

Project PATH will bring proactive answers to homelessness



DAVID STOCKDALE

OTHER VIEWS

Every city and county in the state of Oregon is impacted by homelessness, and the impact is growing each year.

People without housing are less likely to have access to health care, employment and education. They are more likely to suffer from chronic mental and physical health effects like substance abuse disorders and disability, and are at a higher risk of abuse and violence.

They are also members of our communities. We have a responsibility to provide access to services in accordance with state guidelines and our own guiding principles.

The societal cost of homelessness is broad and too large for a single entity to solve, but also too diverse and individualized for a one-size-fits-all solution. Breaking the cycle requires collaboration and investment.

That is the mission of Project PATH (Practical Assistance through Transitional

Housing), a joint effort among Hermiston, Umatilla, Stanfield, Echo and Umatilla County. We have been granted \$1 million from the State of Oregon to launch a pilot project, and we are intent on getting the best return on that investment by focusing our efforts on a single sustainable program for the west end of the county.

support of my colleagues Hermiston City Manager Byron Smith and Umatilla County Commissioner Dan Dorran.

The next step is to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) to find a community partner that can best provide the services we need. A shelter or warming center is a temporary solution, but a tran-

ted RFPs. Umatilla, Hermiston, Stanfield, Echo and Umatilla will create an Inter-Governmental Agreement to act as oversight of the project as it develops.

We look forward to engaging with applicants to help develop a program that addresses not only the needs of the homeless community, but the concerns of residents. Security, staffing and measures of success are all an important part of the strategic plan we will develop after awarding the contract.

Ultimately, this project is about using public resources in the way they are intended. Public parks and rights of way were not built to be used as temporary housing, and public safety officers are not equipped to treat mental health disorders. We have resources within our community that can provide these services, and with proper planning we can make the most of them.

This is a work in progress, but we are making sure Project PATH lives up to its name and creates a way forward for homeless residents seeking a healthier, safer and more stable lifestyle.

David Stockdale is the Umatilla city manager.

“THE SOCIETAL COST OF HOMELESSNESS IS BROAD AND TOO LARGE FOR A SINGLE ENTITY TO SOLVE, BUT ALSO TOO DIVERSE AND INDIVIDUALIZED FOR A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL SOLUTION. BREAKING THE CYCLE REQUIRES COLLABORATION AND INVESTMENT.”

The first step was a historic joint public meeting on May 23 where the city councils of Hermiston and Umatilla and the Board of Umatilla County Commissioners discussed the project and took public testimony. It was important that we start off on the right foot and gather feedback from elected officials and the public. I write this with the

sitional housing program that connects its residents to health care, education, employment and stable housing is a long-term answer that will improve lives.

The City of Umatilla will be able to annex a two-acre property on the corner of Lind and Benschel roads to locate the project. A coalition of the represented governments will review the submit-



TRICIA MOONEY

OTHER VIEWS

Safe schools start well outside the classroom

We are heartbroken by the tragedy at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. Though the events unfolded many miles away, we all feel the impact of violence when it touches a school. Our thoughts extend to the families, students and community that is in so many ways similar to our own.

The Board of Directors and I want you to know that Hermiston School District works hard every day to keep students safe. When these tragedies occur, it is understandable that parents put themselves in the shoes of those dealing with the aftermath of horrific events. We feel that deeply.

Our best protection is a community that looks out for one another and cares for those who are struggling, combined with daily vigilance, purposeful planning and clear protocols at every school. The process doesn't start when tragedy strikes and doesn't end when the national spotlight on school safety fades.

When it comes to facilities, the Hermiston community has consistently invested in upgrading and maintaining buildings with clear lines of sight at entries and exits and modern security systems in place.

We have specific measures in place for the safety of all students and staff across the district that are specified for each building, and we work continuously to improve those measures. The Hermiston Police Department is immediately alerted for any non-planned fire alarm, and staff and students are trained on how to respond in any kind of emergency.

But safety planning goes beyond drills and security cameras. It takes thoughtful, well-trained staff to provide support for our students, including counselors, our student services team, safety support specialist, mental health specialists, campus monitors, teachers and many others. We tell every student who walks through the doors that they are important and cared for, and we take that promise seriously.

