

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Paving the way to a better future

Must hand it to Blue Mountain Community College President Mark Browning for his decision to conduct an in-depth institutional review of the learning center.

Browning unveiled his plan in his March 2 president report to the college board, and the move is insightful in a number of ways but mostly because it shows the man at the helm at BMCC wants to create opportunities for success and growth.

No doubt Browning will be up against a stacked deck in the sense the college already is gearing up for more budget cuts, a scenario no top official of an organization welcomes. Browning touched on that theme, at least tangentially, when he talked about how “budget adjustments” may be necessary, but they should not occur without ensuring they are resources to grow rather “than just hanging on.”

Browning’s decision for the review also can be traced, at least partly, to feedback from students that the college does not always feel like a welcoming environment along with other negative feedback.

Browning is suggesting a motion that does not always occur in state-run institutions: He is advocating the college step back and take a good, long look at what it can improve upon even as budget cuts loom.

That takes more than a little bit of courage. Top officials at any organization often simply go with the flow and refrain from looking into the mirror. Yet that look into the mirror is essential for any organization to be able to grow. No one likes to open the books and review what could be done better with a company or a school. We naturally want to hang our hats on what we do very well, not on what can be done better.

Yet truthful evaluation can create more opportunities than most realize at first glance. Once an organization determines what it can do better over an extended period, the better it will be in the future.

Self-reflection is difficult and even more so when done in a straight-forward, truthful way. However, the organizations that move from simply “good” to “great” accomplish in-depth reviews of their policies and actions on a regular basis. They discover what needs to be fixed — if anything — and then move forward into the future.

Browning should be lauded for having the courage to hatch a plan designed to help the college out in the long run.

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.

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Thinking of those in war's way



REGINA
BRAKER
ANOTHER MILE

A couple of weeks ago my friend told us about the Ukrainian young woman who spent a year with them here in Pendleton as an exchange student. When they spoke recently, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, uncertainty and fear had become a daily constant. Beyond assurances that local friends and acquaintances were sending moral support through responses to aid groups and prayers, it felt so inadequate.

And yet, there was a connection not only between this family and this young woman. Surely there are many more who interacted with her then and are thinking of her now.

There are many students I've known, who made their way to Eastern Oregon from countries not part of the usual exchange partnerships before the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989. From Slovakia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, where in one case a contact with a professor on sabbatical created the connection to take a chance on coming for a year of study.

As former members of the Warsaw Pact opted to align with western Europe, these students came, sometimes in unexpected ways. The Czech student, whose high school year in Ukiah paved an easier admission to university study at Eastern Oregon University, where I met him, made further strides in English and German. And there were new perspectives to share for him and fellow students in my class.

International students got involved in myriad ways, responding to invitations to present their country to others. Some enhanced their experience through extra-curricular activities. They often brought an intensity of academic commitment, grateful for their opportunity here. Sometimes they encouraged someone else to consider an extended stay across the globe.

Another friend hosted a Serbian student who was worried about the bombing at home during the break-of Yugoslavia in the '90s. In that context and in photos we see today, the cross-cultural lessons from home-stay experiences, such as careful water use or quiet footsteps in high-density apartment living may seem quaint. Today's realities remind us that those who experienced war and political chaos also live among us here at home.

Over the decades some of my students took on a different kind of international experience, learning another language in a war zone and experiencing culture shock fraught with high stakes. Their stories of life lessons learned on tours of duty were amazing, often heart-breaking. While taking comfort in the commonalities of human experience, they also became aware that multi-faceted cultural differences over there were also among us here at home.

Pendleton is a town that brings people from everywhere, through the Round-up, but also as part of professional exchanges. International experts in their fields collaborate with colleagues, often over many months. Perhaps we took these exchanges for granted until they paused during these years of pandemic, turning us inward. What have we lost?

The immersion experience can confront us daily with unfamiliar ways of living. We learn to navigate differences that can divide or enrich us. And when the culture shock experiences are understood, we become better aware of what separates us, along with the possibility of taking steps toward understanding each other, whether out of country or here at home.

With new fears now that the war in Ukraine could reach other countries, I am thinking about exchange colleagues and former students in Estonia, Rumania, Poland and Slovakia but also Belarus and Russia. The possibility that war could divide us was unthinkable to us then. And here at home we've been living with divisions that went unacknowledged for far too long.

We, too, have language barriers, unfamiliar ethnic experiences, but also socio-economic differences and rural-urban divides. To what extent can we reconsider how we live in the present and plan for the future, and learn from cultural traditions that are grounded in perspectives other than our own?

Among us here are relatives, neighbors or colleagues who have come from places of war or political conflict over the years, not only from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq, the Philippines, Venezuela or Vietnam. At this time of renewed international conflict and war, we have much to learn from one another. It's essential that we find ways to become supportive of each other.

Regina Braker, of Pendleton, is a retired educator with journeys through many places and experiences who enjoys getting to know people along the way.

YOUR VIEWS

Pendleton Children's Center is a 'golden opportunity'

It is true — I did give an emotional plea to the Pendleton Development Commission on behalf of the Pendleton Children's Center.

I have spent years working in this field, so I believe the creation of a high-quality childcare center could reduce many of the negative effects resulting from the issues Pendleton faces today. Research shows an investment in our children has a high rate of return. A return experienced in increased capacity and of course money saved.

This project was recently referred to as a “golden opportunity.” I could not have said it better myself. In fact, I think I will continue to refer to it as such. It is a golden opportunity for the children, families, employers and, ultimately, the city of Pendleton and the surrounding area.

You could look at this project as the next welfare program because we are seeking assistance for a vulnerable and underserved population. I, however, have studied welfare and poverty and there is no other time in a person's life when poverty is more detrimental to health and well-being outcomes than in the first five years.

I see this golden opportunity as a

welfare-reducing program because children who participate in high-quality childcare programs not only experience healthier outcomes but experience a 26% reduced likelihood of receiving government assistance in the future (First Five Years Fund).

One of the main reasons there are so many job openings is not a shortage of workers, but a shortage of child care. It is not unrealistic to believe we will find people to fill our positions. When you have a business with strong values and the drive to do better people won't just fill positions, they will willingly go to work to be a part of something special.

When you look out into your community and identify a problem, injustice, questionable spending or see room for improvement, you have options. You can complain by sending an endless barrage of narrow-perspective letters to the editor.

Or, you can choose to do better. Identify not just the problems, but seek solutions and create change. Fight for what is right and for those who cannot do so themselves. Put some walk behind your talk.

I prefer the latter. I will continue to share my emotional plea in hopes to create this golden opportunity, but what I won't do is spend any more time writing about this in a letter to the editor. I prefer to use my energy to help Pendleton with

my actions as I believe this to be a transformational opportunity for so many.

If anyone would like to know more about the purpose or mission of Pendleton Children's Center, or contact information we have a website and a Facebook page.

Brittney Jackson
Pendleton

Oregon voter registration reminder

Attention all citizens of Oregon, now is the time to update your registration if you have moved, changed your name or mailing address. Please note that ballots will not be forwarded to you.

Most important if you want to select or change your party affiliation, the time is now, or if you are a first-time voter. (You must be 18 years of age.) Name changes should be done using the paper registration form, so the county elections department has a record of your new signature.

To update your status, you can use the website: Oregon's My Vote. You can visit your local county election's office for assistance. Your ballots will be mailed approximately two weeks before an election. Your vote is the most important thing you can do as a citizen of the United States.

Kathy Wilson
Pendleton