

Letters to the Editor

Editor's note: Letters to the Editor must be signed. The Gazette-Times will not publish unsigned letters. Please include your address and phone number on all letters for use by the G-T office. The G-T reserves the right to edit. The G-T is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters.

Shocked and disappointed in school board's action

To the Editor:

For those of you who were unable to attend the Morrow County School Board meeting on Monday, Valentine's Day, at 7:30 p.m. in Boardman, I would like to give you a feel of it as I write this at 12:15 a.m. upon returning in complete shock and disappointment in five out of the seven board members.

The gym at Sam Boardman Elementary was so full of people from the whole county, including a large representation of the Hispanic community, that the bleachers were pulled out to extend the seating. The superintendent remarked he had not expected so many people. People came to the meeting as it was the first meeting held after the announcement that the superintendent recommended cutting 17 teachers from Morrow County schools to meet a budget crisis of a short-fall of approximately \$900,000.

These cuts were most heavily weighed on the Heppner schools, but eliminating such long standing programs as Vo-Ag brought many from Boardman to testify including a team of FFA students dressed in uniform.

The overall theme of all who spoke was, wait. There is no need to make these cuts tonight. The budget committee and public wants other options considered. Repeatedly mentioned were cuts to administration with classroom teachers being the last to be cut. Only one work session was held prior to this decision, and (it) was held on a week-day afternoon. One budget member addressed the board and stressed the need for more discussion by the budget committee.

If the board is responsible to voters, and all the people from both ends of the county wanted other options discussed, why didn't the board listen? It appears they will rubber stamp any proposal the superintendent makes and this one has a total disregard for long-term planning and leaves us with a district below neighboring Eastern Oregon towns.

After all the public testimony in favor of looking for more creative ways of preserving a

3A sports program not a reason to hold up Irrigon high school

To the Editor:

Morrow County School District is going to build two new grade schools, one in Irrigon and one in Boardman. This should open the door to convert Columbia Middle School and Riverside High School into seventh through 12th grade facilities, which in turn should guarantee the return of a high school to Irrigon.

So what is the holdup? Perhaps, Riverside's 3A sports program? What price is the rest of the community supposed to pay so that a small percentage of students can participate in a sports program that has reduced Riverside from state champions to seventh place in the league.

When Umatilla High School returns to the 2A program they stand to save \$5,000 per year on transportation alone. In a 20-year bond issue that translates into \$100,000. That would buy a lot of books.

How much does it cost the parents of these athletes so their children can compete against much larger schools? What is the out-of-pocket expense these parents absorb so their children can travel halfway across the state, compete, get home at 3 a.m. and be at school at 7 a.m. or be punished for being tardy?

How many parents have the time and money to go to their children's away games? Who among you get time off work to travel 300 miles to a state tournament? And, how many can afford such a trip?

Once Irrigon and Boardman both have a high school neither will qualify for 3A status. I believe this development will benefit all the schools in our

history of quality education here, board member John Rietmann from Ione made a motion to accept the administrator's proposal. When the audience asked, "Why not give us more time?" his answer was that we need to give these displaced teachers time to find new jobs and housing.

Board member Barney Lindsay made a motion to amend the proposal to reduce the cuts by \$300,000 and changing the wording of the proposal so that rather than cutting only teachers and programs it would include district-wide spending so other cuts could be considered. He proposed a meeting of the budget committee with two representatives of the board from both the north and south and members of the advisory committee to look at other options. He was supported by Keith Lewis.

The remaining board members, Gary Frederickson, Pat McNamee, John Rietmann, Dwayne Carroll and Julie Weikel, wanted the cuts made tonight.

As a business owner and parent of five children, I have no confidence in this superintendent and make-up of this board to ensure quality education for our children. In only seven months on the job Supt. Anderson is destroying the quality of schools we have insisted upon for years. His style totally lacks foresight and is doing serious damage to this district. He can blame the legislature for lack of funding, but if this is all we have, we have to use our dollars wisely and classroom teachers most directly affect the quality of education, which is why so many of us attended this meeting.

The board really seems to encourage making it a North-South issue even though all the parents were saying the same thing-consider other options before eliminating so many teachers and programs that took years to build.

I assure you I will vote no on any future school bond levies under this administration.

(s) Ann Murray
Heppner

district.

(s) Meredith DeHaven
Irrigon

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Board's decision crippling to children's future

To the Editor:

Thoughts from a school board meeting.

