

Reach out to calm fears when threats call

It's a sad state of affairs, but the threat-induced lockdown last week at Prairie City School is becoming almost a rite of spring in schools across the state and nation — an unwelcome one, to say the least.

The disturbing events began after an anonymous call threatening violence against students came into the school. Officials there notified police and set in motion procedures designed to keep students and staff safe while police moved in to investigate.

A lockdown at two other schools, Humbolt and Grant Union, was just a precaution, but it was warranted, given the inter-relatedness and close connections of the Prairie City and John Day communities.

This phone threat, like ones reported elsewhere, coincided with the anniversary of the Virginia Tech mass shooting, the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history. Similar calls in Southwest Washington prompted lockdown and evacuations at the Long Beach Peninsula Schools that same day.

Both there and in Prairie City, police are saying the threats likely were a sick — and illegal — prank. But as our sister newspaper, the Chinook Observer noted, such events feel like anything but a prank to the affected students and parents.

When students must be shepherd into their classrooms, told to shelter in place, and then

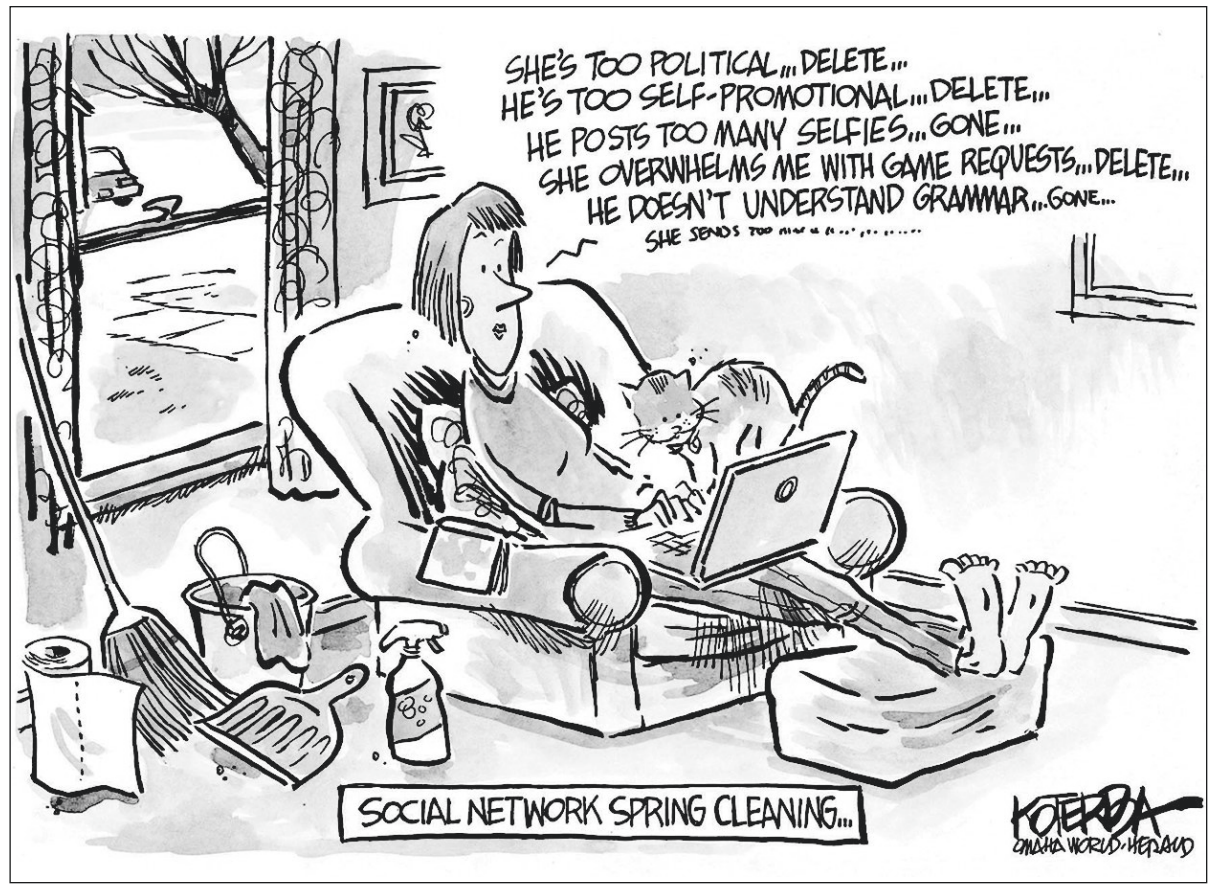
released under the watchful eye of law enforcement, it is bound to be a stressful situation. But with the possibility of a real assault, such precautions are necessary.

