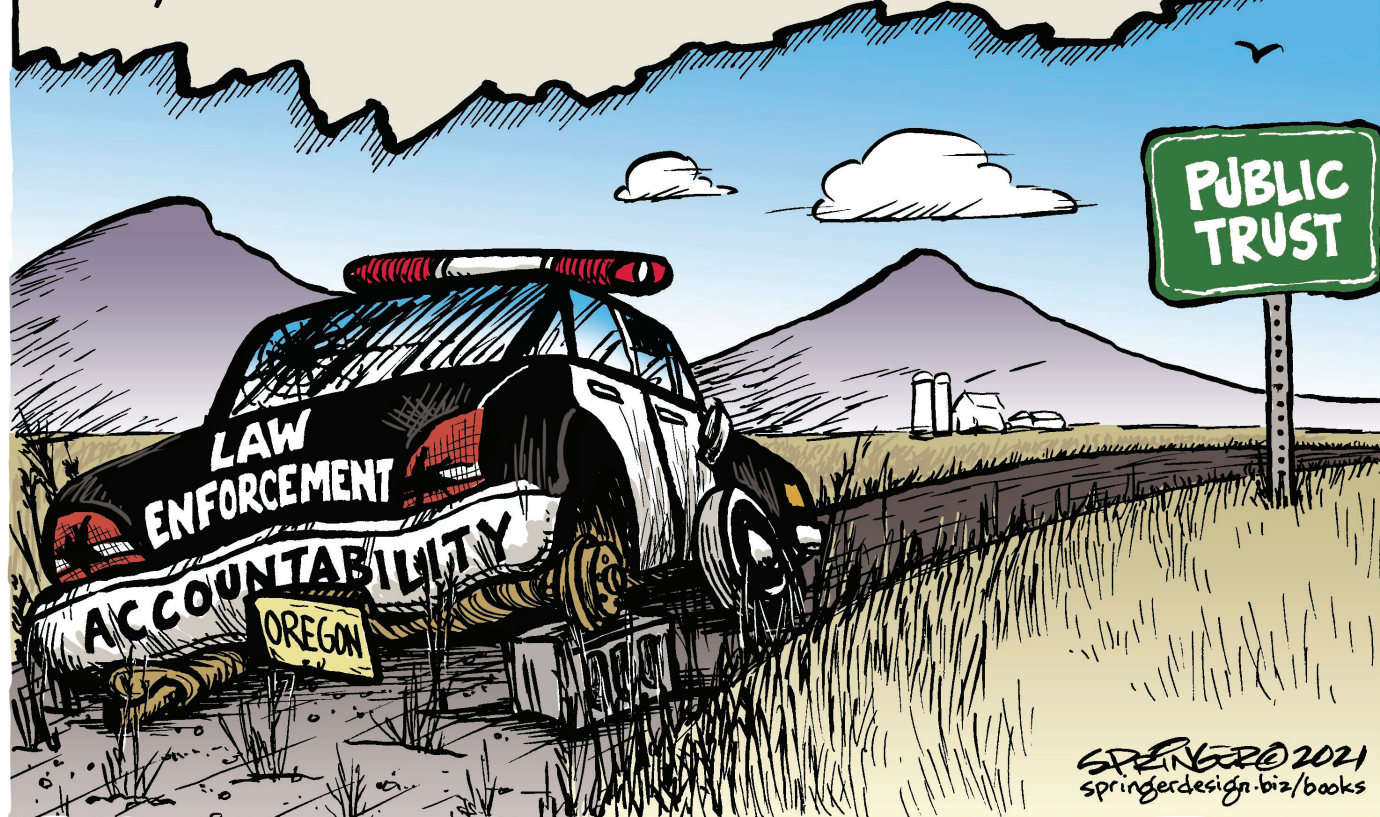
By the Dec. 1 meeting, though, the contract was publicly available and all three commissioners — for the second time — approved the deal. Following the vote, Murdock said the first time the commissioners voted on the issue it was as a “concept.” The second time they approved it was the actual deal.

The \$2 million that will go to Pendleton isn’t a grant, but structured as a revolving fund, which means the city is expected to reinvest money back into the fund after withdrawing from it.

The money, though, will come from the county’s general fund. That’s public dollars. In other words, if you are a voter or resident in Hermiston, Weston, Pilot Rock or Stanfield, the general fund cash is your money.

In the end, the entire incident is unfortunate because of how badly the run-up to the initial vote was bungled. There never should have been a vote before an actual agreement was accessible to the other two commissioners and the public. As hard as it may be to visualize for some, the public has a right to know anytime its money is going to be used for any endeavor.

NEWS ITEM: A NEW AUDIT REVEALS THAT THE STATE OF OREGON FAILS TO HOLD LOCAL POLICE AGENCIES ACCOUNTABLE FOR EXCESSIVE FORCE, MISCONDUCT AND/OR INEPTITUDE.



Culture grows and changes with the population



DANIEL
WATTENBURGER
HOMEGROWN

When I moved to Hermiston in the early 1990s, the most recent census had the town’s population as 10,366. Thirty years later in April 2020, the census counted 19,354 people in town, and 20 months later in July 2021, Portland State University’s estimate put the city at 19,696. If we’re not at 20,000 by next summer, we’ll be darn close.

So in my time as a Hermistonian, the city has essentially doubled in population. But that doesn’t mean there are just 10,000 new people in town. That number includes the regular inflow and outflow of people who come and go, who move in and move away, who are born and die here.

