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What is going on at BMCC?

Blue Mountain Community College has announced the layoff of 10 full-time faculty. Do they expect to actually get rid of all 10?

No. The aim is to throw a whole bunch of challenges up knowing full well that half of it is pure nonsense, but which will serve to distract and deflect from the real issues, while using up finite resources of attention and efforts to resist. Laying off Linc DeBunce (who teaches anthropology and geography) in the name of financial necessity is pure nonsense.

Linc's classes have the fewest empty seats and the lowest overhead cost. His classes yield the highest budget surplus and support the very high-cost career-technical courses the administration claims are the "real" purpose of a community college. They have slated him for removal so the leadership of the faculty union must contend with his case and thus can devote less time and energy to saving the jobs of others not as financially viable.

What is the purpose of BMCC? Should it be primarily a tech school? Has it been?

For all its talk about serving students, the aims of the new administration at the college run counter to what students have demanded and signed up for over the past 10 years. Sure, there have been issues with enrollment during the pandemic. What feature of our society hasn't been disrupted? Will our anxiety about sickness never abate? Will the smooth flow of commodities and products never return? Of course, it will.

And so will enrollments at BMCC. So long as there are no radical changes to the offerings, it will return to something that approximates what they were three years ago. If the administration tries to turn BMCC into a trade school, they will really have financial problems. Few of the tech programs are self-supporting. Certainly, none yield a budget surplus like Linc DeBunce's classes. The last thing the BMCC administration should be doing is stirring up an already unstable mess.

What has contributed to low enrollments? One answer: the college administrative information system, the system that handles registrations, finance, student records, data processing, everything. Five years ago, the college knew it had to move to a new AIS. It has been four years of nothing but delays and malfunction from the get-go.

For two years I have heard nothing but frustration from students trying to register and faculty members trying to get any information out of the system. Was everyone invited to have a role in choosing the new system? No.

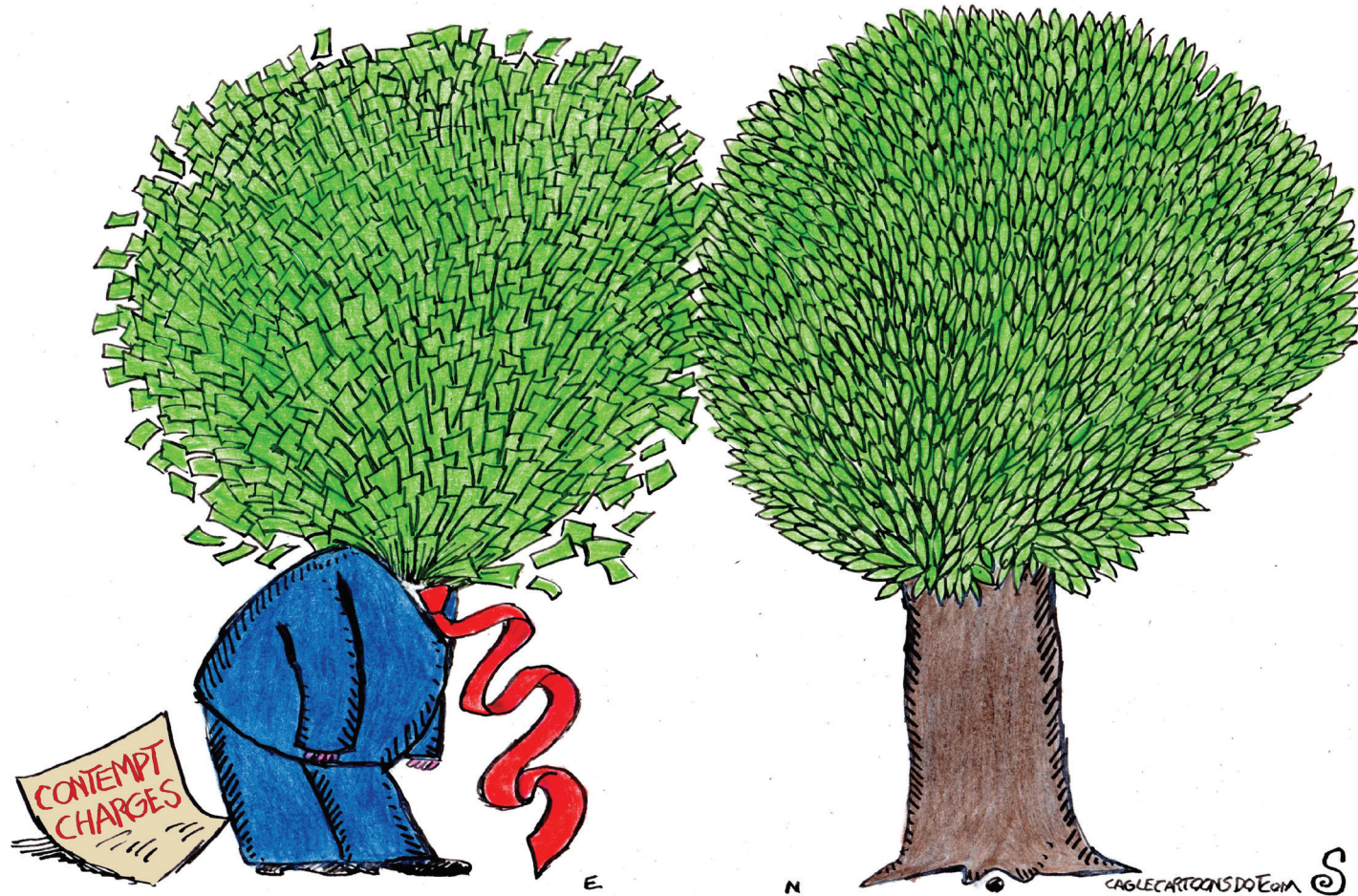
In particular, the computer science faculty members were dismissed when they raised concerns about the process whereby the new computer system was chosen and implemented. The very same faculty members who now, out of desperation, the administration has turned to in order to salvage a working registration system from the completely catastrophic mess they ended up with. So, it's faculty's fault that enrollments are down? Hardly.