In Prairie City, some students didn't think there was a real threat at first, but the reality — this was not a drill — sank in. While it was unsettling for many of the older students, the fear was particularly noticeable in some of the younger children.

No one wants to cause that kind of stress without reason. However, the reality of school violence seen elsewhere in recent years means no threat can be taken lightly, even here. Shooter drills and lockdowns are as much a need in our remote corner of the world as they are in more urban and suburban communities. We can't ignore threats, or wish the risks away.

So what can we do? Just as the schools and police are embracing relatively new obligations — planning drills and emergency responses — parents have a new challenge to talk with their kids about these situations, unpleasant as the topic may be, and the reason for the safeguards. Those conversations, in age-appropriate terms, can help kids cope with their fears and navigate what seems at times a troubling world.

The silver lining in last week's situation was that authorities responded quickly, and the threat turned out to be one of words, not action. Next step: Take a deep breath and hug your kids. — SC



COMMENTARY

Collaboration, seeking balance in forestry

By Dave Hannibal
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

Collaboration could well be the most effective tool to come along in my 30 years of work in the national forests of the Northwest.

The Blue Mountains Forest Partners formed in John Day almost 10 years ago in an effort to end the timber wars that were strangling the local community and to deal with the unhealthy condition of our forest. It has been a huge success — albeit a success that has been acknowledged regionally and nationally far more than locally.

I was disheartened to hear us referred to as an “environmental group” during a recent meeting at the Courthouse. I see a need for people to know a little more about what we do and who we are.

Our members are loggers, timber company and service contract reps, retired Forest Service employees, ranchers and others — yes, some environmental group reps as well. All of these people work to move important projects forward which benefit the people of Grant County.

This is a big change from “the old days.” It can be hard for any of us to move away from the viewpoints of our interest groups and compromise, but often it is the only way to make meaningful progress.

While many of us have spent long hours in meetings, others have not been so involved, and some have just

recently come to the table. All are welcome to participate, although it's not a process all will enjoy.

In the early years, the extreme views of a few seemed the hardest to take. Those viewpoints formed from an emotional, rather than scientific, standpoint, and that remains the case today. They come from both far left and far right, but anytime one person demands his ideals be heard above the rest, it causes extra time and work.

The advantage of our process is we have almost always been able to work through our conflicts to a reasonable solution.

We benefit by furthering our knowledge of the evolution of forestry, forest systems and related economics. We strive to expand our understanding by inviting top scientists to speak to us and take field tours. We talk through our contentious issues.

Our agreements have resulted in numerous large-scale projects hitting the ground. Logs are moving and the local economy is in better shape than I have seen in more than 20 years. The prescriptions and treatments are good for the forest and the economy, getting better as we go along.

While BMFP has primarily worked on vegetation treatments, the road systems in the project areas are looked at as well. Most of the projects included some minor closures along with some new road construction, some temporary road construction, some open roads moving to closed, and some closed roads moving to

open. I voted for what met the most needs and made the best sense on the ground.

Evaluating roads at the project level yields the most site-specific and realistic outcomes. The broad brush of national, or even forestwide, directives can be ineffective or inappropriate in any given project. Some roads may have been built in a bad location long ago or are just no longer appropriate, while others may need to be built to maintain the access many of us enjoy. Newer members representing “access” groups could be of great help evaluating these with us, and are welcome at the table.

In all of our collaboration to date, road closures amounted to a very small percent of the total roads in any project.

As an avid off-roader, I like my roads and trails and I spend a lot of time in the forest. But I do not buy in to the current fight that's brewing and the hype that we are being locked out of the forest. I will not fight to save every foot of road ever made on the Malheur, but rather do my best to help wisely manage the forest and maintain the recreational opportunities so many of us enjoy, while taking into account the myriad of laws, rules, and interest groups involved.

The BMFP meets at the Grant County Regional Airport the third Thursday of each month at 4 p.m., and all are welcome.

Dave Hannibal is a board member of the Blue Mountains Forest Partners.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Who will decide?

To the Editor:
The county ordinance pertaining to public road closures states “all roads, trails ... across public lands within Grant County shall remain open unless otherwise authorized for closure by the Grant County Court and the Grant County Sheriff.”

This ordinance was only signed by the County Court and the Sheriff. None of the managers of the impacted “public lands” had a place to sign, nor is there any guidance included in the ordinance on how it might be “enforced.”

