

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Funding starting to flow into Boardman

Just as criticism of public officials is sometimes necessary, praise is just as important when it is deserved.

Oregon U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley deserve to be lauded for their help in channeling \$1.7 million to Morrow County to address drinking water contamination in Boardman.

The money — from the 2023 Senate Appropriations Bill — will help pay for the testing of wells and to study long-term solutions to the contamination problem for rural residents of the county.

The money is good news and even better for voters is the knowledge the two elected leaders identified the problem and acted to support a solution. While partisan politics matter in the coffee shop and when forming opinions, when it comes down to the heartland whether an elected leader is a Democrat or Republican really doesn't matter when there is a crisis. Then, what matters is simply are elected leaders looking out for their constituents best interests and finding a way to help?

Merkley and Wyden did exactly what they are supposed to do as our representatives at the federal level.

The money will be important and so will long-term solutions. The sooner those solutions can be developed and implemented the better for the residents of the Boardman area.

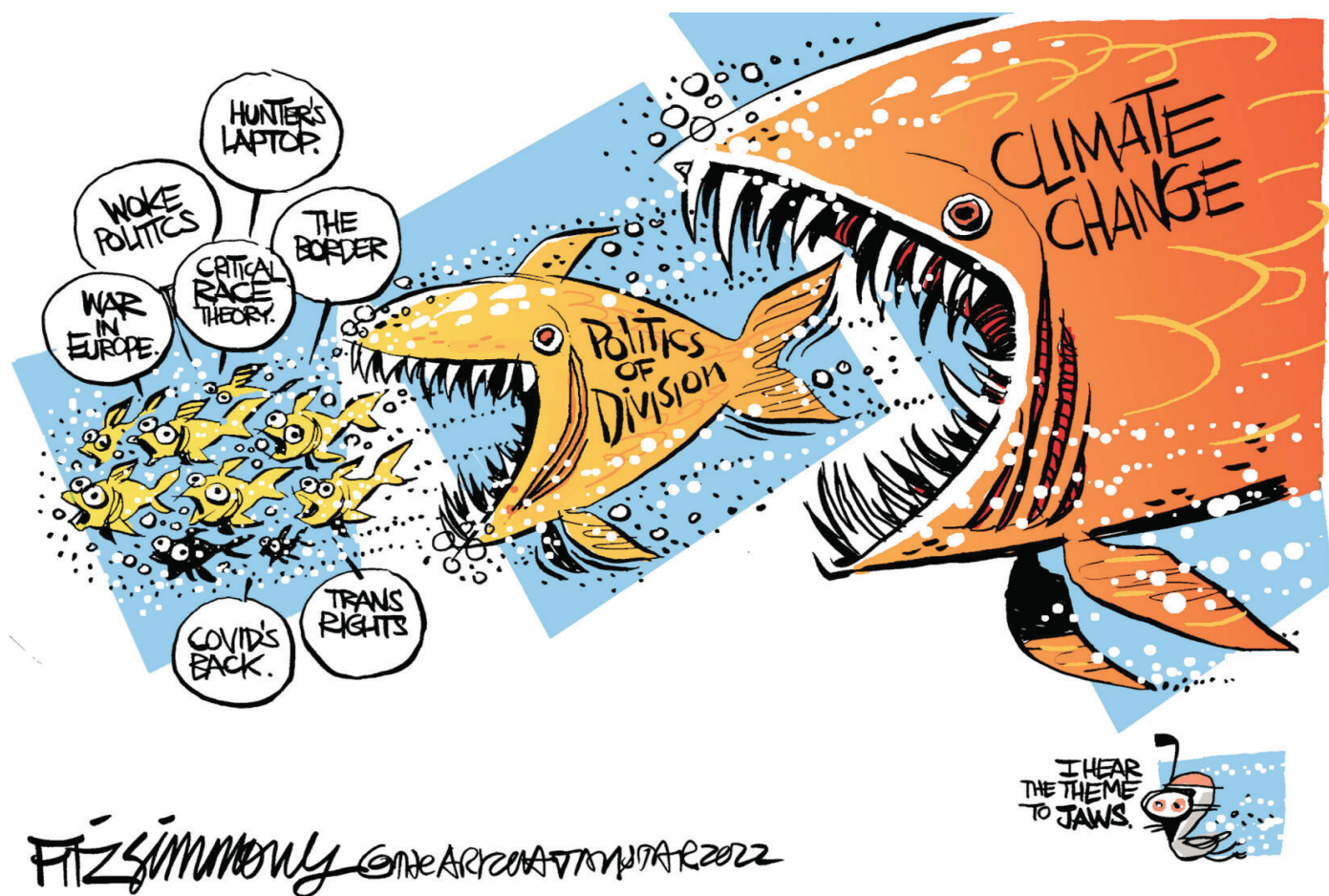
Recently, Morrow County Commission Chair Jim Doherty said that since the county issued an emergency declaration the area is "finally receiving attention and resources from state agencies."

