

~ 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.

## Why I'm running for POM commissioner

Why am I running for Port of Morrow commissioner position 1?

Why am I running? This is the question a candidate needs to answer for the voters in a district so they may have a basis for choosing to give that candidate their vote or not.

I had a difficult time answering that for myself so I could explain it to Morrow County voters. I am not running because of the folks who asked me to; I have no problem turning down suggestions I don't like. I'm not running because I need something to do; I'm living a full life working at CFS and raising some boys.

The answer finally came to me at the Ione candidate forum last Thursday. Danny Kerns and I were chatting with one of the current port commissioners before the event and the commissioner told us "Most people don't know that we don't have to give or do anything for these small communities. The port is a business."

The event coordinator interrupted our conversation, starting the evening's event, so I couldn't ask the port commissioner to elaborate, but I then knew why I was running.

The Port of Morrow is a business, but it's one created and supported by the taxpayers of Morrow County, and if the people running the Port don't know that, they need to be replaced.

I understand that a Port Commissioner's job as an elected position is to direct the staff of the Port to operate the business according to the taxpayers/voters wishes. If elected, I will not lose sight of who is ultimately in charge of the Port of Morrow.

I have experience making deals that benefit everyone involved, and I am not afraid to take on unpleasant problems, people or entities in order to negotiate fair deals for the taxpayers of Morrow County. I am unafraid to change the culture of the staff at the Port to one where they all understand who they're working for.

Please open your ballots, choose your candidates and return your ballots. What you want for your county makes a difference.

Thank you for your time,

J. Fletcher Hobbs  
Boardman, OR

## It's time to invest

We are writing in support of the Morrow County School District facilities bond measure 25-104 on the May 20, 2025, ballot. If passed, this facilities bond will allow the district to replace and upgrade three buildings along with improving the safety and security of all buildings in the district.

In July 2023, the district found major structural damage in several areas of Irrigon Jr/Sr High School. Structural engineers found that the original building was not constructed properly in the late seventies. The roof to wall pre-cast concrete beams were welded together and did not allow for expansion and contraction, causing cracking and

damage. All three engineers have recommended that the best option is to replace the building.

Riverside Jr/Sr High School has many systems that are at the end of their life cycle, such as HVAC, plumbing and electrical. These are systems you can't see, but that cause the learning environment to not be ideal for students and staff. The building has areas with small hallways and odd-shaped classrooms and is not ADA compliant. A full remodel would allow the systems to be replaced, the building be brought up to code, and add an additional gymnasium and square footage for growth.

The Community Bond Advisor Committee reviewed the costs to replace or remodel both Heppner Elementary and Heppner Jr/Sr High School. By combining the schools, the cost savings was over \$20 million dollars, not including the long-term savings of an updated building versus having two outdated buildings with failing systems. If the bond passes, the junior/senior high building will be remodeled to allow for all systems, ADA, building codes and safety to be upgraded and become a K-12 campus.

Morrow County has seen tremendous growth in the tax assessed value over the past 15 years. Large industry makes up 72 percent of our overall tax base. If voters pass this facilities bond, those companies will pay approximately \$147 million of the total bond over 20 years. That's an incredible opportunity for our taxpayers and doesn't happen in most counties in Oregon.

Be an informed voter—do the research—ask the questions. We have. We vote yes. It's time to invest in our buildings, which will strengthen the learning and growth of our students. Please join us in supporting MCSD.

Brandi and Corey Sweeney  
Heppner, OR

## Bond will shape the future of Morrow County

Dear Morrow County Voters,

As members of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners, we stand united in support of the Morrow County School District's General Obligation Bond - Measure 25-104, which will appear on the May 2025 ballot. This bond represents a crucial investment in our schools, community, and most importantly, our students' futures.

The bond proposal follows a year of diligent work by the district's Community Bond Advisory Committee (CBAC) and incorporates comprehensive assessments of facility needs and feedback from community members. It addresses critical projects, including replacing and remodeling aging schools, improving traffic and parking safety, and upgrading district-wide security systems.

The proposed bond amount of \$204.4 million includes a \$6 million matching grant from the Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program, a

benefit that directly offsets the burden on taxpayers. With an estimated bond rate of \$2.99 per \$1,000 assessed property value, taxpayers can appreciate the unique advantage in Morrow County, where industrial and utility companies pay approximately 72 percent of property taxes.

This is an opportunity to modernize our schools, ensure the safety of students, and create environments where they can thrive academically and socially. Supporting Measure 25-104 is an investment in the long-term success and growth of our community.

We encourage all voters to learn more about the bond at mcsdbond.org and consider how its passage will shape the future of Morrow County.

Sincerely,  
Morrow County Board of Commissioners

David Sykes, Jeff Wenzholz, August Peterson

## Say thanks

A little appreciation goes a long way...something I've heard often. Sometimes I think appreciation is more important than love. Or maybe that's 90 percent of what love is. Everyone wants to have value. We want to know that what we do has value. It gives us a reason to keep going, striving, overcoming and improving.

