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City of Heppner and the
County of Morrow

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Questions answered on lone pool

By Chuck Starr, superintendent of Morrow County Schools.

Why is the school district running a swimming pool at lone?

The swimming pool at lone was built by the lone community in the mid-1950s, before the existence of the Morrow County School District. When MCSD was formed through the 1959 consolidation, the district agreed to continue running the pool for the school and the community.

How much does it cost the taxpayers of Morrow County to run the pool in lone?

For many years, the lone pool was self-supporting, but expenses have exceeded receipts in recent years. Currently, the District subsidizes the operation of the pool by \$10,000 per year. When Measure 5 is applied, the tax rate per \$1,000 for that subsidy is about 1/3 of one cent per \$1,000 of assessed value. In other words, the lone pool currently costs a Mor-

row County taxpayer with a \$60,000 home about 20 cents per year to operate.

What happens when the lone pool requires major repairs and remodeling?

This is a very good question, and one that we are facing right now. Preliminary estimates of the cost to make needed repairs to the lone pool and bring it up to current codes range from \$200,000 to \$400,000. These costs are prohibitive for the school district and would require another bond issue to accomplish. I believe that the only logical way of solving this problem is for the school district to enter into an agreement with the Willow Creek Park District to operate the lone pool and move toward providing the funds for its repair. I believe that all of south Morrow County must continue to support the Willow Creek Park District in its efforts to provide both park and swimming pool facilities for the children of Heppner, Lexington and lone.

Nothing to fear from free at-large elections

To the Editor:

There are some faulty notions being bandied about by some of the members of the Morrow County Home Rule Charter Committee (MCHRCC) and their supporters. Their efforts are probably meant to drum up support for their version of a new charter for the county to replace our present county court system. As a member of MCHRCC opposed to what the majority appears to be trying to do, I would like to comment on each of these ideas.

First, my committee has apparently "bought" the notion, advanced by Boardman members, that the "North County" has been denied representation on the Morrow County Court. Therefore, they urge that county should be divided into five districts, giving two representatives to Boardman and its rural environs while Irrigon, Heppner, and the rural heartland of the county, including Lexington and lone have one each. Even more curiously, they threaten that if this is not done that within a very short time, perhaps four or five years, the Boardman area will become the "Colossus of the North" (my interpretation of what they mean), will win a majority position on the county court, and will visit retaliation upon the South for all the years of alleged abuse.

My response to this is best expressed in barracks parlance: "what a crock". Boardman and the North County have not been denied anything. The people of Morrow County, in free and open elections, elected two county commissioners and a county judge, none of whom happen to reside in the Boardman area. None of them reside in the Irrigon precincts, or for that matter, Lexington either. Generally, when people mark their ballots, they vote for the candidate whom they believe will govern best. The results of that process has produced the current composition of the court, which is subject to change at each election.

We have the only perfect one-person/one-vote system of elections; that is, voting at large county-wide for each representative to be elected. I am stunned by the refrain repeated time and again by the majority of my committee and their principal supporters that "county government" is not an issue in the North County anymore, that the people up there are just waiting patiently for the revenge that will soon be theirs. The truest and most time-honored fact about free elections is that bad government will cause the wrath of an aroused citizenry to unite and turn it out. What these self-styled political leaders interpret as an angry, surly citizenry bidding their time eager to grab the reins of county government is more likely folks just like the rest of us, reasonably contented with the people that make up our county government, both elected and appointed, who are doing their best to deliver excellent public service.

A second idea of my committee that cries for careful examination is the notion that districting the county and increasing the number of county commissioners to at least five would be a good thing because it would allow greater participation in county government. My answer to that is that county government is not an intramural softball league where you measure success by the number of participants. Three good people with above-average intelligence, some management experience, good character and a wish to serve are all that are needed in my opinion. I am especially wary of the idea of replacing our two commissioners and judge with five or more commissioners who would meet only once or twice per month to endorse the actions of a county manager much as our county school board does with their superintendent of schools. I much

prefer the daily hands-on management of our present system. Our county court can district the county and hire a county manager if necessary and as time goes on that may be advisable. I do not see that either is urgent at this time.

Thirdly, the majority of my committee and their principal supporters, mainly from Boardman, seem to have little heart for electing every representative to county government, whether from single-member districts or not, by majority vote of the whole county. Rather, they seem to be more concerned that Boardman get the lion's share of representatives more than anything else. Of all the issues involved in "going home rule" or not, I think this one is the most important. The right to elect every political representative of the county by popular vote of the whole county is invaluable. Don't give it up! It's the key to finding the best government and turning out a bad one if we make a mistake. Further, it would be a grave error to district the county so that Boardman, which has only 38 percent of its population registered to vote (in contrast to the lone precinct with 71 percent) would elect two representatives while the rest of the districts would elect only one each.