It is 12:15 a.m. on a Monday night just after the Morrow County School Board meeting where it was decided to cut 17 teaching positions from our schools. Needless to say the feelings of disappointment and disgust are running high. Many times I have been warned by fellow merchants not to speak out publicly for fear of losing business. Right now, my biggest fear is the education my five kids will receive thanks to Superintendent Anderson's proposals.

Is it just a Morrow County School Board phenomenon, or does it occur with other such boards that the public who attend the meetings and are truly wanting to help the situation are treated with such arrogance and contempt? The five board members who voted for the cuts seemed quite pleased with themselves that they were able to quickly see through the appeals and act so fiscally responsible in the face of such a large crowd. It was quite upsetting to see one board member and the superintendent smiling at each other for their "victory" while just five feet away students are crying and thanking board member Barney Lindsay for this effort to temper the one and only option set before the board.

All we wanted at this meeting was a little time to explore options other than the single one presented by Anderson. Board members who voted for the cuts, Gary Frederickson, Pat McNamee, John Rietmann, Dwayne Carroll and Julie Weikel

Cutting vo-ag would be drastic mistake

To the Editor:

I have heard recently that the proposed school budget cuts plan to eliminate vocational agriculture in Morrow County. This would be a drastic mistake.

Programs such as vocational agriculture and technology classes are very important for today's students. I would not be where I am today without being involved in vocational agriculture and FFA. I was very fortunate to start my agricultural experience from two great advisors, Bill Umbarger and Barney Lindsay. The great program, guided by these two individuals, helped me to pursue a career in agriculture. The leadership skills learned through FFA continue to help me excel in my college career.

Agriculture is very important. It is not only a way of life, but is vital in this world. The world has just reached an astounding population of six billion people. We need today's generation of students to help feed the world's people.

By cutting vocational

would have none of it. I suggest that these board members have been on the board too long and have lost their ability to think independently and creatively or have come to rely far too much on administration for their guidance.

Who is in charge anyway? Time and time again on controversial and gut-wrenching decisions the public has come to meetings only to discover that the issue has apparently already been decided in private or executive session meetings prior to the public discussion. Was that the case at the 6:45 p.m. meeting prior to the public meeting?

Does the administration and this board not understand the need to address parents' concerns about their children's education? Even if, after public input, these same cuts had to be made, we would have handled them better than having them shoved down our throats.

I appreciate Barney Lindsay and Keith Lewis trying to bring some understanding and compassion to this debate. The other five spoke of having a great desire to help education in this county, but could do nothing more creative than rubber-stamp administration's one and only proposal.

Board members acted like, "Don't worry, this will blow over and people will forget." Sorry to say, I will not. The handling of this funding crisis was at best short-sighted and careless and at worst crippling to our children's future. It did not have to go this way.

(s) John Murray
Heppner

agriculture you are taking away

vital education that cannot be replaced by math, science or any other core class. Vocational agriculture and FFA prepare students for a promising career in agriculture. These classes not only prepare students for farming, but for a variety of other agricultural-based careers. There are so many opportunities available in agriculture today. Do not hold back these opportunities from the students of Morrow County.

As stated in the FFA creed by E.M. Tiffany, "I believe in the future of agriculture." The question that remains is if you do.

(s) Toni Kemp
Junior, University of Idaho,
College of Agriculture
HHS Class of 1997

Elguezabal fund set up

A fund for the Elguezabal family of Heppner has been set up at the Bank of Eastern Oregon for anyone wishing to donate.

School board didn't listen

To the Editor:

After attending the school board meeting Monday night in Boardman, I feel compelled to write this letter.

First and probably most important of all, I would like to thank Barney Lindsey and Keith Lewis. For those of you who did not attend this meeting, these men put their heart and soul into their jobs as board members and tried desperately to protect our schools. These men listened with open hearts and minds. They did not come to this meeting with a decision already made. Not only did they hear the public, but they tried in vain to persuade the rest of the board to hear also. Your words did not fall on deaf ears. Even though the other five board members did not hear you, we did.

Since I've lived in Morrow County, I have seen many cuts. School days went from five to four days a week. Did it work? We also changed kindergarten from a half day, every day, to every other day. This left five-year-olds with four-day weekends. Did it work?

The very next year in Heppner,

the first grade class of 25 boys and eight girls was denied a second teacher because of no money. Instead, 10 boys were pulled from the room and placed with second grade teachers in hopes of alleviating the problem. Did it work?

