

OUR VIEW

VA should rethink service reduction

A potential move by the Department of Veterans Affairs to scale back services at its medical center in Walla Walla is a bad idea and should be reconsidered carefully.

Last month, the VA released a report from the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission that recommended the Walla Walla VA reduce services to primary care and mental health.

That move would downgrade the facility's services and potentially create problems for thousands of veterans who live across the Pacific Northwest's inland empire of Eastern Washington and North-eastern Oregon.

The best, recent news came from Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, who vowed he would reach out to the VA to get an explanation for the recommendation.

The commission's suggestions about reducing services at the Walla Walla center appear to be misguided and crafted through a certain degree of ignorance regarding the plight of veterans in rural areas of the Pacific Northwest.

All too often the government seeks to slash funding for programs that provide key services with apparently little forethought.

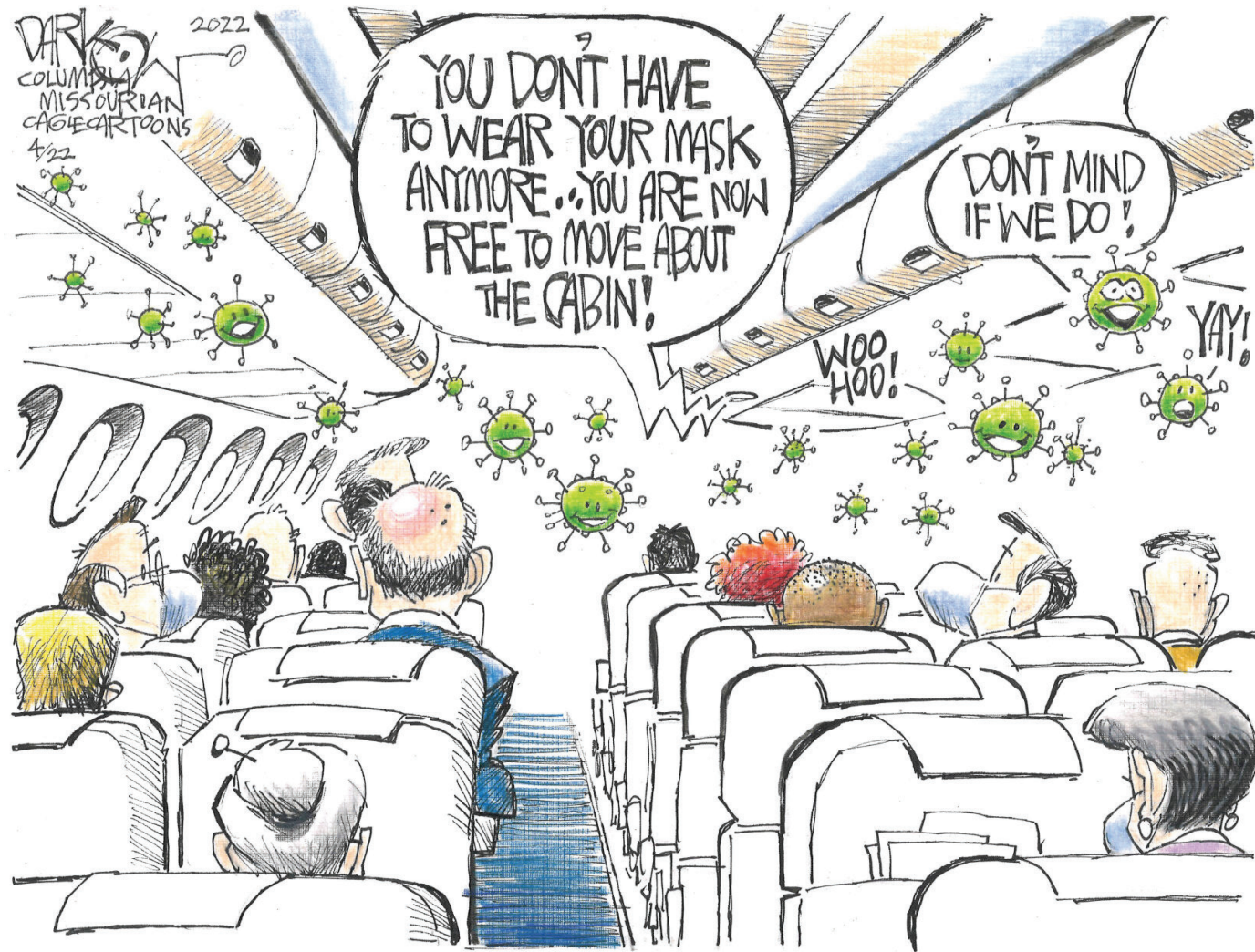
Modifying a funding outlay for an expensive, nonessential government program makes good sense and is a service to taxpayers, but VA facilities and programs should be off limits.

That's not because VA programs and facilities are not expensive. They are. However, the VA and its programs are part of a sacred covenant established between those who give service to our great nation and the rest of us who vow to take care of them.

As a nation we tend to get geared up for a major conflict but forget each war, each confrontation where our men and women are deployed, has long-term consequences. Those consequences are the health and care of our veterans, and we cannot ignore our pledge.

When a man or woman dons the uniform of one of our nation's service branches they do so as volunteers and as part of an unspoken bargain, they know America will watch out for them after their service ends. We owe our veterans more than we can ever repay, but we can ensure that as they age they have the best medical care our nation can provide.

