

~ Letters to the Editor ~

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 \$16 Email to editor@rapidsolve.net or upload to Heppner.net.

A lifeline for rural Oregon: Why we need PBM reform now

As we celebrate our family's 65-year legacy of serving Morrow, Gilliam and Wheeler Counties through Murray's Drug, we're reminded of the values that have made our independent pharmacy a staple in these rural communities. To us, family isn't just our name on the sign—it's you, our customers. Two of our children are now both pharmacists and eager to carry on this legacy, but independents like us are getting wiped out by unfair competition from powerful Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs). Without PBM reform, essential healthcare access for thousands of Oregonians is in jeopardy.

From our locations in Heppner, Condon and Boardman, we've built a network of care that extends to towns without pharmacies of their own, including Fossil, Lexington, Ione, Arlington, Irrigon and Umatilla. Our free delivery service ensures that no neighbor goes without needed medicine, regardless of how remote their home. This personalized care and local knowledge are the backbone of our rural communities, and it's hard to put a value on the relationships we've established with families and community members over the years.

The crisis facing Oregon's pharmacies is undeniable. Since 2008, over 200 pharmacies have closed their doors due to PBMs' predatory practices, with five more announcing closures this week. This devastating trend affects not only independents like us but also large chains. Oregon now ranks worst in the lower United States for pharmacy access, leaving many without access to essential healthcare services. Many other states have already taken steps to curb abusive practices from Maine to Arkansas to California.

PBMs' business model forces us to sell medications below cost, making it impossible for independent pharmacies to sustain our operations. We've worked tirelessly to adapt, but the system is increasingly rigged against us. That's why we've joined forces with lawmakers like Senator Wyden and Congressman Bentz at the federal level to push for PBM reform for all pharmacies. Despite this bipartisan support, Congress has failed to act. This is why it's even more important for legislators in Salem to join Representative Greg Smith in leading the effort as a lead sponsor to pass House Bill 3212.

House Bill 3212 offers a critical lifeline for independent pharmacies like ours. This legislation acknowledges the vital role we play in rural communities and provides a much-needed solution to the PBM-driven crisis. It's not a cure-all, but it's a crucial step towards ensuring that healthcare services remain accessible to those who need them most.

We urge Oregonians to contact their legislators today and demand action on HB 3212. Our rural

communities deserve better than to be abandoned by the very system that's supposed to support them. We need Salem's help to protect the heart of our communities before more essential healthcare services disappear forever.

As we look to the future, we're not just fighting for our family's business; we're fighting for the well-being of our neighbors, friends and community members. We're fighting for the personalized care and local knowledge that make a real difference in people's lives. The clock is ticking, and we need your voice to make a difference. Let's work together to ensure that rural Oregon remains a place where healthcare is accessible, and community pharmacies like Murray's Drug can continue to thrive.

By passing HB 3212, we can take a significant step towards creating a more equitable healthcare system that values the contributions of independent pharmacies. We owe it to ourselves, our children, and the communities we serve to take action. The fate of rural Oregon's healthcare hangs in the balance, and we can't afford to wait any longer. Thank you for your continued support—we're in this together and your voice will make a difference.

*John & Ann Murray
Heppner, OR*

Let's bring healing back to the health district

Over the past 40 years, I have held various leadership roles within the Morrow County Health District, including staff RN, Chief Nursing Officer, and Director of Home Health & Hospice. My experience encompasses strategic planning, operational management, and policy development, all of which are crucial for guiding the board's decisions.

I have consistently demonstrated a dedication to improving patient outcomes through innovative solutions and evidence-based practices. My work in instituting the Providence TeleStroke program, collaborating with Kadlec cardiology to establish heart attack protocols for our emergency department, and establishing a Medicare-Certified Hospice has led to significant advancements in emergency care at Pioneer Memorial and high-quality end-of-life care for terminally ill patients throughout Morrow and Gilliam counties.

I have successfully led multidisciplinary teams, fostering a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect. My ability to build strong relationships with patients, healthcare providers and community leaders ensures that diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes.