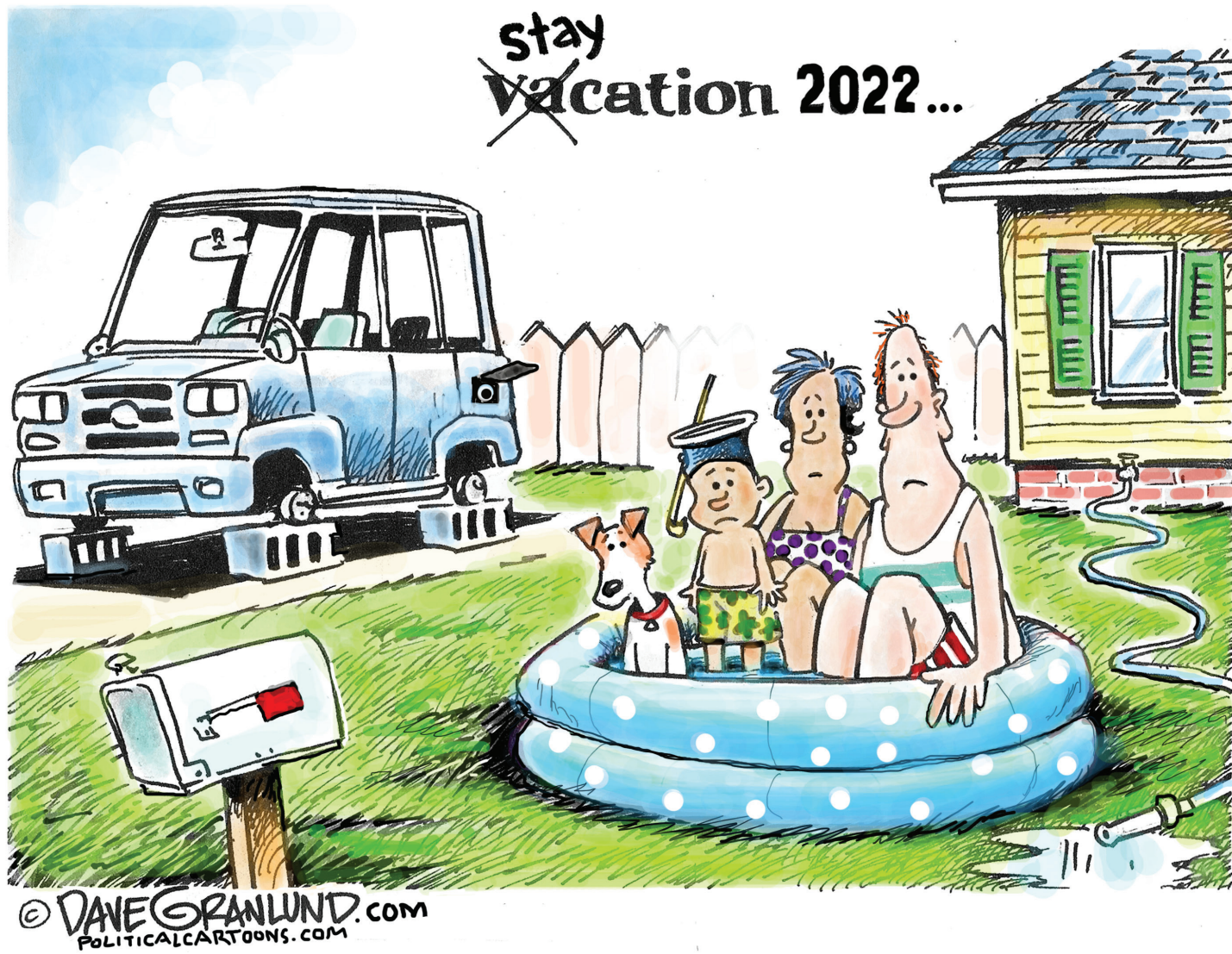
Our partnership with the Hermiston Police Department is not just as an emergency response team, but to build relationships day in and day out. Resource officers are an integral part of our schools and, along with teachers, counselors and other staff, help mentor and watch over students.

Hermiston schools must be safe, welcoming places for all students and staff to learn and thrive. It's our commitment to provide both. You can read about our safety and security measures on the school's website at www.hermiston.k12.or.us.

We don't always know how a student will be affected in a crisis like the one in Uvalde and the news coverage and conversations that follow, but parents know their children the best of anyone. We ask that you talk with your students and remind them that their school is a safe place and that we are united in our commitment to the safety of our schools, staff and students. Thank you for the care you give to our community of children.

We join together as a community in grief and in solidarity with Uvalde. We are shaken but not shattered.

Tricia Mooney is the superintendent of the Hermiston School District.



