

The Heppner Gazette Times will print all letters to the Editor with the following criteria met: letters submitted to the newspaper will need to have the name of the sender along with a legible signature. We are also requesting that you provide your address and a phone number where you can be reached. The address and phone number will only be used for verification and will not be printed in the newspaper. Letters may not be libelous. The GT reserves the right to edit. The GT is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters. Any letters expressing thanks will be placed in the classifieds under "Card of Thanks" at a cost of \$10. Email to editor@rapidsolve.net or upload to Heppner.net.

Details and facts matter

When it comes to emergency medical services in Morrow County, details and facts matter.

This letter is in response to the anonymous letter published in the July issue of the North Morrow Times, which by the way was rejected by the East Oregonian and Heppner Gazette Times because the writers hid behind the title "Morrow County first responders" and did not list their names.

Those of us in local health care recall activities similar to these in the form of the past CEO of Columbia River Health, Seth Whitmer. His tactics were very similar to the ones being used in the current emergency medical services situation by Boardman Fire Rescue District (BFRD) Chief Michael Hughes and the BFRD board of directors. Divide and conquer until they get what they want, no matter the costs. I counter, however, that the county and the region is bigger than just what Hughes, the BFRD board and the anonymous writers consider and care for. All parts of the region's health care are important to the locals who live and work here.

I am speaking as only one board member of the Morrow County Health District (MCHD) and as an owner of a growing local business in Boardman serving north Morrow, north Gilliam and north Umatilla counties. People should know more about this current emergency medical services situation than they are being fed. Transparency and facts matter.

About two years ago, Michael Hughes approached the MCHD with the idea of taking over all of north Morrow County EMS services. Later, that proposal was modified to partnering with MCHD for service to Boardman only. Many conversations occurred over the past two years; ultimately, the MCHD board voted 5-0 to decline this partnership.

Here's why I voted against it:

-Hughes stated he needed EMS personnel so that he could add staff and thus gain firefighters in case of a catastrophic fire. Who is supposed to staff the ambulances if all of them are fighting fire?

-Who looks after the well-being of the fire crew and casualties if all are en-

gaged in firefighting?

-This proposal was unnecessary also because mutual aid still exists between cities. Should the need arise, firefighting help for large fires would still be available.

When it appeared that MCHD would not give BFRD all of north Morrow County, Hughes attempted to take it at the county level by carving up the Ambulance Service Area and the funding for it from MCHD's operating levy. He claimed it was legal to remove the funding from the MCHD budget, when in fact it very much is not. When asked for his written plan to provide services for his proposed ASA, he actually presented the MCHD's paperwork (plan), not his own, with the comment that "the rest of the county can stay the same." I disagreed with his actions that day, especially his cutting loose the rest of the county, and concluded that everything he says must be questioned.

Hughes was also asked how he was going to financially support EMS services, a question that still stands to this day. He still has not explained his funding sources and billing mechanisms. You might want to ask him and his board about this if you are a city of Boardman taxpayer. What does everyone think of BFRD's request for contributions to make up the difference in funding between the new fire hall levy and the currently increased building costs? How does an additional \$500,000 for two new ambulances and staffing fit into the budget when they are short on funds already? A public records request was made to BFRD for this information but has not been fulfilled, nor have minutes from recent BFRD board meetings been posted to their website. Why not?

The straw that broke my camel's back about voting to turn over MCHD staff to Chief Hughes' supervision came when we began to see information about EMS patient runs showing up in public meetings and on social media from BFRD's employees.

According to Oregon Administrative Rule 333-265-0083(1), the law that specifically governs EMS, it is contrary to the recognized standards of ethics for an EMS provider to "knowingly and willfully violate a patient's privacy

or confidentiality by releasing information to persons not directly involved in the care or treatment of the patient." This rule is even more stringent than federal rules and is meant to protect your confidentiality.

Shouldn't an EMS provider with years of experience know this? Shouldn't the leader of EMS services know the laws he is supposed to lead by? My only conclusion was that he and his board were either ignorant of the services they were trying to sell to the public or they felt it was more important to politically leverage it for their gain than to protect the patients they serve. Either was unacceptable to me.

I have no regrets about voting no on Hughes' proposal. Also, I did not and do not say "never" when it comes to possibly working together in the future. That's not how I was taught to look to the future. I do insist on competent and knowledgeable leadership though before doing so. Which is why now is an appropriate time to thank MCHD CEO Emily Roberts for her competent, ethical, legal and transparent leadership.

Lastly, I will totally own Murray's pharmacy service to the MCHD for the past 40+ years (not 20, facts matter) and the wages our pharmacists have earned from their dedicated service to patients. Murray's pharmacy also pays fair market rent on the space leased at MCHD's Boardman Building.

Fact and details do matter, more than emotions and rumors. Take the time to learn the real facts of this situation and consider both sides.

