

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Survey could be beneficial to city

The Pendleton City Council is on the right path with its devotion to fulfilling its goal to improve communication with the community. Last week, the city announced it has launched the Pendleton Communications Survey 2022 to help solicit feedback from residents.

Any time elected and appointed officials can gather input from voters it is a good step forward. In the digital world we now live in people and cities can become isolated inside self-made silos where information is either stunted or slanted.

For government to work effectively several goals must be met on a consistent basis. For one, voters must always keep a keen eye on the decisions made by elected and appointed leaders. Our government works for us. Which means its decisions must be based on constructive feedback from citizens.

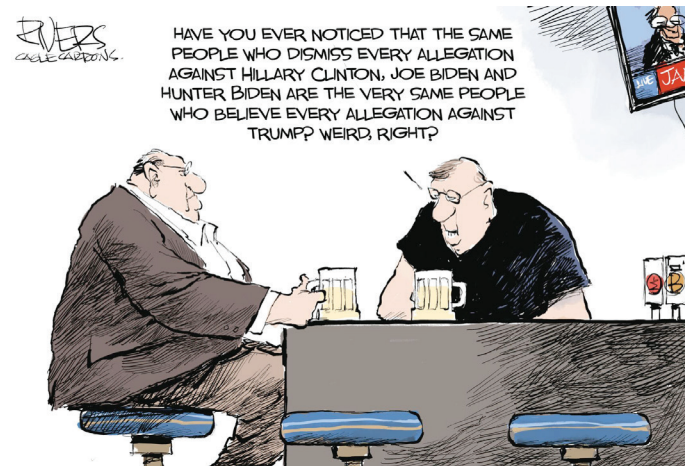
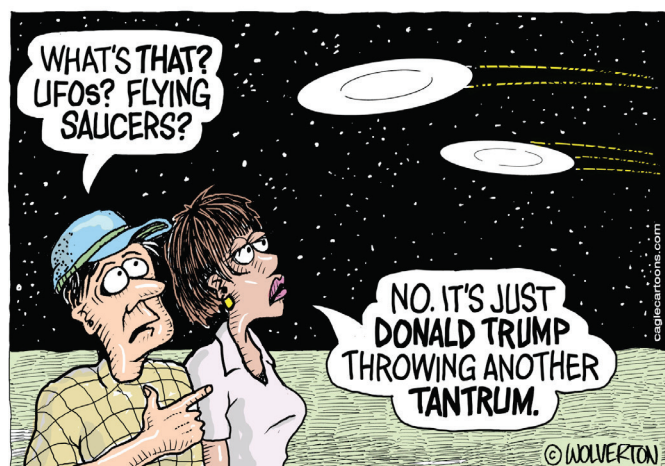
There is no shortage of communication in our world now. From social media platforms to bloggers, the number of opinions thrown across the public stage is monumental. The trouble is, all of those voices — those opinions — blend together and become a single, long scream of white noise.

Collecting feedback that is narrowly focused and with an established goal is crucial and the communications survey does that. The key, though, will be the kind of feedback the city receives. Long narratives of political bombast are fine for national television but hardly the ingredients to help a relatively small-town council pave a way forward.

Pendleton residents essentially have a terrific opportunity to give feedback to their elected leaders. In an ideal world, throngs of citizens would attend council meetings and give feedback during the public comment period at each session. The reality, though, is we all live very busy lives and attendance at most city — or even county — public meetings is never robust.

Yet now the city has created an avenue for voters to use to get their input before their elected leaders. Such input, if done in a methodical and civil manner, can go a long way toward helping the city in the future. In the end, our goals should be similar. A nice city that is safe and clean that is welcoming to all.

The city is on the right track with this survey, and we hope it proves to be a successful model for the future.



## Which Betsy Johnson would govern?



STEVE FORRESTER  
WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Betsy Johnson entered my office at The Astorian in 2000 as a candidate for the state House of Representatives. Decades prior, our family histories intersected when my father and Johnson's mother were colleagues on the Oregon State Board of Higher Education. They had a simpatico relationship. So I was inclined to like this legislative candidate. And I did.

Not being a pollster, I will leave it to others to speculate on the viability of Johnson's strategy for winning the three-way race she has with Democrat Tina Kotek and Republican Christine Drazan. What interests me much more is what kind of governor she would be.

Oregon has not had a governor with business ownership in their background since Victor Atiyeh, our last Republican governor, who led the state from 1979 to 1987. Atiyeh grasped the concept of being the state's CEO.

Our state government has grown considerably since the 1980s, but some of the same challenges beg for oversight. With government's growth, the state's dependence on computer systems and software platforms has grown markedly. And Oregon has lacked a governor who grasped that particular challenge and dealt with it.

Oregon's state government's computer system disasters are no secret. Refreshing my memory about those

malfunctions, I consulted a man with some 30 years of watching the state-house — Dick Hughes, our newspaper's Salem columnist. "They're awful," Hughes said.

On the one hand, computer systems have become the nervous systems of most businesses and governments. On the other hand, no candidate for state office will run on a platform of improving them. This is not sexy stuff.

Based on what Hughes tells me and what I know of Johnson, she would have the moxie to ask the tough questions of systems and software providers who are contracted to serve the divisions of state government — which are equivalent to large companies — in terms of their payroll, budget and the size of the customer base they serve.

Guns, however, are a sexy issue — a highly visible flashpoint. When Johnson told me, more than a decade ago, about the machine gun that she purchased at an auction, I was startled. In U.S. Marine Corps infantry training, I had fired the M60 machine gun. Why, I wondered, would anyone not in uniform want that killing machine?

When Johnson and I had this conversation, a national community of public health physicians was gathering numbers on the scale of gun wounding, deaths and suicides. They argued America should recognize this as a public health issue. A calamity. An epidemic.

An example of this public health perspective was "The Medical Costs of Gunshot Injuries in the United States," published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Its conclusions were: "Gunshot injury costs represent a

substantial burden to the medical care system. Nearly half this cost is borne by the US taxpayers," (Aug. 4, 1999).

David Hemenway, of the Harvard School of Public Health, was a leading explorer of the intersection of firearm wounding and deaths and public health. "Private Guns, Public Health" was his 2004 book. The virtue of Hemenway's work and other public health physicians is that it moved the gun issue away from politics and emotion into the world of medicine, healing and prevention. In an attempt to have a fruitful dialogue with Johnson, I gave her one of Hemenway's papers. At that point, this very articulate woman said nothing in response.

I was sorry to hear Johnson's response to the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, but it was the Betsy I listened to some 20 years ago.

I know that her independent campaign for governor demands she cultivate a hard-line stance for the single-issue voter — to cut into the Republican electorate. That's fine for short-term thinking. But it is not leadership for what has become a mortal concern.

Put simply, Johnson is on the wrong side of history. And if Oregon has another Umpqua Community College shooting (2015), Clackamas Town Center incident (2012) or Thurston High School shooting (Kip Kinkel, 1998), most Oregonians will want much more than a cliched response from their governor.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.

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