Does our appreciation for someone mean anything if we don't express it? Will they even know their value if they're never told...or shown? There are many ways to show you care. Our actions speak loudly, and our attitude speaks even louder.

I do love the town of Heppner, and I love my job...enough to travel three hours to get there. Knowing (and hoping) I can be a blessing to patients is a labor of love (even at 3 a.m.). I work with some great people. Yes, there have been too many come and go, and it's not a great "look." I've seen some nice folks disappear. Some quit, and some were fired. I don't pretend to know the "how come" of every circumstance but knowing you could be booted at any time isn't a great feeling...and it makes it tough to speak up.

So, what about appreciation? Maybe it's all wrapped up in "Ya don't know what ya got till it's gone." Sometimes we have to do without to realize something's true value. Sad deal. I hope that's not the case with our medical services in Heppner. I can't imagine the tragic outcomes if our hospital and EMS services were to cease.

I hope PMH keeps going and improving. I hope those "in charge" will listen to their employees and will treat them with respect and appreciation, while understanding the need for communication and transparency between the ground floor and the top levels.

Caring for the sick and injured isn't always easy. Sometimes it's exhausting both physically and mentally. But then it's hard to know that unless you've "been there." Compassion and understanding for doctors, nurses and EMS helps...a ton. And I hope they listen to the community they serve. They're the reason MCHD exists.

In the middle of this election, please remember

that your vote is important. Do your candidate research. Ask questions. And go tell someone how much you appreciate them...say thank you, then repeat often. It's time well spent.

"But we ask you, brothers, to acknowledge those who work diligently among you, who preside over you in the Lord and give you instruction. In love, hold them in highest regard because of their work. Live in peace with one another. And we urge you, brothers, to admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with everyone. Make sure that no one repays evil for evil. Always pursue what is good for one another and for all people" (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15).

Susie Crosby  
Prineville, OR

## School bond: money left on the table?

Free money? You're right, there really is no such thing; however, there are rare times when our investments pay returns far beyond the amount we put in. This is the case with the school bond ballot question in front of you today.

A few facts: Yes, we will all pay the bond rate for the life of the bond, even people in the cities of the county already paying the highest rates in the state capped at \$10 per 1,000, Heppner as an example. Bond payments are not part of the Measure 5 cap. All citizens of Morrow County pay the same rate, as do all industries—this last group paying an estimated 70 percent of the total amount versus individual taxpayers. The total bond amount to repay is \$204 million, a lot of money, I know.

Here is where it gets

interesting, though, or exciting, in my opinion.

Through negotiated contracts with AWS/Amazon for placement of facilities in the county and tax deferral incentives, AWS will pay on this school bond for the life of the bond. We may have differing opinions on the other terms of the contracts signed in CREZ3 (Columbia River Enterprise Zone Version 3), but this one line item alone, depending on their new facility building schedules, would amount to millions of dollars. Remember, this is in addition to any taxes they are paying toward the bond, the 70 percent figure mentioned above.

What this means to us individual taxpayers is that the bond duration will be drastically reduced. Instead of 20 years of our payments, it very likely could be far less. We are talking big dollars that we won't be paying; AWS will be.

I for one am very appreciative of this from AWS, and what's more, the company has offered to go back to a previous facility (facilities?) contracts without bond payments required and add it in so as to pay on those older contracts as well. They don't have to do this but are generously offering it.

Not to belabor this point but, if the bond passes, AWS will contribute a substantial amount. If it fails, they contribute nothing.

I haven't even talked of the dozens of other good reasons to pass the school bond, but now I will, from a personal standpoint.

Ann and I have five kids, all valedictorians of their classes and, if all goes as planned, five college doctorates between them when done with school in about a year. The Morrow County School District set

them up well for success. But scholastic achievement is not what's currently most important here; it is the fact that four of the five have already, or will as soon as they can, be moving back to Morrow County to live and raise their kids. They are two pharmacists, a nurse practitioner and a dentist, all professional services we need in this county. Homegrown is best for so many reasons but love of the communities and the people in them has to be one of the most important.

Please join me in voting in support of the school bond on May 20.

Respectfully submitted,

John Murray  
Heppner, OR

## Rhea will make things better

After attending the recent public candidates forum held in Ione on Wednesday, May 1, I was impressed in the response of each of the candidates. I didn't necessarily agree with each of them but did appreciate that they responded to the questions that were asked.

Having served on the Pioneer Memorial Hospital board for several years alongside Larry Mills as well as other dedicated volunteers, I remember fighting to save the hospital as it was being threatened with foreclosure. Oh, how I wish I had kept the box of papers that stacked up as we fought to save the hospital. We all worked together for the same purpose, and it worked.

Now we are going in different directions. I do feel there are those that will work to bring the hospital back to a better place. Molly Rhea is one of those.

Molly has experienced

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