We need to do better in our approach to fires



ROB KLAVINS

OTHER VIEWS

Here in Eastern Oregon, our identity and way of life is deeply connected to our public lands. Landscapes of deep canyons, snow-capped peaks, dense forests and deserts are quite literally our backyard.

They provide clean cold water, abundant wildlife, freedom and a core piece of our identity.

In post-colonial times, our relationship with the land has been based on what we can take from it. Thankfully, many of us are rethinking that relationship.

The idea of logging big old trees and intact forests runs counter to Oregonians' deepest held values. It also runs counter to science showing the irreplaceable values these forests provide. Keeping forests functioning is one of the best things we can do to slow climate change and the extinction crisis.

But change is hard. Romantic notions of Manifest Destiny persist, and many influential voices are intent on trying to move into the future with their eyes glued to the rearview mirror. The now-infamous West Bend project is an example of the conflict that creates.

When a biker noticed blue paint on some big old pines — meaning they were slated for logging — on a popular trail near Bend, the nature-loving city became embroiled in conflict. That frustration was justified.

Aggressive logging

But the West Bend project is not an isolated case, nor is it the most egregious.

Across Eastern Oregon, timber sales billed as “restoration,” “thinning,” “fuels reduction,” and “collaboration” are decimating our forests. Too often, they are just labels applied to justify the same aggressive logging that many Oregonians thought we moved past long ago. It's partly our fault.

As the “timber wars” came to an end, and environmental safeguards were put into place, we played a major role in creating forest collaboratives. These groups sought to bring interested parties together to find common ground and guide public agencies to develop projects. As a state that prides itself on our green values, and ability to get along — some call it “the Oregon Way” — it seemed like the right thing to do.

Collaboratives initially focused on restoring forests damaged by logging, fire suppression and overgrazing. They worked to protect healthy forests, clean water, old growth and wildlife habitat. Many succeeded.

Fast forward to today.

Environmental protections have been eroded and extractive interests have taken over. Most collaboratives prioritize getting to “yes” for its own sake.

Anything other than greenwashing Forest Service logging projects has become controversial. Rural politicians, timber executives and extractive interests run the agenda and marginalize those without a financial interest. Anything not involving chainsaws and bulldozers is not worth discussing.

That's why the Wallowa Whitman National Forest was able to invoke collaboration to get away with logging centuries-old trees in the Lostine “safety” project. The results were lawsuits and an increased fire risk.

Now the same planners are doubling down with the Morgan Nesbitt Project, which would nearly clear cut virgin forests from the edge of the Eagle Cap Wilderness into the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.

The Umatilla National Forest proposed logging over 27,000 acres of pristine forests and some of the biggest trees in Eastern Oregon on the Ellis Project. Next door, with no environmental analysis, they are developing Parkers Mill, which would allow more logging of roadless forests than has occurred across the lower 48 in the last two decades combined.

Last summer, we bore witness to old-growth logging in a project called Big Mosquito. The project's stated goal was to

thin small trees to protect old growth from fire. It was touted as yet another success of the Blue Mountain Forest Partners Collaborative. But once the celebrations subsided and the logging equipment rolled in, the big old trees were considered a danger, splashed with blue paint, and cut down. It was only due to diligent conservation advocates that we learned of the carnage. The collaborative and agency remain silent.

These projects are like West Bend, but over tens of thousands of acres and in places further away from the watchful eye of the public and objective media outlets.

Over the last 20 years or so, tax dollars have rained down on these logging collaboratives. With the groups always eager to tell their success stories, and silence dissent, there's been little to no oversight.

Millions of dollars

The latest round of funding for “collaborative restoration” is counted in the tens of millions of dollars. It is being celebrated by the agency, collaborators and decision makers. If folks like U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley are serious about their commitments to protecting our forests, slowing climate change and supporting healthy rural communities, they need to put sideboards in place, empower all members of the public and provide meaningful oversight and accountability. They also need to defend basic environmental protections.

One easy and concrete step would be to call on the Biden Administration to restore long-standing protections for big and old trees called “the Screens” that were eliminated by the Trump administration just hours before Inauguration Day. This shouldn't be controversial.

Wyden rightly endorsed the president's Earth Day executive order to begin creating long-term protections for mature and old growth forests. He and Merkley need to do the work to ensure the Forest Service stops the bleeding now.

Rob Klavins is the Northeast Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild. He lives near Enterprise and helps run the family farm and business.