Here are some facts that might be of interest:

1. The Article IV, clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution has been consistently interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court “that state laws that conflict with federal law are without effect” (Maryland v. Louisiana, 451 U.S. 725, 746 (1991))

2. Also in Article IV of the U.S. Constitution it states “The Congress shall have the power to dispose of and make all the needful rules and regulations respecting the territory or other property belonging to the United States.”

My fear is that if local people continue to advocate that the Grant County Court “enforce” our local road closure ordinance, the road closure issue will end up being decided by parties outside Grant County!

I believe that if all interested local parties were to start working together they could have a much better chance of “deciding what is best for Grant County” rather than trying to “enforce” a local ordinance that has very questionable legal standing.

Mike Cosgrove
John Day

Thanks for office space

To the Editor:
We would like to express our deepest appreciation to Judge Myers and Commissioners Britton and Labhart, and to the entire courthouse staff for providing office space to the local outreach center after the ESD fire.

Because of the gracious invitation and quick action of the Court and the ESD staff, we were able to regroup and carry on services to local college students in just a few short days, in time for the beginning of fall term.

We owe special thanks to Hilary McNary and Shannon Springer in the Planning Department for being so welcoming and inviting to BMCC and EOU students and staff.

It was a great location for us and for our local students, and we enjoyed our stay. We will especially miss the fantastic Christmas potluck!

A difficult experience was made much better by the kindness and generous support of all of the courthouse and ESD staff.

Grant County is a wonderful place to live and work — and to get a college degree! Please come visit us in our beautiful new location in the rebuilt ESD, 835 South Canyon Blvd., John Day.

Ashley Armichardy
BMCC Center Coordinator
Chris Cronin
EOU Regional Center Director

Road density mystery?

To the Editor:
Questions just keep coming about the welfare of our county and citizens' access to our forest. During

the March 19 Blue Mountains Forest Partners meeting, Mark Webb was appointed to a position of eminence (executive director) of this environmentally-led and Forest Service-fed organization. In that meeting he derided the Grant County Ordinance 2013-01 which was designed to protect access to our lands in Grant County. Is that the same attitude the Forest Partners hope to promote with their dealings to control our land, which I choose to interpret as “to hell with what people want”?

More questions address the subject of forest road density that has appearance of being the driving force for the Forest Service's attempts at massive road closures.

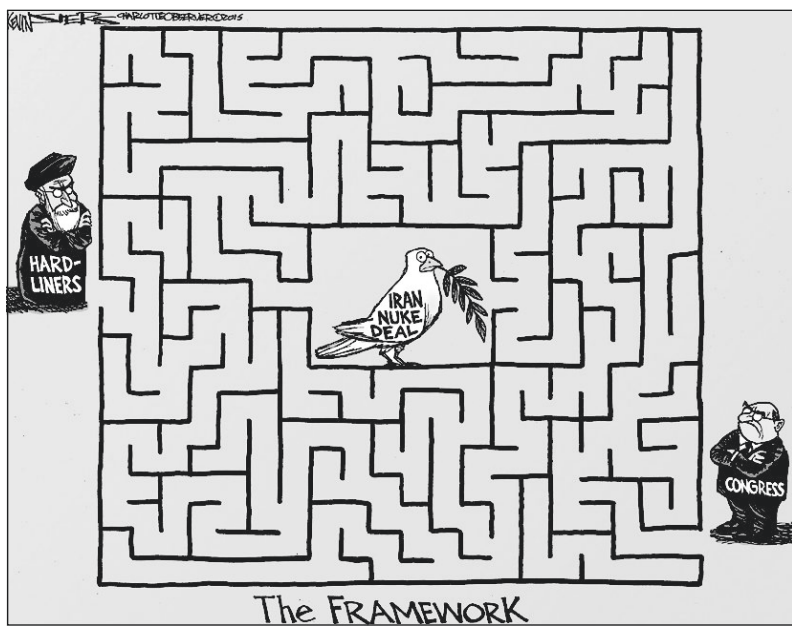
How did the Forest Service determine this density? Who derived the formula? Were certain areas selected as targets? Did the density include the wilderness, proposed roadless, and roadless area in the calculations? Is the data still valid after the indiscriminate, unauthorized closing of roads by various forest districts?

This is a game of catch-up with reality, and I believe all levels of nationwide and local government are mired in pursuit of their own self-serving achievement in county dominance.

Consider this from the Jan. 23, 2015 East Oregonian: “The Blue Mountains are an integral part of the lifestyle in rural Eastern Oregon. Outdoor recreation is a major draw, not only for residents but for visitors from across the country.”

This doesn't seem to be a consideration of the Forest Service, which apparently doesn't care about our economy.

Judy Kerr
Canyon City





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