I am passionate about advancing healthcare to meet the evolving needs of our community. My vision includes enhancing access to care, promoting preventive health measures, and leveraging technology to improve service delivery. I am committed to working with the board to develop strategies that align with these goals.

With my background in

healthcare management, a commitment to patient-centered care, and a proven track record of leadership, I am confident in my ability to contribute effectively to the board's mission.

My goal in running for Position 2 on the Morrow County Health District Board of Directors is to help bring healing and cohesiveness back to our hospital and clinics.

*Sincerely,
Molly Rhea
Heppner, OR*

Please Vote Carefully

Hopefully, by now, most of you have attended or watched a recording of one of the Morrow County Health District candidates' forums that have taken place recently. I attended the Heppner Chamber of Commerce sponsored forum, which was very helpful in learning about the candidates, their vision for the health district, and most importantly, their plans and priorities to get there. If you were unable to attend or haven't yet watched a recording, I encourage you to do so. The candidates' answers to the questions will tell you what you want to know.

I was grateful to hear answers at the forum from Ann Spicer, Russ Nichols, Janet Greenup and Jason Hanna. They were refreshing and hopeful answers that were spot on, in my opinion, and they will have my vote. I was surprised by answers I heard from Scott Ezell, Molly Rhea, Donna Rietmann and Raymond Seastone. I believe these are all good people, and I admire their willingness to run, but for me, the choices were clear.

That said, I was impressed by Laura Torres, who I believe is fairly new to the area and was just recently appointed to the board; however, I believe Jason Hanna's lifetime spent in Morrow County, and his answers about change, priorities, and taking the time to utilize Interim CEO Dennis Burke's expertise to find the best CEO for the District, is the candidate we need right now in that position.

If change for MCHD is your priority in this election, you will need to vote for like-minded candidates. If only one or two who want change are elected, it isn't going to happen as three out of the five must vote in agreement to accomplish change.

Right now, the power belongs to the voters. Please use it carefully.

*Thank you,
Patti Allstott
Heppner, OR*

Gunsafe

Some people don't like guns. They call them dangerous and say they kill things. Let's get this straight... No, they don't kill people. I've been around them for a long time and have never yet seen one get up, walk over to someone, take aim and fire a shot. Most the time, they just sit there looking cool. Yes, people (and animals) kill, but guns don't. Neither do knives, but they are rarely accused.

Call me crazy, but... I like guns. There, I said it. Why do I like guns? Because they're fun...and they provide back straps. And if you think I have too

many guns, you have never seen my fabric collection... or my goats. However, I wouldn't mind having a few more (guns, not goats).

So, if you've ever heard of the Constitution of the United States, you might also have heard of the Second Amendment. This little piece of history contains some very important words: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

No, this does not mean you have the right to show me your bicep tattoo.

It means that We the People, of which a Militia is made, should have the capacity to defend ourselves from any government that would harm us. Our freedom is based on our ability to defend ourselves. The right to bear arms is meant to give us that ability. But why would we need guns to keep us free when we have our military, police, security guards and Security Alert Home Alarms Systems? Because we need to protect ourselves from the possibility of a tyrannical government that would mess with our right to own and carry weapons. It's actually a pretty simple concept. One very important note: The "right of the people to keep and bear arms" is not a *privilege granted* by our constitution. It is a *right protected* by our constitution. Huge difference.

Some have tried to complicate our Second Amendment, ignoring its original intent. "Nobody is taking your guns" (insert eye-roll) has become the popular mantra. Yeah... Nobody's taking them... they're just making it ridiculously difficult to purchase a gun and acquire ammunition, making sure our defense is ineffective. Are you listening, Oregon?

You can't defend yourself against someone (or a government) if they have a bazooka and you have a pea shooter. And poorly-armed people are just about as defenseless as unarmed people. Maybe we should all acquire bows and arrows. But then we'd be hearing about "bow violence," and a one arrow per quiver rule. And it didn't work well for the Natives.