I believe that the districting of this county, with its meager population of less than 9000 souls, is of doubtful wisdom and serves no purpose other than to ensure majority representation for the Boardman area through political gimmickry rather than open elections. Umatilla County, with more than seven times our population, started their home rule charter government with only three commissioners. On the average, each senator and representative in the U.S. Legislature represents about 500,000 people!

Fourthly, and particularly galling to me, is the repeated claim in our public hearings by the MCHRCC spokesmen that our committee has pointedly abstained from examining the county court to determine its shortcomings, nevertheless implying that there is something wrong with it. This simply isn't true. From the beginning of our so-called "deliberations" about 18 months ago, we have been advised by other counties' commissioners and we have read articles advising us that we could not hope to pass a home rule charter if we could not tell our citizens exactly what is wrong with our present system-and therefore why we should change it. The subject has come up at almost every one of our meetings. The sum total of our finding of "dirt" would not fill a thimble nor does it amount to as much as a "hill of beans". Our lack of "success", however, is not from lack of trying.

I have put in many long hours learning as much as I could about our county court system and the people who run it. I have found no evidence whatever of misfeasance, malfeasance, negligence, gross inefficiency, dishonesty or incompetence. It seems to me it deserves our applause rather than censure. The internal squabbles you sometimes hear about are generally of little consequence, except to those directly involved, and are pro-

Letters to the Editor

bably more common in business, schools, universities, the military and indeed churches than in Morrow County government.

Lastly, I wish to add my overall impression of what I have seen in my committee. There has been, at best, a certain overzealousness on the part of the majority to use the home rule charter as a vehicle to achieve a radical change in county government. That notion seems to me to grow from an inner conviction that the political power that they seem to want cannot be achieved by doing the grass-roots things that a community normally does to prevail at the poll.

In that regard, I think they are mistaken and out of touch with their citizenry. I can't believe that Irrigon, for example, wants to tie their political future to the tail of the Boardman kite. They know from experience that such a position comes with some undesirable

baggage. Rather, they seem to have a healthy interest in strengthening the social and political development of their own community by doing such laudable things as working to establish their own high school.

I think home rule charter, as my committee has crafted it, has lost much of the appeal it might have once had. I hope we can bring it to a graceful end and let wiser heads try it in years to come if they wish. Whether you believe what I have said or not, we should let the idea of a grand cleavage between north and south Morrow County die a much-deserved natural death and get on with electing the governments we may choose. The great majority of us share common values and the minority has nothing to fear from continued free elections voting at large.

Sincerely,
(s) Hal Dinkins
MCHRCC member

Best served by elected officers

To the Editor:

I attended the recent hearing in lone of the committee investigating whether or not we should have a vote to determine whether or not we want "home rule", as compared to the elective system we have now in our county government.

Since the committee's task is to investigate and propose the kind of "home rule" they think would be best, the discussion centers on the details of what "home rule" is. With my understanding of the structure of our current county government it is very difficult to agree that we should throw out our current system of governing. It seems to me that we are

best served by elected officers rather than an appointed manager. Why? You can appeal and discuss with an elected official of a department, while you would have to discuss your concerns with a board under "home rule". Also a good manager wines and dines his board, so I believe a manager of a county that has "home rule" would be vastly powerful, and unresponsive to citizens' concerns.

We as citizens of Morrow County had better acquaint ourselves with the kind of government we have now, before we vote another system in.

Sincerely,
(s) Don Peterson
lone

Fear of change strong emotion

To the Editor:

The fear of change is a strong emotion. But now that the Industrial Park Annexation in Boardman is a fact rather than a mere proposal, those emotions are rapidly being replaced with rational consideration. Most of the horror tales that were told for a fact are proving false and many of the parties on both sides are now talking to each other.

The issue, of course, was water-water for present industries and water for future development. Political forces far beyond Morrow County are making new water sources much harder to acquire so it is imperative that we all protect the water resources we now have. Now, the vast unused water resources of the city of Boardman can be available for back-up to other existing sources and for future industrial and residential users. Throughout this process, Morrow County Assessor Greg Sweek has performed his professional duty to provide information and certifications courteously, promptly and accurately. Now, Morrow County Judge Louis Carlson is serving a valuable role as moderator of meetings between public and private entities which will develop a new, higher level of cooperations toward our common goals.

Boardman City Manager Jack Palmer has worked tirelessly to assure timely notice, properly drawn documents and still deal with the many substantive issues. Many others could fore-

see the immense value annexation of the Industrial Park would have in preparing the Boardman community and all of Morrow County for the Twenty-first Century.

As we move forward with this annexation, its true value to us all will be maximized as more and more folks join the positive aspects of industrial development rather than succumb to the destruction of the emotional fear of change.

Sincerely,
(s) Ed Glenn
Boardman

Justice Court Report

The Justice Court office at the courthouse annex building in Heppner reports handling the following business during the past week:

Jeff Hiatt, Heppner-Criminal Mischief II, \$625 fine plus \$312 restitution, 180 days in jail; \$250 and jail sentence suspended with two year probation with no further violation of law excluding minor traffic; continue anger management counseling sessions.

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