

# Fire causes locals, visiting cyclists both to miss out

In a cruel parting shot, our fiery summer of 2015 has unexpectedly slammed the door on this week’s eagerly anticipated visit to Wallowa County from Cycle Oregon.

With temperatures dropping a week in front of the fall equinox, and even as we were sleeping to the sound of another gentle rainfall on our roofs at night, Cycle Oregon’s trip planners were finishing pulling the plug on the Halfway-to-Joseph leg of their cyclists’ journey. This was an unavoidable adjustment given the proximity of the recently sparked Dry Gulch Fire, which is now rather sizable, and which has firefighting forces running their emergency vehicles quickly along the same scenic route to our county that Cycle Oregon would have used.

The abrupt change of plan came as a disappointment to Wallowa County businesses and non-profit organizations, many of which stood to gain a welcome shot in the arm either from added late-season trade or the donations the Cycle Oregon organization makes to local groups. Less tangible but equally valuable, though, are the lasting impressions that can be made upon visitors, and in this respect Wallowa County may be suffering a significant loss.

We have no idea exactly how many members of this year’s Cycle Oregon group have pedaled inside Wallowa County before, but even these previously visiting members could have taken away something more than they expected in 2015 — an impression of improving conditions here for bicyclists. To reach Enterprise from Joseph, no doubt a number of the cycling visitors would have eschewed the most direct route, Highway 82, in favor of the longer but pleasanter Hurricane Creek Road, which has been widened and is now safer than when Cycle Oregon was last here. And any visitor who took a moment to learn about the various local projects and proposals that are in various stages of planning couldn’t help but be excited by the prospect of one day finding our county’s western end accessible via a new trail-beside-the-rails, which would be a greatly welcome alternative to the hideously dangerous (for bikes) canyon portion of Highway 82.

Meanwhile, back beyond Highway 82’s eastern or southern terminus at Wallowa Lake, bicyclists and pedestrians alike may relish the idea of passing between the head and the foot of the lake without hassling the fast motor vehicle traffic along the shoulderless Highway 351. Granted, currently conceived options for this particular project all carry price-tags steep enough to induce sticker shock, but the fact that advocates and agencies are putting time and thought into the idea anyway serves to highlight how highly we value the non-motorized modes in our beautiful areas.

It’s both a financial blow and an emotionally deflating turn of events to miss the big influx of Cycle Oregon bikes this year, but Wallowa County takes a back seat to no other part of the state in offering the intense beauty, mild climate, and reasonably good roads that serious cyclists truly appreciate. So Cycle Oregon folks will undoubtedly try it again here in some near-future year, and even if they don’t, Wallowa County figures to be attracting non-motorized two-wheelers in increasing numbers.

—RCR

EDITORIAL

The voice of the Chieftain



## GUEST COMMENTARY

# Can the Independent Party be a magnet?

Last Thursday was the deadline to join the Independent Party of Oregon. Voters always have had the option to declare themselves Independent. But on Aug. 17, the Oregon Secretary of State granted major party status to the Independent Party. That party reached the threshold of having more than 108,000 registered voters.

One of last week’s big deciders was state Sen. Betsy Johnson. Finding herself frequently at odds with the Democratic Party, Johnson mulled the shift, talking with an array of colleagues around Oregon. As 5 p.m. approached, she backed off and remains a registered Democrat.

Until now, the drawback of registering as an Independent in Oregon was not voting in the state primary election, except for ballot measures. Major party status will bring about an array of changes, including the ability to have an Independent slate of candidates for major offices.

While money and organization are important in political campaigns, a good candidate is the rarest commodity. Sen. Johnson is a good candidate.

The Independent Party’s new status is part of a larger context in which many Oregonians see the Democratic and Republican parties as less relevant than they once were. As the share of Oregonians declaring themselves Independent has grown, the Republican Party has seen its fortunes diminish. Years of establishing religious litmus tests for candidates has created a GOP talent deficit. That is one reason why Oregon has trended toward becoming a one-party state.

For a Democrat like Johnson, that should be good news. But increasingly the Democratic power structure (House Speaker Tina Kotek, Senate President Peter Courtney) see things through a lens that is shaped in Portland and the Willamette Valley. And it is widely acknowledged that the public employees

unions set a large part of the agenda in the statehouse.