But what about school shootings? Maybe we should increase school security and treat our kids like rock stars. Worried about murder, rape, sex and drug trafficking? How about some definite consequences for bad behavior, putting bad guys behind bars... or deporting them? Evil starts in the heart, and gun laws don't change hearts, but God does...if we ask. That's where we need to start.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2nd Chronicles 7:14).

*Susie Crosby
Prineville, OR*

WCVEDG supports our schools

The Willow Creek Valley Economic Development Group (WCVEDG) supports the Morrow County School District bond measure 25-104.

For over 30 years, WCVEDG has provided resources, programs and grants to businesses, community organizations and homeowners in South Morrow County. WCVEDG's commitment is only strong when both the public and private industry make the same consistent investment.

Support for our schools creates positive economic growth. School bonds attract business and industry seeking a qualified workforce, and public investment in education always strengthens the economic outlook of our communities. More immediately, good schools encourage our friends, neighbors and children to return home to start and grow their own businesses, support existing ones, and invest their time and money in Morrow County.

As outlined in other endorsements and the school district bond proposal, over 70 percent of this bond will be paid for by industry like Amazon, and residents are anticipated to pay about 12 percent, with depreciation in the property tax rate over time.

For the benefit of all, WCVEDG encourages all Morrow County residents to vote yes on the upcoming May 20 ballot.

*Willow Creek Valley
Economic Development
Group*

Your vote matters for MCHD

The upcoming MCHD board election is almost here. Months ago, I attended my first-ever board meeting. I wanted to hear firsthand why our hospital was losing so many employees. Why the traveling doctors and nurses were here for short time spans.

For the past two years, I've listened to Morrow County citizens who were also concerned on what is happening at the hospital. I watched hard-working people be terminated, some had their hours cut, and many relocated. Most quickly found jobs elsewhere.

Last week I attended the MCHD forum to listen and try to understand what each candidate plans to bring to the MCHD board. Weeks ago, I thought that we were going to elect four people. I thought, that is easy. Then I learned multiple people were running against each other. And yes, we are electing four people (the board consists of five)!

I'm reaching out to our Morrow County residents to vote with knowledge, understanding, reasoning

and honesty. There may not have been any other time that your vote is as important as now. We do have good candidates. Truly knowing which candidates will be able to work together on this board is important. Who has the proven leadership, experience and knowledge for our health care district board?

The future of maintaining our hospital, all clinics and much needed services of the MCHD is in your hands. Hiring a new CEO, doctors, nurses and employees is top priority. Please cast your vote. All votes matter!

*Susan Hisler
Heppner, OR*

Oregon's transportation crisis: Inaction is not an option

As the mayor of Irrigon, I see firsthand how vital safe and reliable transportation systems are to our community. From the roads we drive on to the bridges that connect us, Oregon's transportation infrastructure is the backbone of our economy, emergency response and daily lives. Yet, our cities' ability to fix roads and provide safe streets remains challenging with limited local revenue.

The Oregon Transportation Reinvestment Package (TRIP-2025) offers a solution. This legislative framework prioritizes safety and improvement, ensuring every community benefits from modernized funding and investments in multimodal transportation options. It stabilizes revenue streams and ties fees to system use.

Under TRIP 2025, 50 percent of the revenue will go directly to cities and counties, funding critical operations and maintenance. This means that regardless of where they live, every vehicle owner will see a direct benefit of the added revenue in your city and county road system.

This is not just about fixing potholes or maintaining bridges—it's about protecting lives, supporting local economies, and ensuring Oregon remains connected and resilient for generations to come. Waiting for roads and bridges to collapse is not only irresponsible; it's dangerous.

Why TRIP Matters:

1. Focused on Safety -Oregon's roads are critical to our economy, emergency response, and daily lives. -Crumbling infrastructure threatens our economy and safety. -Every community deserves safe roads.
2. Inaction is Dangerous -Oregon's primary funding source—the fuels tax is outdated! -Without funding, we risk: More potholes and unsafe streets; longer waiting times for traffic accident clearance; and so much more. -We cannot wait for roads and bridges to col-

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