The college administration claims it needs layoffs because faculty salaries are "top heavy" compared to other community colleges. Almost all BMCC faculty members have been here a long time and so are at the top of the salary step schedule since raises for faculty are scheduled by years of service.

However, the average faculty salary at BMCC is lower than the statewide average, and the percentage of general fund dollars BMCC devotes to full-time faculty salaries is among the lowest in the state. If the college gets rid of 10 on-campus faculty members, Clatsop Community College, a college with two-thirds the number of students, will have more full-time faculty members with a general fund that is a third less than BMCC's. How do they manage? Not like BMCC apparently.

It is time the college realizes that the wealth of experience in the full-time faculty is an asset, not a liability. Experience counts for something in every profession, especially in education. The college administration needs to abandon its planned radical changes and focus on the real issue: putting together an efficient and effective administration that can provide our community with the college it wants and needs.

Robert Hillenbrand taught math at Blue Mountain Community College, in Pendleton, for 22 years.



The curious case of crypto as a player in Oregon politics



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OTHER VIEWS

Winners for election to the U.S. House in Oregon, who are mostly incumbents, typically raise campaign treasuries for the whole of an election cycle of up to about \$2 million.

Sometimes they raise more (as in the 4th Congressional District race in 2020), but that's unusual.

What's happening this year in the 6th Congressional District, a new district with no incumbent and not even a clear front-running candidate, is beyond unusual.

This new activity is in the Democratic primary long before we've gotten to the general election phase, though not among the candidates who have been active and successful in Oregon politics. They include state Rep. Andrea Salinas, D-Lake Oswego, (who has many of the highest-profile endorsements and has looked like a front runner), Rep. Teresa Alonso León, D-Woodburn, and former Multnomah County Commissioner Loretta Smith. They and others have raised significant but normal-level funds.

The outside-the-norm here seems to be driven by, of all things that would never occur to most Oregonians, cryptocurrency.

First, there's the treasury of candidate Cody Reynolds, who has reported lending himself \$2 million for the campaign. As Steven Reynolds, he ran for federal offices four times up to 2018, including a 2016 effort as an independent for the U.S. Senate, receiving only a smattering of votes.

Whence this new infusion? Presumably, from the world of cryptocurrency; he has had an extensive and sometimes complicated background with a number of crypto firms during the last decade.

Phantom candidate

Reynolds isn't leading when it comes to crypto (so far) in this primary.

Carrick Flynn is an Oregon native who spent most of his working life in the Washington area, returning during the pandemic to work from Oregon, now at McMinnville, but never actively involved in Oregon politics. Rivals have called him a "phantom candidate," and note he has voted just twice in Oregon since 2000.

He would qualify as a complete unknown with almost no chance of winning but for this: A gusher of TV ads backing his candidacy amounting to \$5 million from a political action committee called Protect Our Future. The committee is run by 30-year-old billionaire Sam Bankman-Fried, of Phoenix, Arizona, whose money seems to come from cryptocurrency.

The ads have overwhelmed TV political advertising in the 6th. He has been described as "the world's richest crypto billionaire."

What's an Arizona billionaire doing in this Oregon race? Wikipedia describes him as a high-end securities trader who became heavily involved in cryptocurrency about five years ago.