The number of “new” people — those who weren’t counted in the 1990 census but were here for the 2020 edition — is much higher. I won’t hazard a specific guess, but these newcomers certainly outnumber us old-timers by a fair margin. And if you’ll allow me to move the “old-timer” status to people who have been here since, say, 1980, that balance tips drastically in favor of us newcomers.

This has a large impact on the culture of a community. Of course every town adds and subtracts over the years, slowly

altering its identity as leadership and employment opportunities and civic activities change. And some of these new faces are the children and extended families of people who have been here longer, carrying on cultural identity from one generation to the next. But the constant infusion of new blood speeds up the evolution process as people bring with it pieces of culture from elsewhere.

Think of how many of the business owners, teachers, pastors, elected officials and nonprofit leaders who have an outsized impact on our community aren’t “from here,” and have moved here in the past 30 years. Think about the huge impact they are having every day on who we are. And imagine what kind of place we would be if we were afraid of this kind of change.

Hermiston strives to be an inclusive community, and this includes “outsiders.” Having a welcoming attitude prevents culture from stagnating. People who move here get involved with the churches, clubs, committees and programs that set the direction of a town. They feel empowered to add their voice to the collective conversation.

I’ve known a lot of people who have moved on from Hermiston. My graduating class of 2001 held a virtual reunion on Facebook this summer and shared updates on what we’re doing and where we’re living now. About 9 in 10 who posted moved after graduation and haven’t come back. I was one of the few whose life took them away

from Hermiston and then back again.

But I’ve also met a lot of people who are new to town. In the past month I’ve met new Hermistonians from Molalla, John Day and Bakersfield, California. They’ve come for a job opportunity or to be closer to family but were also drawn by the culture.

We are now in a state of rapid change as hundreds of new homes are built each year, neighborhoods are expanding in every part of town and new jobs come on the market seemingly every week.

People are coming from all over and for all kinds of reasons. They are often looking for a place to settle down and Hermiston checks the boxes. They bring a refreshing outsider’s perspective, able to see the benefits of a town that’s small but not too small, a community that has some traditions but is more than willing to make new ones. They want good schools for their kids, safe neighborhoods and access to health care, but no rush hour traffic jams.

They’re a constant reminder for those of us who have been here a few years to keep introducing ourselves and our community to new faces. Because, ultimately, they are us, and we are Hermiston.

Daniel Wattenburger is the former managing editor of the East Oregonian. He lives in Hermiston with his wife and children and is an account manager for Pac/West Lobby Group. Contact him at danielwattenburger@gmail.com.

YOUR VIEWS

Time to really understand gun violence

In my younger days I spent a lot of time hunting, everything from elk and deer to game birds.

Now, thanks to COVID-19 and age, I have to watch hunting shows like “Meat Eater.” What a life. This guy travels all over the United States hunting. One week he might be in Colorado hunting elk and the next few weeks he might chase giant mule deer bucks in Montana or maybe pheasants in South Dakota.

I have a nephew who went to Wyoming hunting antelope. Others have gone to the Dakotas to hunt pheasants. My son is a horn hunter and has gone to Nevada to hunt mule deer. One time on a cast and blast in the Snake River, while fishing and watching for chukars, he spotted a nice Idaho buck and traded the shotgun for a rifle and headed up after him.

One common theme from the ballistics-impaired on CNN and other left-wing media after the Kyle Rittenhouse verdict was “he crossed state lines with a gun.” All those I mentioned above cross state lines with a gun.

Got an out-of-state tag? Load up the gear and the guns and get going. No checkpoints at the border, because there are no laws about transporting firearms across state lines in the United

States. The only borders you have to worry about are ones to the north called Canada and to the south called Mexico. Canadians, being descendants of British loyalists, don’t like handguns, but if you want to spend some big bucks hunting moose, you can go in with a rifle. Mexico doesn’t allow private citizens to own firearms unless you belong to a cartel.

There is one exception that hinders transporting a firearm. If I go to the Veterans Affairs hospital I can’t have a firearm, even in my car. Guess they are afraid of those who preserved their freedom with a gun. A class action lawsuit is overdue, especially in light of a Supreme Court decision that said a homeless man could have a gun in his tent.

The left is having a meltdown after Rittenhouse. You have a right to defend your life. What’s next? The right to defend your home or property?

Space limits a lot more of what I have to say. I could cover the 1934 Federal Firearms Act that unconstitutionally banned fully automatics. Since then the rate of fire on any gun is one projectile per trigger pull. Full autos only exist in Hollywood. An exception to this is the smooth bore shotgun, which can hold anywhere from nine to a dozen or so peewee marble sized shot to more than a hundred BB sized shot to many more smaller shot. No rifling in the barrel, untraceable.

So Democrats better get some checkpoints in place and ban the shotgun. Move on. Send some men with guns to confront men with guns. It’s time to really understand gun violence.

Steve Culley
La Grande

Let’s learn from our ancestors

Supply chain problems. Rising inflation. Agricultural concentration. Climate change.

My fellow citizens of Umatilla County, we have a solution: regional self-reliance, something our ancestors knew well. We need to develop our regional and local economies. Our food can travel, on average, 2,000 miles. Our farmers and ranchers are at the mercy of the national and global food system.

All that stuff moving around takes a lot of energy, which contributes to climate change. We need to produce, manufacture and buy more local. Good for the environment, good for our economy. Get some chickens this spring. Plant a garden. Support your local cattle rancher and get a side of beef. Shop at the farmers market. Go solar. Buy less stuff from China.

Our ancestors knew how to do it. Maybe it’s time to relearn from the past.

Don Hartley
Pendleton

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SEND LETTERS TO:

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