That is good news as well. Yet it is troubling there wasn't a faster response from the state to this issue. A good question so far unanswered is why it took so long for the state to provide assistance.

A larger, even more troubling question, revolves around the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's actions regarding the Port of Morrow's wastewater violations connected to the water crisis. The state agency fined the port \$1.3 million in January for violating its wastewater permit and allowing hundreds of tons of excess nitrogen onto area farmlands situated on the already contaminated basin.

The DEQ boosted the fine to \$2.1 million in June. The real questions are for the future. For example, how will the voters know the state is monitoring the port in an adequate fashion to prevent another such violation?

The solution to the greater contamination problem is crucial and will need to be addressed by a wide range of stakeholders, including the port. We need the port, but we also need the port to be good stewards.



The Spruce Goose and the watermelon



DANIEL
WATTENBURGER
HOMEGROWN

The Spruce Goose is a spectacle of an airplane — part sideshow oddity, part historical relic — on display in a custom hangar at the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum in McMinnville.

It was constructed primarily of birch wood in Long Beach, California, during World War II in a plan to produce air-worthy transports that didn't require scarce metal commodities. It made one flight in 1947 to prove the concept and was then mothballed as the only prototype.

Half a century later, the McMinnville museum bid on the right to purchase the one-of-a-kind plane, building a sizable collection of real and replica planes and helicopters around it to tell the history of flight.

As we climbed the steps up to see the Goose a few weeks ago, the friendly veterans stationed at the entrance went through an all-but scripted dialogue with us. They asked if we were enjoying the museum, asked the kids if they were ready to fly a plane, and asked us where we were from.

When we told them we were from Hermiston, the inevitable question followed: "Are the watermelons ready yet?"

Only for locals, I let them know, but we'll ship them out once we're ready to share with the world.

My agricultural background is minimal, and I've certainly never harvested watermelons in the heat of summer. But that doesn't mean I can't take pride in living in a town that produces the best version of the best fruit known to mankind.

I've never been asked how the potatoes are looking, how the onion crop is coming in, or if the grass seed is as good as last year. Frankly, I wouldn't have an answer, although I know a few folks at the Hermiston Agricultural Research & Extension Center who could share some thoughts. But I do know enough to know that the iconic watermelon, proudly displayed on the water tower, doesn't nearly tell the story of Hermiston's agricultural bounty. It's just a digestible slice of what makes Hermiston special.

In the same way, Pendleton has the Round-Up, a once-a-year event that doesn't completely define the town but captures its ethos. Maybe McMinnville didn't birth the birch behemoth that now plays an outsized role in its tourism culture, but it does tie into a rich aviation history that could otherwise be missed.

I was thinking about these touchpoints during a presentation about the Hermiston HEROS project that would add youth sports fields at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center. The question of identity came up. What is

Hermiston all about? What would bring people here from across the Northwest?