"In January 2018, Bankman-Fried organized an arbitrage trade, moving up to \$25M per day, to take advantage of the higher price of bitcoin in Japan compared to in America. After attending a late 2018 cryptocurrency conference in Macau, and while also inspired by the concurrent fork (split) of Bitcoin Cash, he moved to Hong Kong. He founded FTX, a cryptocurrency derivatives exchange, in April 2019, and it then launched the following month. On December 8, 2021, Bankman-Fried, along with other industry executives, testified before the Committee on Financial Services in relation to regulating the cryptocurrency industry," according to the Wikipedia entry.

That last connects directly with interest in races for the U.S. House.

\$5 million spend

Flynn has said he has no background in, or policy interest in cryptocurrency, that his link to Protect Our Future concerned pandemic policy. But, especially at this stage of the pandemic, that seems a thin reason for spending \$5 million.

That PAC infusion soon was followed by another big assist from the Democratic House Majority PAC, "the only PAC focused exclusively on electing Democrats to the U.S. House of Representatives," of about \$1 million. Usually it reserves donations for general election campaigns rather than a primary, especially where no incumbents are involved.

This got a lot of attention. U.S. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, complained via Twitter: "I haven't endorsed in this race, but it's flat out wrong for House Majority PAC to be weighing in when we have multiple strong candidates vying for the nomination."

Most of the rest of the Democratic field, including Salinas, León, Smith, physician Kathleen Harder of Salem, engineer Matt West and even Reynolds signed an unusual letter of protest.

"House Majority PAC — House Democratic leadership's super PAC, allegedly tasked with holding Republicans accountable and electing Democrats to Congress — should not be spending resources to divide Democrats," they wrote. "With so much needed to defend the House, how can they afford involvement in a primary? Why is this happening? Where is this money coming from? And what does its source want in exchange?"

Those questions, which sound valid, are only a few that come to mind. They might be obviated — for now — by the results of the primary. Or not.

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Congress has one more thing to fix this year: succession



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One important thing Congress should do before the likely return of divided government next year? Finally fix the order of presidential succession.

Remember, the only thing the Constitution says about this process is that the vice president should become president if there's a vacancy. Even that wasn't entirely clear until the 25th Amendment was ratified in 1967 and not only cleaned up that bit of ambiguity but also provided for a way to replace a vacancy in the vice presidency. The rest of the process has been established by acts of Congress, and the rules have changed several times over the years.

The current version of the Presidential Succession Act, which places the speaker of the House and the president pro tempore of the Senate in the line of succession after the vice president, initially dates to 1947. Before that, at least from 1886, members of Congress weren't included in the process at all. Changing that was a mistake. Lawmakers should never have been placed in the line of succession, and they should now be removed.

To begin with, the whole idea is contrary to the logic of the constitutional system of separated institutions sharing powers. The electorate (well, the Electoral College, but the same principle applies) chose the president and the vice president. If those

positions should become vacant, then they should be filled by officials who would steer the nation in more or less the same direction. That would've been true even if political parties had never emerged, but it's very obvious now, given the partisan presidency. Simply put, if the nation chose a Democrat, then a Democrat should be president; if a Republican, then it should be a Republican. Regardless of the outcome of the most recent congressional elections.

Moreover, the party of the presidency should never be up for grabs in a national emergency, whether it's a resignation, impeachment or death. It's asking too much of any Congress to put aside party interest when the stakes are so high. The U.S. system expects that politicians will follow healthy incentives. Sure, we'd also like them to care about the national interest, but the framers of the Constitution knew that when strong self-interest is at stake, politicians are unlikely to put it aside and do what's best for the nation. The president pro tem of the Senate is a largely ceremonial position usually occupied by the senior-most member of the majority party — which means it's often someone quite elderly, and rarely anyone chosen as a leader for that chamber, let alone for the presidency. Speakers are better; at least they're chosen for their political abilities. But few speakers have had the communication skills that the modern presidency demands, especially during a crisis. And surely any situation in which the line of succession came into play would call for such skills.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, a commission on continuity in government looked at

all this and recommended serious changes. Not only should members of Congress be excluded from the line of succession, but so should most of the cabinet. (Under the current system, the two top congressional leaders are followed by cabinet secretaries in the order of the establishment of their departments.) The commission recommended that only four cabinet secretaries, from the most important departments, follow the vice president. After that, the president should designate four other potential replacements (most likely notable retired officials from the president's party, all of whom would be reasonably well known and credible leaders in the unlikely event one of them should have to serve). Not only would this avoid a "designated survivor" scenario, in which some third-rate official who happened to have filled out the cabinet suddenly became president, but it also would mean the line of succession likely would include people scattered across the nation — a wise precaution should some national calamity in Washington force the issue.

I argued in 2018 that Republican majorities in Congress should act quickly — before the midterm elections that year and the likely resumption of divided government — to change the law to prevent House Speaker Nancy Pelosi from being two steps away from the presidency. We're in the same situation now, with the parties reversed, and it still makes sense to act. Maybe Democrats will be more responsible now than Republicans were then.

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