John Murray, RPh
Owner, Murray's Drug

Republicans to host ice cream social

The "Get the Scoop" ice cream social fundraising event is scheduled for Wednesday, August 17, 2022. The event is being organized by the Morrow County Republicans and will feature the 2022 Republican candidates: Oregon District 2 U.S. Congress, Cliff Bentz; U.S. Senate, Jo Rae Perkins; Oregon Governor, Christine Drazan; Oregon Commissioner of Labor and Industry, Cheri Helt; and Oregon

Hughes reveals different agenda

To the editor:

Michael Hughes, BFRD fire chief stated soon after being hired, "BFRD does not want to take over EMS services in Boardman." (MCHD public record, 11/9/20). A few months later, Michael Hughes revealed a different agenda to the MCHD (Morrow County Health District) "to split the county into two ASAs with BFRD taking the Boardman-Irrigon area." (MCHD, 2/24/21) The MCHD Board of Directors has attempted to work with Boardman Fire Chief Hughes since then to "resolve this issue and develop a partnership with BFRD to enhance EMS service" (Hermiston Herald, (H.H.) 7/27/22), however, those efforts have not been successful. The MCHD continues to work "toward a reasonable, community-based resolution." (Hermiston Herald, 7/27/22), however, according to MCHD, Fire Chief Hughes "is not looking to partner with the health district but instead take it over and the funding that goes with it." (H.H., 7/27/22)

The Morrow County public are caught in the middle of this manure storm. Is MCHD correct in its position to have "shot down Hughes request because of the 'overriding reasons' for the request was about funding rather than public safety." (H.H. 7/27/22). Has Boardman Fire Chief Hughes sincerely worked with MCHD to find a solution to a political battle that threatens to irreconcilably divide our county?

Oregon Public Records of official board meetings and other correspondence reveal consistent evidence Chief Hughes never intended to work for a partnership with MCHD from

the get-go. "Chief Hughes indicated he had artificially inflated the payment rates he requested in order to 'sting' to force MCHD to agree to his partnership plan." (MCHD 9/1/21) The MCHD reached out to BFRD regarding "deteriorating relationship...no response received." (MCHD 9/27/21) BFRD Chief Hughes revealed why there was no response: "Currently the fire district (BFRD) is not interested in having a contractual agreement with the health district." (MCHD 1/20/22) Presently Hughes Boardman Fire Department is "engaging in a practice known as call jumping, where multiple providers respond to single accident." (H.H. 7/27/22) Call jumping is illegal in Oregon because it puts the public and patients at risk. Fire Chief Hughes is one of the prime instigators of a recall petition to remove two county commissioners that oppose his plan. Hughes advocated for this recall using his public office, on public time, on public payroll, in violation of ORS 260.432 at a meeting in Heppner June 30, 22.

If you attended a recent EMS (Emergency Medical Service) meeting July 20, 22 in Heppner you would be led to believe it has been the MCHD that is the stumbling block by being "stubborn...I don't get the conflict...Get over it...make the best service possible" (Boardman Mayor Paul Keefer) (Gazette Times, 7/20/22). At the present time MCHD is the "ambulance service provider for all of Morrow County and Boardman has been ignoring that." (H.H. 7/27/22). In fact, BFRD has purchased three new ambulances that they have no license to operate. Who paid for these ambulances? Veteran Morrow County Paramedic Del Turner urged the MCHD to allow the BFRD to operate these ambulances stating there would be consequences if denied. "Simply put any agency trying to stop a highly respected fire department from serving its community

and Boardman at Murray's Drug or from Stacie Ekstrom in Ione. Funds raised will support the work of the Morrow County Republicans. For more information about the event or ticket purchase, email mocoreps@gmail.com.

will embolden and polarize the voters to a degree of anger that will simply not be good outcome for the MCHD." (G.T. 7/20/22) I applaud Del Turner and fellow EMT's for their life saving commitment to our county and country. Nevertheless, it should grieve all Morrow County citizens that this battle rages on with no end in sight and the true motives have been hidden from the public. Boardman Fire Chief Hughes in consult with Commissioner Don Russell has violated multiple Oregon State statutes in fostering enmity and division in our County.

Commissioner Don Russell has worked behind the back of fellow county commissioners with Fire Chief Hughes in an attempt to obtain an ambulance license from the Oregon Health Authority to operate ambulances the BFRD has already purchased. Russell sent a letter of verification of need to the Oregon Health Authority claiming, "the county does not have an adopted ASA (Ambulance Service Area) Plan at this time." (Letter from Commissioner Don Russell to Oregon Health Authority, June 27. 22) Russell knew full well the Morrow County commissioners "unanimously adopted the ASA Plan on April 28, 21." (MCBOC, 4/28/21) Fire Chief Hughes signed a notarized statement he full well knew was not truthful: "I certify that there has been no attempt to knowingly and willingly falsify, conceal or omit material fact... for the purpose of obtaining or attempting to obtain an ambulance service license." (Notarized June 1, 22 Krista Anna Price)

In the old days county judges like Paul Jones, Oscar Peterson, Louis Carlson would have put this fire out before it started. Business and civic leaders like Dewey West, Howard Bryant, Cliff Green, Glen Ward, Larry Mills would have separated the truth from the subterfuge. Sheriff Clarence Bauman would have discerned this political manure storm from the get-go and put an end to the dangerous and illegal practice of 'call jumping.'

These true fathers of Morrow County are gone. Will our heritage and integrity of public office go with them? "Ye shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)

Stuart Dick, Irrigon

August 10th is Agent Orange Awareness Day

Veterans who served in Vietnam, Brown Water Navy, Blue Water Navy to include those stationed on ships off the coast of Vietnam during the conflict, Thailand military bases, Korean Demilitarized Zone

Currently, the following conditions are presumed to be caused by *Agent Orange*. Qualifying veterans may receive service connected benefits.

- *AL Amyloidosis*
- *Chronic B-cell Leukemias*
- *Chloracne*
- *Diabetes Mellitus Type 2*
- *Hodgkin's Disease*
- *Ischemic Heart Disease*
- *Multiple Myeloma*
- *Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma*
- *Parkinson's Disease*
- *Peripheral Neuropathy, Early Onset*
- *Porphyria Cutanea Tarda*
- *Prostate Cancer*
- *Respiratory Cancers (bronchus, larynx , lung cancer, trachea)*
- *Soft Tissue Sarcomas*

Call Morrow County Veterans Services today! 541-922-6420