

Hermiston HERALD OPINION & READER'S FORUM

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A4

OUR VIEW

City projects are as expensive as they should be

When word of million-dollar projects hit the news, people are often left scratching their heads. Such was the case last week, following an article of the new pedestrian bridge being planned in Umatilla.

The project, which will include a larger bridge than the one destroyed, as well as a repaired water main, is priced at over \$7 million.

One commenter stated that he could build the bridge at half the price.

"He's not wrong," Umatilla City Manager David Stockdale said. He added that there are reasons why the bridge and other city projects are costly.

All projects in excess of \$50,000 require city employers to pay Oregon's prevailing wage, the city manager stated. This wage alone, he said, is enough to increase project cost 40-50% over the cost of a project that does not have the same expense.

Also, a city must undertake certain



A broken section of a destroyed Umatilla River footbridge sits on the shore on April 14, 2022. Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald

studies prior to construction, Stockdale added. Building a bridge over the Umatilla River necessitates investigation about wildlife, which must

consider possible threats to various native species. The city must study cultural sites, too, he said. Native American burial grounds are com-

mon near the Columbia River, which is a short walk from the site of the footbridge. The city must check ground in the area for such sites, so construction does not destroy them.

Finally, he brings up that Umatilla must devote itself to a larger, better bridge that is not subject to the same disaster that befell the last one.

All of these reasons explain the high cost of the planned bridge, as well as any project done anywhere. And we should not expect anything different.

The expense of our local projects funds our economy, providing good-paying jobs. It protects animal habitats, looks after the rights of indigenous people and creates products that can last.

When we, then, look out at the future Umatilla bridge, the Hermiston City Hall or some other project, we can take pride in the work being done.

COLUMN

Time to promote growth at Blue Mountain Community College

I am very upset and sad at the direction President Mark Browning is taking Blue Mountain Community College.

I came to the college in 1969 and taught geography and anthropology full time for 30 years and have lived in Pendleton since. President Browning, who has been here eight months, is seeking to terminate the employment of 10 full-time faculty members who have a collective total of 152 years of service to the college.

These people have professional-level jobs. They purchase homes here, pay taxes here, buy goods and services in the community, serve on local boards and are active in the community in many other ways. Their children attend our schools, and many go on to the college, where they and other students have, at minimal cost, been able to complete the first two years of a college transfer degree or to seek training in a variety of vocations.

Browning intends to terminate my successor, Linc DeBunce, who has taught at BMCC for more than 20 years. According to the schedule for the spring term, Linc's five classes are full, with 123 students occupying a possible 125 spaces.

Also slated for termination is Margaret Mayer whose three music history classes are full, offers private music lessons to students as well as provides music for college events.

Another termination is full-time instructor Ann Marie Hardin, one of the most versatile faculty members. She is teaching three math classes and one physics class while serving as department chair. Some of her classes have lower enrollments but that is because she



CLARK HILDEN
OTHER VIEWS

was assigned higher level math classes that have fewer students.

Other faculty positions at the college being marked for elimination include faculty in writing, chemistry, business, criminal justice, industrial maintenance technology and college prep. The termination of these 10 full-time instructors is our loss, the community college district's loss.

When I came to BMCC, my social science department had six full-time instructors. Browning's plan will decimate that department, leaving only one.

"We're not actually offering fewer classes," Browning says. "We're having fewer people offer the classes that we do currently have."

Not true. DeBunce offers five classes. His five classes are full, all other social science classes are nearly full. Fewer classes will be offered. Where will these students go?

Over the years since I retired, the social science department has lost full-time positions in history, economics and political science. Recently, the full-time sociology instructor was not replaced upon her retirement. Over the past few years, the humanities department has lost full-time positions in Spanish, art and theater. These losses will further impact the college's ability to provide courses to transfer students and to provide the enrichment that such classes offer to all who take them.

Additionally, if higher level

math and science are cut, students interested in STEM fields no longer will be able to attend their first two years at home. Browning's plan may be to seek part-time instructors from other areas to teach online, Portland perhaps.

This already has happened in political science and economics. Is that what's slated for anthropology, geography, music, chemistry and calculus?

That, of course, means the money spent on their salaries will be leaving our area. I have heard the administration feels that the Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer Degree has been "privileged." That contention certainly doesn't stand up to these facts.

I fear that Browning is seeking to turn our comprehensive community college, one that has been supported by our district for 60 years, into a trade school. Rather than seek ways to bring more students to college, he is giving students more reasons not to attend BMCC. I haven't yet seen a plan by President Browning to bring more students to the college. What a sad time this is for our communities and to the instructors who have contributed so much to the teaching of our people and to the well-being of our district.

I encourage the members of the college's board of directors to refuse to allow this to happen. It's time to begin to look for positive ways to promote the growth of the college rather than to oversee the demise of the wonderful place Blue Mountain Community College has been for so long.

■ Clark Hilden, of Pendleton, is a retired geography and anthropology faculty member at Blue Mountain Community College.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank you for sharing our daughter's story

I would like to express my gratitude to Erick Peterson for his skill in conveying what it is like to be a young woman on the autism spectrum and live with seizure disorder. He accurately captured the essence of our daughter, Jilli. The article was a celebration for all individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities. It highlighted how our community reaches out and embraces this special population. I also appreciate how this article shares how important the role of Eastern Oregon Service Support Brokerage is in providing practical supports so that people who experience I/DD can contribute to society and live full and enriched lives. We are so fortunate to live in a community that values all people and have a newspaper which is willing to tell these valuable stories.

Mark and Kristi Smalley
Hermiston

Everything is getting "Californicated"

I hate to think the committee of the Umatilla River Trails Project would even think about fouling up the Umatilla River by putting something like a trail from Umatilla to Echo. Wildlife is crowded enough as is. There are plenty of places for walking. There will be dogs, people with trash, dog crap, loiterers, bikes and motorcycles.

Hermiston wants to take farmland for houses. Look at Tri-Cities, look at Stanfield, everything is getting "Californicated." People use to say Echo is a nice little town. Well, where is it going to be if they keep crowding in? Will they take farmland here too? If they don't like where they came from, then fix it. There is enough mess here from time to time, and farmers have trouble getting where they need to go.

William Douglas
Echo

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