

Draft a wish list for your Oregon legislators

Today we'd like you to draft a multimillion dollar wish list and send it off to your Oregon state senator and state representative.

Each of Oregon's 30 senators can spend \$4 million in federal funding — almost as they please. And each of the 60 members of the House has command of \$2 million.

Who knows better than you where it should be spent? Or at least, they should listen to your suggestions and thank you for them.

The total \$240 million comes courtesy of the federal American Rescue Plan Act. This deal for spreading around the money was struck to keep Democrats and Republicans in the Oregon Legislature focused on passing legislation, not fighting. All the lists submitted may well be rounded up into what they call a Christmas tree bill, so everybody's goodies are rolled into one. That way the bill will surely pass.

Now you could be a penny pincher and tell your Oregon legislators not to spend a penny. You have to know, though, other legislators won't let the money sit around.

They will spend it. Might as well take local control of the money. The overall state budget is in good shape. The early session pandemic financial fretting melted away with the spring, because the total Oregon is expected to get from the federal rescue plan is some \$2.6 billion.

One-time spending of \$4 million or \$2 million can't fix many of the big issues we face.

It can't fix wildfire risk in the Blue Mountains. It won't build enough child care centers or preschools to eliminate the shortage.

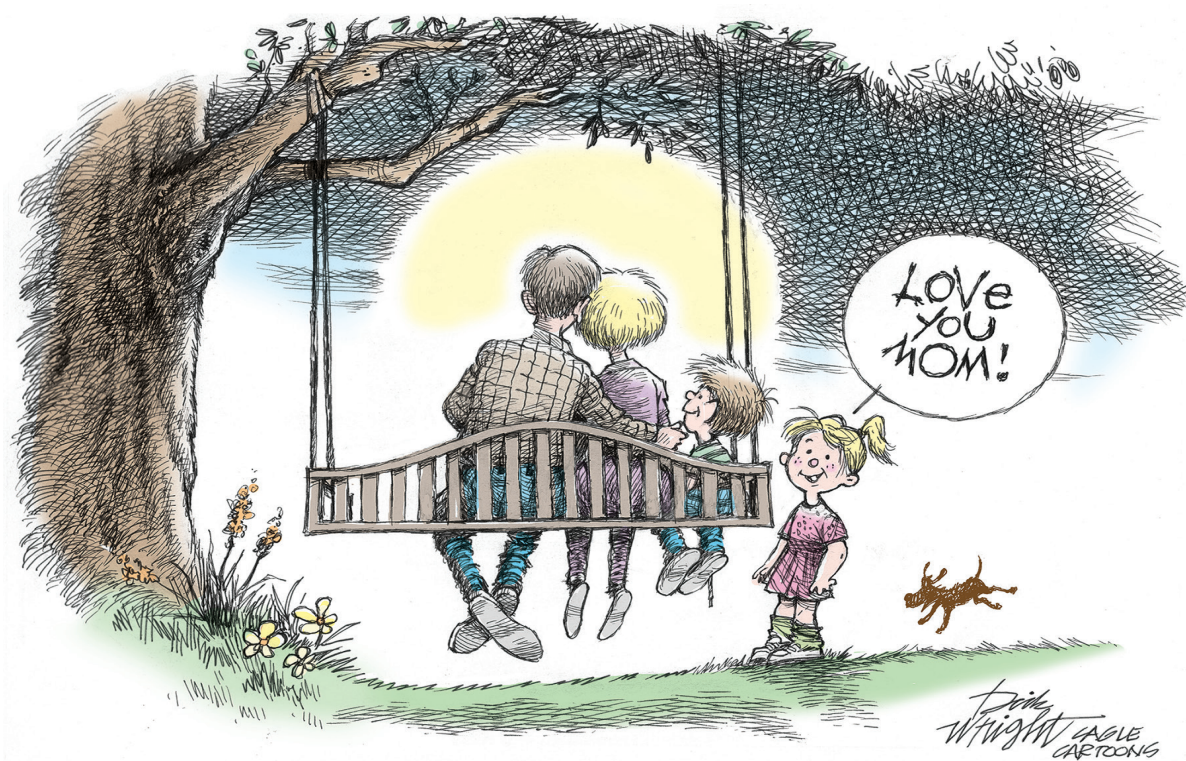
There are a lot of things it won't do; some targeted dollars, though, can change lives.

