

Cost of inaction in the schools is much higher

Helping kids succeed in Bend-La Pine Schools just got an apparent win from Deschutes County.

Deschutes County's budget committee voted 4-2 Friday to put in the county budget about \$160,000 toward a new partnership. The county would put health professionals in the Bend-La Pine Schools to work with students on health promotion and prevention. The county and the school district would split the cost 50-50.

County Commissioners Patti Adair and Phil Chang voted for the Youth Success Partnership, as did two other budget committee members. What's more interesting were the two "no" votes. County Commissioner Tony DeBone voted "no," as did Bruce Barrett, another member of the budget committee.

Why vote "no"?

DeBone and Barrett didn't dispute there are problems in the schools that are not so much about teaching. Mental health is one. Deschutes County has one of the highest rates of youth suicide in the state. The county rate is 18.9 suicides per 100,000. Substance abuse from vaping to alcohol to marijuana is another. There, too, youth in Deschutes County can trend higher. Then there's teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. In 2019, 25 youths between the ages of 10 to 17 in the county got pregnant.

DeBone and Barrett believed the program may not be ready to go.

DeBone explained his vote to us by saying he voted "no," but he is not against the program. Now there's an answer that might have you thinking you have landed in an M.C. Escher drawing. The way we understand it from our conversation with DeBone is that he had reservations that not enough work has been done already

to develop the new program for him to approve spending money on it. He also brought up a concern about how involved parents would be. County officials mentioned parental involvement. They didn't emphasize it.

Barrett had similar worries. He, too, talked about how he didn't think there was enough detail. He and other budget committee members were bothered that no specific metrics were identified to measure the program's performance.

"I feel like this was just kind of a patchwork presentation to get this thing underway, so they can spend some CAT tax and I just don't feel like the program is there," Barrett said.

The CAT tax reference is about Oregon's new corporate activity tax. It could bring in about \$1 billion a year to schools. We are not sure how Barrett meant that jab about the CAT tax, though we don't think it would be fair to suggest the district is throwing together something quickly just to spend money. Suicide, substance abuse and teen pregnancy are serious problems in the schools.

The real problem would be if the school district and the county were not willing to try anything new, not willing to take a chance on a new program to solve these problems that are more acute here and threaten to wreck the ability of students to succeed. If everyone on the county budget committee voted as DeBone and Barrett did, that's where the county would be.

As Nahad Sadr-Azodi, public health director at Deschutes County, put it: "If we think the cost of this program is high, the cost of inaction is higher."

Reinforce openness in Oregon government

The secret to more open Oregon government is simple: fewer secrets.

Fewer records requests that have to go to court to have any chance of success. Lower prices or a price of zero charged by government for records the public is entitled to see. Public records should not only be accessible to wealthy individuals or big corporations.

The Oregon Legislature could help ensure those things happen by passing Senate Bill 500. The bill doesn't technically make Oregon government more open. It takes Oregon's position of public records advocate and moves it to be more

independent. The position will be subject to less control from the governor's office. The bill is scheduled for a work session later this week.

Nobody in the governor's office may have done anything technically wrong in the events that led to the resignation of Oregon's first public records advocate Ginger McCall. It felt wrong to her. And the independence of the office was a critical issue in that dispute.

Oregon needs a strong independent voice helping state and local government adhere to the letter and the spirit of the state's public records law. SB 500 helps get us there.



GUEST COLUMN

Roll up your sleeve, and get your shot

BY FARON SCHULTZ

With jeans, a black T-shirt and a floppy hat resting on her head, she sat in the chair and received her second vaccination for COVID-19. It was Friday May 28, 2021. When she was finished, a group of National Guard members, doctors, nurses and dozens of volunteers gathered around and cheered. You see, this young woman was the final person to be vaccinated at the mass vaccination clinic located at the Deschutes County fairgrounds.

Immediately we began to tear down this amazing enterprise that had vaccinated more than 119,000 Central Oregonians. There was a sense of pride. A sense of accomplishment. And the realization that we could have done more.

When the clinic opened early this year, St. Charles and Volunteers in Medicine reached out to the community for help. We of the tri-county area raised our hands. More than 1,000 people enlisted. People from Jefferson County and Crook County joined Deschutes County volunteers to support this valiant effort.

We began vaccinating our neighbors aged 75 years and older. Many of these folks came with a daughter or son to help with the process. Women came dressed up and with proper hair, or as well as it can be during a pandemic. The men wore veteran's caps from WWII and the Korean war. So many suspenders! We witnessed wheelchairs, walkers and canes maneuver from the vaccine building to the respite building. And if you did not experience this fun, your loss! Many folks asked if the bar was open, or if they could go dancing.

These first vaccines were for our



Central Oregon Connects file

In this March photo, those at the Deschutes County fairgrounds prep to give COVID-19 vaccinations. For current vaccine information visit, <https://tinyurl.com/ywbx42re>

most vulnerable, and our Greatest Generation did not disappoint. Eyes were filled with joy, hope and optimism; resolute to claim a more normal future.