Shifting resources to save money and potentially leaving our veterans out on a limb runs contrary to our nation's values.



Grading this round of cuts



REGINA BRAKER
ANOTHER MILE

Last week, I submitted my April column, a civil discussion regarding the budget cutting underway at Blue Mountain Community College.

On Saturday, April 23, as I was reading through some old papers to revisit a fellow columnist's writing on Ukraine, I came across an article this newspaper published on March 19 under the title "BMCC president orders 'full institutional review'" on page A3. There was some detail in it that didn't square with the content of the April 23 reporting in the front-page article "Showdown in the works over faculty, program cuts."

The March article reported that "the review will take a wider look at the school's operations and programs and provide recommendations on how to improve them." Presumably such a review also would inform any budget adjustments needed ahead.

The article then quoted Browning on the need for budget cuts. In his words: "We can make budget adjustments so that we balance our budget, but we have to make sure we are making those adjustments such that we have resources available to be proactive and grow versus just hanging on. I'm not interested in hanging on. I'm interested in growing and being vital and thriving."

These are positive sentiments, neutral in regard to any future directions, and in the context of an insti-

tutional review, to be informed by its findings.

The next paragraph summarized what Browning said, and these words are those written by EO reporter Antonio Sierra, "Although Browning said the college is planning on moving forward with the review, it's still in the early stages. He said the review will be conducted by a third party and he's already talking with a few potential companies about taking on the task. He doesn't yet have a timeline for when the review will begin and end, and whether it will be completed by the time the college approves a budget for the next fiscal year."

Having read this article some time ago, I was aware that budget cuts were forthcoming, and I assumed that they were informed by this promised review. In rereading this article now, I question how these decisions were made. This college president has fiduciary responsibilities to the taxpayers who fund our community college.

To offer up such vague plans for an institutional review, to have little idea of its contours or timeline, strikes me, a former college administrator, as malfeasance. That someone with a graduate degree in public administration can state a month before presenting budget cuts that he is not sure of the review's completion prior to the cuts is either a signal of ignorance or dishonesty, in my opinion.

In the April 26 EO article, Browning continued with vague statements, "I think what's lost is about where we're heading. We're losing sight of where we're going."

If he has a vision of what and where that is, he has not communicated it. Rather it is about what he is letting go by the wayside.

Continued reporting by Phil Wright mentions Browning's sense that "the days of the two-year transfer degree being the heart of the teaching at the college are passed" and "employers need courses that deliver job-specific basic skills and education in just a few weeks."

The latter may be true for some employers throughout our region. Yet even law enforcement academy and lineman college programs, as two random examples, offer programs of 16- and 13-week duration. School districts and health-care entities continue to report dire needs for trained staff, whose education often begins in the two-year transfer programs at our community colleges. As for the mental health care gaps in rural Oregon, they are as vast as the empty miles between far-flung communities, but real nevertheless.

After reading again the vague pronouncements made by Browning, I question the process that informed these proposed cuts. As a taxpayer, I wonder to what extent this process followed Oregon Administrative Rules. We all have a stake in this, whether or not we have children planning their educational futures. As a former educator, the best grade I can give at this time is an incomplete, and encourage more work ahead.

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

Melissa Lindsay a positive force for Morrow County

We wholeheartedly support Melissa Lindsay for commissioner of Morrow County, and here are just a few reasons why.

Melissa already has put in six years of very accomplished service to all residents of Morrow County as a commissioner. Her energy and dedication to information gathering is top notch. She attends many local meetings and travels frequently out of the county to involve herself with issues that can improve Morrow County.

She doesn't just attend meetings, she is often the guiding force in making things happen. She is interested in all parts of the county. If you have listened to her speak at any meeting, you will agree that she is informed, listens and gets things done.

Melissa is a leader with the Morrow County Emergency Response Government Command Team and worked tirelessly during the pandemic to keep Morrow County businesses open, wrote testing and vaccine plans, brought

Oregon Health Authority and Federal Emergency Management Agency resources across Morrow County to get and keep in-person learning in our schools. She actively brought testing and vaccination drive-thrus to clinics in Boardman and Irrigon.

As a member of the Regional Solutions Team, Melissa brought a working group together to look at solutions for the lone waste water system.

As a member of the Community Counseling Solutions Advisory Board, Melissa was an active part in bringing a mental health court to Morrow County for those suffering mental health issues that cross over into the judicial system.

As a chair, and currently vice chair to the county wide Local Public Safety Coordinating Council, Melissa solidified funding to help our county be one of the most active in the state dealing with mental health court, housing issues, public safety issues, a juvenile diversion program, etc.

Melissa has worked with Umatilla County to deal with many issues and opportunities where a dual county approach is best. She is a member of

the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area Committee that is working to assist the groundwater nitrate issues plaguing parts of our county plus individual wells.

Melissa has chaired and is a member of the Military Economic Agriculture Committee where she works with the Navy, a large landowner in Morrow County.

Melissa is working currently with Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Board and the Port of Morrow to change the Heppner Mill Site FEMA flood map.

Melissa convened and chairs the Morrow County Broadband Team to gain equitable access and education for high speed internet.

Melissa has been elected by state commissioners to serve as Treasurer for the Association of Oregon Counties. She is admired and respected around the state as a positive force for Morrow County.

Join us in electing Melissa Lindsay. Thank you for your time.

Jim and Monica Swanson
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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

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