It perhaps makes sense not to spend it on hiring people for new jobs or to start up new programs. How do you pay for them next year? That said, it might make sense to spend it on a pilot program if there's a good idea that needs testing out.

There's such a big need for so many things it's not going to be easy to divvy up a few million. Are some needs more acute right now? Would it help to spend some more to encourage more people to get vaccinated? Is there a program in the schools that could make a real difference for students who lost learning because of the pandemic? Could something be done to help keep businesses operating? Is there anything needed for public safety training? Affordable housing, fighting child abuse and so many more ideas that we have not mentioned also are deserving.

It's not going to be so easy for legislators to pick. You may have a good idea that your legislator never thought of. You may have a good idea that your legislator is on the fence about. Let them know.

If you are not sure who your legislator is, you can enter your address at this website: oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html and it will tell you. Click on their name and their email address should pop up. Then plan your wish list.



EDUCATION CORNER

Why test so much?

Testing-Testing-Testing Why? Testing has become quite controversial in education. We often hear about students' test scores or teachers reporting test results. Then in social groups, you might experience people discussing that there is too much testing imposed on our children in schools. Is there a misconception?

Depending on your generation and when and where you attended school, perspectives on student testing have probably changed dramatically. Testing in schools in the past was most often for determining grades in classes over material taught by the instructor. Often those tests were teacher-developed or may have come with the curriculum covering the information taught during the instruction. As we have moved to a more mobile society we have come to expect students to learn the same material whether in a little country town or a large city, and no matter what geographical location education looks different than 25 years ago. Publishers created curricula for all subjects along with creating tests to hopefully ensure that all students receive the same instruction.

Testing/assessment in education has changed over the years, and we have also been able to learn more about how our brains learn and develop, thanks to sciences. We have learned that waiting for a student and allowing additional time for them to catch up may not be the best and may make it even harder for the child to learn because of what we now know about brain development. Then borrowing from



Dr. Scott Smith

the sciences and using the scientific process of gaining a baseline, applying theory and then checking for change means education takes a different path. In education, if the child is not showing understanding, we are now able to provide specific instruction at their level and check for understanding by monitoring, which is often referred to as testing. If the child understands the concept, they are ready to move on; if not, some reteaching is necessary. Past practice often was to assume students had it because we taught it to the whole group or they will catch up and some will, but many don't and fall behind. This is true in both math and reading. Moving on and hoping in time they will catch up is more of a myth than reality.

Back in the 1970s, publishers were creating reading materials as fast as they could ("Dick and Jane"). Then they set out to show how their programs were superior to teacher-based programs. These curricula provided instructional materials along with assessments. During the 1980s, studies were completed showing if teachers used and followed their programs with fidelity students scored higher. They took their results to the U.S. Department of Education getting them to sign off that teachers needed to follow the programs with fidelity.

We have all experienced changes in the medical field and the impact on our health and lives. Look at dia-

betes for example. Twenty years ago the way we tested sugar levels is much different than today. It has been life-changing for many and widely embraced. Schools that have embraced using data to inform education rather than teaching what a teacher feels is best have experienced greater student learning growth. There are not many people who would want the doctors to treat their cancer as they did 40 years ago. The same should be true with how we educate our youth.

Students are assessed more in today's schools than in the past. In the younger grades, the short screeners used can determine if the student knows the skill or needs additional support and are usually less than 10 minutes. As a teacher having to screen each student can seem overwhelming and feel like all they do is test, but the students are not spending all that time testing. The teacher can then use that information to adjust their lessons to give additional instruction on skills a student might be struggling with within the curriculum. This then allows the student not to fall behind and keeps their skills moving forward whereas in the past students often fell so far behind that it was hard for them to catch up with their classmates.

Dr. Scott Smith is a Umatilla County educator with 40-plus years of experience. He taught at McNary Heights Elementary School and then for Eastern Oregon University in their teacher education program at Blue Mountain Community College. He serves on the Decoding Dyslexia — OR board as their parent-teacher liaison.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'County leaders, step up, take responsibility'

To the Editor:

The county is in a budget crisis. The shortfall is alleged to be in the realm of half a million dollars. It seems that whenever I ask why, the answers are pat. They include statements similar to the county created too many new positions or extended existing positions without knowing the long-term ramifications. What it ultimately boils down to, without some other detailed and demonstrated explanation, is mismanagement of county financial resources.