While we have not always agreed with Sen. Johnson’s perspective on some of these divisive issues, she nonetheless is genuine in her aspiration to understand and speak up for the interests of the Oregon beyond the densely populous midsection. Johnson tries to grasp the aspirations of communities that are well away from the mega-centers of Portland, Salem, Corvallis, Eugene and Medford.

It is a truism nationally, and no less in Oregon, that the two largest political parties are either more liberal or more conservative than the mass of public opinion that collects in the middle of the spectrum.

For the Independent Party to prosper, it needs to be more than a default option. To become a magnet, it must build a bench. It must have good candidates.

*From the Daily Astorian, a sister publication to the Wallowa County Chieftain.*

# School health center unneeded

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Proposed SBHC would serve real need

**To the Editor:**

Regarding the proposed school based health clinic (SBHC) at Enterprise Schools, I never expected that this would be seen as a subversion of parental rights around their children and their health.

Through my medical practice and community involvement of 13 years, I know there are children in our community that we are not reaching. I have worked with the Center for Wellness, Building Healthy Families, and the Alternative High School and I have seen children struggling at home, and both in and outside of school. I am hopeful that this health-care opportunity will be a new avenue for improving their chances of success.

I understand that there will always be concerns and fear of the unknown. I respect thoughtful discussion and expect that the diversity of ideas now being expressed will shape a viable solution that will work for all involved.

Mitchell and Fossil have implemented SBHCs and most residents feel that these have substantially enhanced the level of care in their communities, especially regarding underserved children.

The Enterprise school based health clinic is a chance to improve our community and the health and well-being of our children without detriment to the health or rights of other families. I feel that we, as a community, cannot afford to fail them when we have the opportunity to make such a real difference in their lives.

“If it is true that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, isn’t it also true a society is only as healthy as its sickest citizen and only as wealthy as its most deprived?” — *Maya Angelou*

“Any society, any nation, is judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest members — the last, the least, the littlest.” — *Cardinal Roger Mahony*

### SBHC opponents outnumber proponents

**To the Editor:**

When I read the article about the meeting held at the Cloverleaf, it seems as though Shannon Vemam is the only person opposed to the SBHC, when in fact there were several parents, medical professionals even, who opposed the center being implemented at the school. There was not a letter sent home to parents of the children at the school that this was intended to happen, however, when mouthwash and or field trips are planned we as parents need to sign for these things. It seems this would be something important enough to receive a letter home.

There were quite a few “I don’t know” answers to questions asked, which brought on more questions, like this opt out, since this uses grant monies, what happens when the government removes the option and this becomes mandatory?

Christina Moffit  
Enterprise

Renee Grandi  
Enterprise

### Of lost and found sheep and coinage

**To the Editor:**

#AllLivesMatter, suppose you have one hundred sheep in your care, and you lose one of them. Do you not leave the ninety-nine and go after the one? And when you’ve found it put it on your shoulders and go home? Then call to your friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me! I have found my lost sheep!’ Or suppose you have ten silver coins, and you lose one of them. Do you not sweep the floor carefully until you’ve found it? And when you’ve found it call to your friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me! I have found what I have lost!’ All that we have belongs to you, and you are always with us! But it is right to go looking for what you’ve lost.

Andrew Esquibel  
Enterprise

### Good reasons to welcome wolves

**To the Editor:**

As The voice of the Chieftain noted (“California gets wolf experience,” Sept. 9), California is privileged to host a new wolf pack.

Wolves have been instrumental in restoring biological diversity in the Northern Rocky Mountains, including increasing the number of song birds, pronghorns, lynxes and other species, while simultaneously improving the ecology of vital riparian systems. Recently, researchers found that wolves in the Great Lakes region have the same trophic-cascading effects on their ecosystems. Wolves help scavengers like grizzly bears and bald eagles, and also help keep a check on smaller predators. Their left-over carrion affects soil nutrients, soil microbes and plant quality.

While providing those benefits in Idaho and Montana — states with more wolves than Oregon or California — wolves took less than one percent of livestock inventories. According to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service data, more animals in ranches die from weather, disease, theft, poisoning and birthing problems

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