Next we moved to the 65 and older crowd. This awesome group was focused on duty, with determination for success. They were committed to do everything possible and bring our country back to normal.

Men's caps began to read Vietnam Veteran. Women sported workout clothes. It was evident that the choice of vaccination was correct. All were looking for a return to normal.

As we moved to younger and younger neighbors, the clothing changed. The attitudes changed. Parents brought their children and both embraced the solution. The desire to neutralize this virus remained front and center.

When the clinic began to operate, we were driving on snow and ice. February was dark and gray. And slowly, the gray began to transition to spring. A perfect metaphor. The vaccine was taking hold, and we could see the light.

To quote the Eagles, "We may lose

or we may win... but we will never be here again." The virus is here; it is real, and it is not going away. Our chances to win are so much better with the vaccination.

COVID-19 is agnostic. It does not care where you live or what you do. It does not care how you like your eggs or what language you speak. It simply attacks. It has killed almost 600,000 Americans since the pandemic began. And to bring it closer to home, as of Tuesday, the virus has taken the lives of 80 Deschutes County residents, 38 dead in Jefferson County and 22 dead in Crook County.

Central Oregon has made great progress, but there is more to do. We all want normal. And normal is within reach. These vaccines work. They are safe. They are free.

For me, it is difficult to understand why so many people have decided the vaccination is not right for them. Please educate yourself. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist. It is a personal decision. It is your body. It is your choice. And understand that your choice impacts the entire population.

Roll up your sleeve.

■ Faron Schultz lives in Powell Butte.

Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

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Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

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Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.

Create an independent district in Oregon with new 6th seat

BY KEVIN FRAZIER

In the 2019 legislative year, there were 236 Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives, four of whom were from Oregon. Out of those 236, though, the Oregonians were nearly indistinguishable from the rest of the Democratic block. Reps. Suzanne Bonamici, Earl Blumenauer, and Peter DeFazio all recorded nearly perfect party-line records; CQ Press reported their party unity scores as 99 out of 100; Rep. Kurt Schrader came in at 93. Comparatively, on the other side of the aisle, then-Rep. Greg Walden had a far lower party unity score of just 81.

On the whole, these scores go to show that Oregonians have lacked an independent voice in D.C. Sure, Oregon's Democratic representatives have spoken out against their party

from time to time and, though less frequently, even voted against their ideological colleagues; but, from a voting record perspective, there's nothing distinctive about the state's congressional delegates — especially on the Democratic side. In defense of Oregon's Democratic delegates, they're just following a much larger trend. The average party unity score in 2019 for House Democrats was 97.6 — up from 75.8 in 1983.

Oregonians have a chance to elect a voice, rather than an echo, in their sixth congressional district. Now more than ever, independent voices in the House have a chance to sway the conversation by virtue of the fact that neither party has a controlling presence in the chamber. Right now, there's 219 Democrats, 212 Republicans and four vacancies. Electing

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independent representatives in a handful of districts would upend politics as usual by forcing both parties to cater to this party-free caucus.

Of course, the odds of state legislators drawing an independent district are low. It's in the interest of both parties to draw "safe" seats. These are seats with such skewed party registration differentials that it's a Sisyphean act for someone from the other side to run a credible campaign. These sorts of seats save both parties money because the general elections are so uncompetitive. They also reinforce the faulty idea that we're stuck with two options when it comes to our elected officials and, therefore, entrench the dominance of the two parties.

So as legislators start to redistrict,

Democrats will push for a map that has five safe, blue seats and that offers the Republicans one safe, red seat; Republicans will push for a four-two map. Neither will advocate for a purple district. That's why the rest of us, the voters of Oregon, must do so.

A competitive district in Oregon will give at least some Oregonians a meaningful choice every election cycle. The two parties will have to put forth their best candidates, and third party or non-affiliated candidates may even have a chance at running competitive races. This district can become an example of the sort of democratic competition that voters have long been denied due to closed primaries, gerrymandered districts and undue influence afforded to ideologically exclusive parties.

If just a few other states take this brave approach of thwarting party efforts to draw safe seats, then we could

see the emergence of U.S. Representatives capable of offering their voice and not merely an echo of the party line.

Our democracy is not broken; it's fixed. The rules, the game board and the players are tilted to two sides. Let's create space for an independent voice in Oregon again; someone who can truthfully share these same lines from Sen. Wayne Morse: "I will exercise an independence of judgment based on the evidence of each issue. I will weigh the views of my constituents and party, but cast my vote free of political pressure and unmoved by threats of loss of political support."

■ Kevin Frazier formerly led Passport Oregon, which helped young Oregonians explore the state's outdoors. He currently operates No One Left Offline, which has distributed nearly 100 Wi-Fi hot spots throughout Oregon, especially Central Oregon. Kevin will graduate from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law in May of 2022.



Frazier