A proposal to right the ship is for county employees (with the exception of elected officials) to take a cut in hours per week from 40 to 32, or alternatively take furlough days. These employees had no say in the mismanagement of county finances, and ultimately have no say in how the county resolves this budget shortfall. This should not be a viable option.

I may be the elected official of my office, but I know that my office would not function without my staff doing most of the heavy lifting. It is unreasonable for them and the staff of the other county offices to bear the brunt of the county's financial mismanagement.

County leaders need to go back to the drawing board and come up with a solution that does not penalize those

who didn't create the problem, and who literally do the most in providing services to the public. These are the people that actually put in 40 hour weeks. They don't get to arrive late, leave early and come and go as they please. Most of them go above and beyond their official job duties without receiving extra compensation in the form of stipends as many elected county officials do.

Forecasting the future can be tricky, and sometimes missteps are made. It should be counterintuitive to have those that make those missteps be the same ones we turn to for fixing them. However, that is how government works. In this instance, a better plan needs to be formulated than punishing those who had no say in the process that got us here. County leaders, step up, take responsibility and protect those who do your heavy lifting.

Jim Carpenter
Grant County District Attorney

Just saying

To the Editor:

So many eating establishments have signs that say "No shirt — no shoes — no service." Why can't we help these establishments get more business by honoring a new sign that says "No shirt — no shoes — no COVID-19 vaccination card — no service"?

Gary and Virginia Miller
Mt. Vernon

'Let's be civil and work together'

To the Editor:

Grant County commissioners need to do the job they were elected to do for the citizens of Grant County. Rise above petty politics and personal biases and take the right steps for what is best for the people of Grant County.

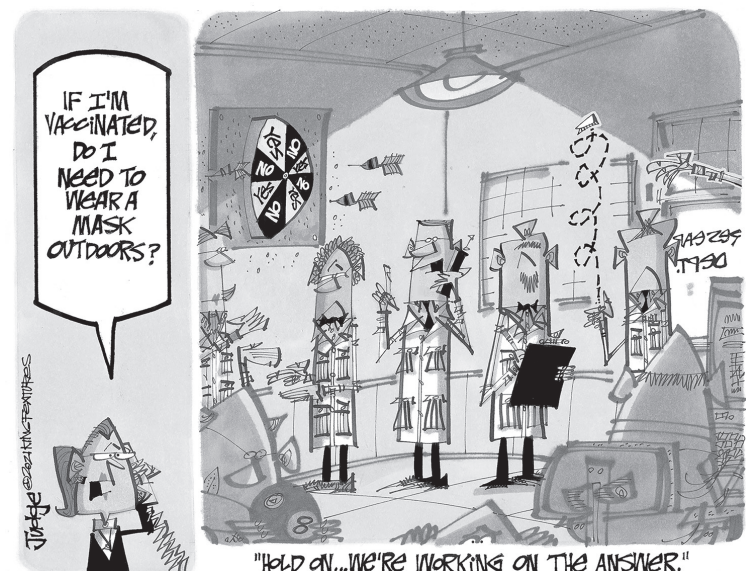
When the bridge and road in Canyon City experienced the need for repairs from the same 2019 flooding event that caused the Fourth Street damage, the county cooperated and approved funds in a timely manner.

The repairs need to be completed this summer to ensure FEMA funding of 75% of the cost. Grant County has the necessary funds to be part of this critical project; action just needs to be taken.

If there are legitimate reasons for not partnering with the city of John Day, the commissioners need to communicate those reasons to the John Day City Council and the voters of Grant County.

In this unusual and challenging time, let's be civil and work together to make our lives less stressful, care for each other in neighborly fashion and work to make our county better and stronger.

Nancy Collins
Canyon City



WHERE TO WRITE

GRANT COUNTY
 • **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
 • **Canyon City** — P.O. Box 276, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0509. Fax: 541-575-0515. Email: tocc1862@centurylink.net.
 • **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net.
 • **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.
 • **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek

97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.
 • **Monument** — P.O. Box 426, Monument 97864. Phone and fax: 541-934-2025. Email: cityofmonument@centurytel.net.
 • **Mt. Vernon** — P.O. Box 647, Mt. Vernon 97865. Phone: 541-932-4688. Fax: 541-932-4222. Email: cmtv@ortelco.net.
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