In the next three years, our school added multi-age classrooms in an effort to evenly distribute the numbers. Did it work?

Now the state is grading our school. Look and see how our fifth graders are scoring on the tests. Are they below the state average? I ask you, Did it work?

At the meeting Monday night we asked you to consider different options. We also asked that you not to vote to adopt the first budget. The communities brought up many excellent points. You voted anyway. I heard you say that our problems are statewide and that we need to be talking to our legislators in Salem. We talked to you and you didn't listen. Hopefully they will listen better than you did.

(s) Keith and Angie Hanson
Heppner

Why stop motor cross races?

To the Editor:

I am writing in regards to the cancellation of St. Patrick's Day Motorcross Races. I don't understand why anyone would be complaining about it.

For one, it brings people and business to our small town, which we all know we need, especially since the mill closed. It also gives everyone of all ages something to do. It keeps younger kids out of trouble and gets the elderly out of their houses.

If people don't like it because it takes too long, then break it down between Saturday and Sunday.

I hear people say, well, there's team roping Sunday, have them do it in the new arena.

Do you people who decided to not have them anymore know how much these races mean to some people? My five year old son who has raced in them since he was three was so mad and disappointed because he couldn't race and win (he says). Granted, he doesn't do exactly what he is supposed to when he races, but he

still feels like he's accomplishing something big.

People say that everyone goes to the motorcross instead of the traditional St. Paddy's festivities, but most of the town people have already been to them.

Someone had a really good idea to start the motorcross, so why stop having it when it has become such a big success? Every year it's getting bigger and bigger and the people seem to be coming from further away.

Obviously the word has gotten out what a great place Heppner can be on St. Patrick's Day.

Not to offend anybody, but some of you need to think about how many people really look forward to and enjoy these races.

Not only will Justin be disappointed, so will other children and their parents and grandparents who enjoy watching them.

(s) Tami Howey
Heppner

Editor's note-this letter included a petition to continue the races with 58 names on it.

Hurting over poisoning of dog

To the Editor:

Somebody poisoned my dog last night. I went outside to a terrible sight. Somebody poisoned my dog last night.

I wonder the action that could cause such a fuss, she wasn't a mean or ornery of cuss but ---- somebody poisoned my dog last night.

A faithful friend-we'd been near and far we--came from Alaska she rode in my car but-somebody poisoned my dog last night.

What will I tell my grandson of six? She won't be there to look at his sticks. You could throw all day to coax her to play, to all your sticks she'd just say 'nix' but --somebody poisoned my dog last night.

What kind of person would poison a dog? Have they no feeling? Are they a log?

Those soft eyes that said, "I'm so glad you're home." The soft

gentle "woof" to the cat that would roam The soft warm pillow for my grandson's head. I guess they're all gone 'cause now she is dead.

Somebody poisoned my dog last night.

Body convulsing and spitting up blood. She dropped to her belly in a pool of mud. Somebody murdered my friend!!!!

To the responsible party:

How grateful I would have been for a call or a chance to make a change but you gave me none. I can't imagine what kind of disturbance would warrant the death you inflicted upon my friend and I understand that this is not the first incident like this.

What is your reasoning? I don't understand.

Still hurting and not knowing why.

(s) Richard Drake
Heppner

Voices were not heard

To the Editor:

Do all members of the public in Morrow County wish our county school board to make such drastic decisions as eliminating numerous teachers and electives without a vote of the people?

Their previous actions jammed through a damaging and unnecessary four-day school week upon us. Is disregarding a vote of the people the sensible way to handle school decisions?

What would be more disruptive to our school system? A vote or two failed levies?

Corrective measures do need to be taken but the public needs to have input into how this is done. Do we need so much administration? Do we need to furnish their transportation to and from their place of employment? No other taxpayer is allowed this deduction.

Do we want two substandard schools in south Morrow? Do we want to make all cuts only in teaching staff and electives?

Over 400 people came to the school board meeting Feb. 14. Their voices were not heard.

(s) Meg Murray
Ione

MCCACC meeting slated

Morrow County Creative Arts and Crafts Club will meet Thursday, February 24, at 1 p.m. at Cal's for lunch and a meeting. Workshops for the year 2000 and the subject of the mural will be discussed. Anyone interested in

art or the museum is invited to attend.

Artists and crafters are reminded to start preparing things for their exhibit and sale on St. Patrick's Day at Les Schwab.



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