

ANDREW CUTLER
Publisher/Editor

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Owner

ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Editor/Senior Reporter

TUESDAY, JULY 26, 2022

Founded October 16, 1875

A4

OUR VIEW

Response to water crisis has been abysmal

The message from state and federal lawmakers to the officials and residents of Morrow County seems pretty clear.

You want help for your contaminated ground water — go get in line. We'll get to you eventually. Probably. Maybe.

For months now Morrow County officials have tested tap water of residents who use wells in the wake of the county commission's declaration of emergency over high levels of nitrates. The county is paying for bottled water while a coalition of local businesses is forking over money for reverse-osmosis filters for homeowners.

Jim Doherty, chair of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners, needs the state to contribute \$4 million to expand testing in the county, help pay for reverse-osmosis filter systems and dig new wells.

While the state has provided some help there hasn't been any money.

State lawmakers told Doherty to wait for the annual meeting of the Legislature's Emergency Board set for September to see about financial help. Even then there is no guarantee Morrow County will see cash to help alleviate what is becoming a Flint, Michigan-type of public health disaster.

The contaminated water stems from the lower Umatilla Basin, which is used by residents in Umatilla and Morrow counties, has been contaminated throughout the years with high levels of nitrates derived from farm fertilizers, animal manure and wastewater from the Port of Morrow.

In January, the state slapped a \$1.3 million fine on the Port of Morrow for violating its wastewater permit and allowing tons of excess nitrogen onto area farmlands. An investigation by Salem's Capital Chronicle found the port had been violating its permit for nearly two decades.

In June, the DEQ increased the fine to \$2.1 million after the discovery of additional wastewater violations.

Some food processing and ag firms connected to the Port of Morrow are reimbursing the county for up to 350 water filters at a cost of \$220 each. That's a bright spot in an otherwise dismal situation.

What remains troubling is the apparent lack of concern by regional and federal lawmakers. Until now, no lawmaker has convened a community meeting regarding the contamination issue. So far, no lawmaker has stepped in to be a leader on an effort to solve the problem.

That fact should be more than a little troubling to voters. Voters should study the actions of their elected representatives carefully in this matter. Essentially, the efforts of our elected leaders — with the exception of those in Morrow County — has been abysmal.

That needs to change. Right now.



Making things better



REGINA BRAKER
ANOTHER MILE

She's always on the go, sending texts to friends, putting out notices on social media for local fund-raisers, gathering folks with similar interests to help on a project, and gets support at short notice for something urgent, or to plan some longer-term commitment. It's truly amazing to me.

Since writing my last column, I've seen her in the middle of the Pendleton Venn diagram pulling people I know from several different groups together: someone from church, someone else from a group I knit with, other friends from choirs I've sung in, and people recognizable from other entities, all for good causes. And of course, there are always many individuals I don't know, whom she counts in her circle of acquaintances.

I think of her as an influencer in the best sense possible. Folks say yes to her because she's out there in front doing even more, and her energy is infectious.

She doesn't seem to accept anyone's age as an excuse for not showing up. Her manner of presenting the task gives people confidence and enthusiasm to join in, no matter their demographic.

Having collected enough experiences and commonalities to connect her with people, no matter where their working lives take place, she takes pride in connecting with rural citi-

zens, as well as those in town or beyond us in the city. She is much younger in her actions and vigor than whatever age shows up in a check of her identification for a senior discount.

When life starts in a community of a few hundred souls, where social opportunities exist only at school with less than a dozen age peers, or at the church located twenty some miles from home, you view everyone as a potential acquaintance, friend, or soulmate. My friend learned to live the motto "never knew a stranger" from her father. But there were constant reminders of what was not available to her too.

Cultural divides based in faith loyalties further limited who was available for friendship and the events she could attend. She has a memory of a grandmother teaching her to make chokecherry jelly, and she found refuge in her love of horses.

It wasn't just the size of her hometown with a biblical name that limited relational possibilities. Deeply restrictive religious beliefs from her church and parents taught lessons in shunning those outside the tiny fold, especially members of more dominant denominations. Her family warned that her best friend in high school was someone to avoid because she was black. That did not square with my friend's sense of faith or what possibilities lay beyond the horizon.

College became the outlet that allowed her to thrive. It was there that she met her husband. His studies took them to a large coastal metropolis, where she came across other perspec-

tives. A further stint in a western Oregon town continued her education in opening herself to others, no matter their nationality, religion or ethnicity. The world had opened up to her and she embraced it.

At one point her life path rerouted to the deep South. There she realized how far she had come from the beliefs about race she had grown up with and left behind, realizing that her social habits violated taboos about who she could talk to. It surprised her how deeply entrenched those social limitations still were, well past the passage of laws to protect against discrimination. It motivated her toward a life of action to improve her corner of the world.

Seeing possibility in every individual, especially for those who face limitations, whether the aged, or young people with obstacles in their lives, she's eager to help. Her long-time occupation of several decades in Pendleton required her to interact with folks in all walks of life, and that continues now in retirement.

Whether urgent farm chores claim her time, or community events call on her abilities, and some group needs a slew of volunteers to show up, she knows how to make it all happen. And it's a reminder to me of what I value and am grateful for in small town life: the ability for each of us to have an impact in the lives of others.

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

Oregon's 2nd Congressional District needs a veteran

This letter is directed to every veteran in the Oregon's 2nd Congressional District because our wonderful representative, Cliff Bentz, voted against allowing 56,000 veterans who are victims of the burn pits in the Middle East from having access to Veteran's Affairs Health Care, citing it would cost too much.

What Rep. Bentz fails to realize is that taking care of the men and women who fought for freedom in a far off land is part of the cost of war. To not vote for that bill shows me that Bentz hasn't been in the military nor has he talked to any of you who are suffering from the after-effects of those burn pits.

I think it's high time that Oregon's

2nd Congressional District got a veteran to represent us who knows what it means to protect his men and women.

Dr. Joseph Yetter is a military veteran and a medical doctor who will represent all of the district, not just those who gave him big campaign contributions. Oregon's 2nd Congressional District is better with Yetter. So in November remember vote Joe Yetter for Congress and send a fighter to Washington.

Barbara Ann Wright
Pendleton

Issues linger with proposed B2H transmission line

For 13 years Idaho Power has been trying to railroad the 310-mile-long B2H, Boardman to Hemingway power lines through Eastern Oregon. No one wants it, but Idaho Power keeps push-

ing, trying to outflank the public and government agencies, state and federal.

By the time they go into service they will be archaic, but Idaho Power gets around 10% of building cost bonus, most of which will go into stockholders' pockets. Nor does Idaho Power have an adequate fire plan for when the lines break and start fires, as it did in Paradise, California, when PG&E ignited fire. Death toll: 85 people.

Nor has weed control from building the project been properly addressed. The power lines cross the Oregon Trail numerous times, but Idaho Power could care less about preserving them or the heritage that goes with them. Their plan is to place their lines directly in front of the \$16 million Oregon Trail interpretive center outside of Baker City.

The list goes on.

Whit Deschner
Baker City

EDITORIALS

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SEND LETTERS TO:

editor@eastoregonian.com,
or via mail to Andrew Cutler,
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801