As EOTEC manager Al Davis likes to say, it's the middle of nowhere but the center of everything. That's a good start.

But this community has also developed a reputation as a youth sports mecca, and not just because of our location at the crossroads of two interstates. In the fall we host playoff football and soccer at Kennison Field, in the winter we have AAU basketball and wrestling in school gyms, in the spring and summer our sports fields fill with lacrosse players. A youth softball team just did us all proud by carrying the Hermiston name to the western regional Little League tournament, as many other local teams have done in all areas of competition over the years.

Watermelons may be our notable export, but youth sports give us a chance to showcase our talented youth, dedicated adult coaches, commitment to inclusiveness, and community hospitality. They make up our character.

Everyone wants to live in a town that stands for something. Knowing what Hermiston stands for will guide us through the continued growth and change ahead.

Daniel Wattenburger is the former managing editor of the East Oregonian. He lives in Hermiston with his wife and children and is an account manager for Pac/West Lobby Group. Contact him at danielwattenburger@gmail.com.

YOUR VIEWS

Out of site, out of mind

It appears the Pendleton city manager has decided to deal with the issue of the surplus handicapped vans sitting in the parking lot at city hall. After much criticism and embarrassment forcing a push for construction of a \$3 million bus barn for storage, you'll notice those surplus vans have mysteriously vanished.

That's something positive to report. Perhaps the city will save a few shekels on insurance. It's time for some kudos. Or is it? Those sneaky devils at city hall have simply moved them to the Public Works storage yard near Washington School. You'd think that since these vehicles seem to be so valuable that construction for indoor storage in a bus barn has been approved, they'd put them inside the Public Work's warehouse along with the old Eighth Street Bridge, its last reported location.

Don't fret, though, according to the mayor, the latest van purchased was needed as a replacement for one that was worn out. Besides, it was paid for with a grant from the state of Oregon, as is most of the cost of the bus barn. He continues to stress that those grant expenditures don't cost us. How is that possible when they are derived from our taxes? These grants don't come automatically, someone has to write the request. Who pays

them? Why do we keep and insure worn out vans, if that's really the case, that just sit idle? Out of site, out of mind seems to be the latest tool in city hall's bag of tricks.

City management has decided to use a government program intended to expand public transportation to construct a bus barn rather than expand bus service to a seven day a week schedule that would better serve the public. The only thing this proposed plan will accomplish is expanding the fuel bill and adding another building to the maintenance backlog.

The city council is letting the public decide whether to ban the use of psilocybin, those psychedelic mushrooms approved in the last general election. Why do you suppose they are not letting the public vote on whether to build a \$3 million bus barn up at the airport?

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

Digital coupons means paying for lower prices

Recently a letter about Safeway's digital only coupons appeared in this paper. The writer was absolutely correct. In the past, sale prices were available using a "club card." These are available at no

cost. With digital coupons a shopper needs to buy an electronic device, pay for a service plan, learn how to use it and bring it along whenever they shop. One literally has to pay to get the lower prices.

As one example of the extent of the problem, 18.5 ounce bottles of Lipton tea are \$2.49 each at full price. However, for the past several years, the price has ranged from \$1.25 to \$1.50 each with a club card. Now, you must use a "digital coupon" to get that same lower price. Hence, I am forced to pay \$1.20 more per bottle. If I buy just one a week, in a month I have spent an extra \$4.80 on these alone. In all, I am paying around \$25 more per month because of these digital coupons.

Like the previous writer, I have also asked if there is some other way to get these lower prices, and have received a hard "no." Also like him, I believe there are alternatives the store could offer.

This problem disproportionately affects older, disabled and lower income people — those who can least afford it. Thus I find it both morally and ethically objectionable. I am doubtful that Safeway will read our letters, so I encourage other shoppers to express this concern to them.

Shelley Wilson
Hermiston

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