

OPINION

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OUR OPINION

Growth plan for School District right alternative

Another year, another new school to build. Sometimes it must seem like that to Bozeman School District taxpayers. Enrollment growth has been so high and steady the district can barely keep up.

It's understandable then that School Board members might be reluctant to roll out a proposal for another new middle school. But they have to do something. The existing two middle schools are over or nearly at capacity. And another 250 students are anticipated in the coming years.

Though the board won't formally vote on the matter until next month, trustees are leaning toward expanding Sacajawea Middle School rather than building a third middle school. The latter would ding taxpayers for an estimated \$30 million, whereas expanding Sacajawea would cost half that — from \$10 million for a barebones addition to \$16 million for a more deluxe expansion that would meet all the wishes of educators.

It's a tough choice. Enrollment projects suggest an expansion will do the trick. But how reliable are those numbers? Circumstances could conspire to accelerate local population growth and fill a third middle school in short order.

And then there's the problem of a second high school. The district will need another high school in a few short years, and that's going to take a big chunk of change from local taxpayers. It will not be good if they are suffering from construction bond fatigue at that point.

The board is probably wise to go with the smaller option this time. But they should do more than the minimum. Make sure there's enough classroom space to accommodate the anticipated enrollment growth, but make sure the academic infrastructure — the electronics and other teaching resources — is in place as well.

And if they approve the plan in July, the bond will be on the November ballot — in plenty of time to get the ball rolling on the construction next spring. But that doesn't leave a lot of time for trustees to get after the business of educating voters about the need for this project.

A lot of people are traveling or recreating in the summer months and not paying a lot of attention to what's going on in the community. And when school resumes in the fall, there will only be a few short weeks to bring voters up to speed on the need.

An expanded Sacajawea probably makes the most sense right now. But just because it's the lesser of two options, don't be too stingy with the plans and don't take voter approval for granted.

MSU responds: We respectfully disagree

On June 7, Rep. Art Wittich published a letter "Valley Republicans didn't let down MSU." MSU would like to respectfully disagree.

Throughout the legislative session, Rep. Wittich misrepresented MSU's request for funding to renovate Romney Hall. His most recent letters appearing in state newspapers describe the renovation of Romney as simply the "renovation of an historic gymnasium at MSU." His June 7 letter in the Bozeman Chronicle says: "During the session's final week, the House received a late capital projects request to refurbish MSU's old gym, which required us to borrow \$100 million, even though \$350 million cash was available."

Such imprecise language could leave readers thinking the renovation of Romney Hall would cost \$100 million and be nothing more than a gym. Additionally, Rep. Wittich describes the proposal as "late." The proposal he refers to, Senate Bill 416, was for infrastructure projects across the entire state of Montana, not just MSU's Romney Hall. As to being late, infrastructure was being discussed even before the session started. MSU's specific request for Romney was endorsed by the Montana Board of Regents in May 2014.

Senate Bill 416 was developed by a bipartisan group of senators and championed by Sen. John Brenden, R-Scobey. The "Brenden Plan," as it was sometimes called, didn't give anyone all they wanted and was significantly smaller than Gov. Bullock's original infrastructure request. MSU's request to renovate Romney was reduced from \$28 million to \$18.5 million. Many other projects had their funding reduced. As Sen. Brenden was fond of saying, the bill made everyone unhappy and therefore was probably a pretty good compromise. However, it did provide an

infrastructure plan for the entire state.

The vast majority of the Republican-controlled Senate agreed with Sen. Brenden and his plan passed overwhelmingly 47-2, with one abstention. And who were the two senators who could not see their way to this compromise bill? Gallatin Valley's Scott Sales and Gordon Vance.

When the proposal came to the House, Rep. Wittich stood on the floor and spoke against it, lobbied his caucus against it and voted against it. The Brenden Plan was killed and the 2015 Legislature closed with no state-wide infrastructure plan. It died for lack of a single vote.

Though it was built as a gym in 1922, MSU's renovation plans didn't include any gym-like activities for the building. With large portions of the building currently unusable or only marginally useable, Romney would have been renovated to include an expanded veteran's center, new classrooms and tutoring facilities. In the months leading up to the legislative session, MSU was transparent about its plans for Romney: MSU offered public tours of the building, the proposal was extensively covered by the local media, and endorsed by the Chronicle's editorial board.

MSU is funded through a performance-based model tied to the university's success in retaining and graduating students. This is a reasonable accountability expectation of the Legislature. The academic services that could be



WADED CRUZADO

Guest columnist

provided in a renovated Romney Hall are vital to student success and to meeting the Legislature's expectations. Rep. Wittich says MSU shouldn't expect his support with Romney Hall because "the Legislature approved MSU's stated priorities, including more funds for research programs, employee compensation, and avoiding tuition hikes." Yes, the Legislature indeed provided funding for MSU research programs to help the Montana economy, and to help MSU hire capable faculty and staff to serve growing numbers of students. MSU worked cooperatively with the Legislature to gain this instructional and research support in a way that ensures we can freeze tuition prices to help Montana students and families get access to affordable education. What Rep. Wittich did not mention was the fact that in addition to voting against Romney Hall improvements, he also voted against all of the above — research funding, faculty and staff compensation and the conditional tuition freeze.

In the fall of 2014, MSU was the most successful campus in the Montana University System in increasing the number of students who stay in school and graduate. MSU is also the largest, fastest-growing university in Montana. We are committed to doing everything we can to help students succeed, including not giving up on the potential for infrastructure improvements to Romney Hall. However, it appears we will have to do it without the support of Rep. Art Wittich and the five other Gallatin Valley lawmakers who voted with him: Reps. Tom Burnett, Kerry White, Matthew Monforton; and Sens. Scott Sales and Gordon Vance.

Waded Cruzado is the president of Montana State University.

LETTERS

Shot osprey deserved a much better fate

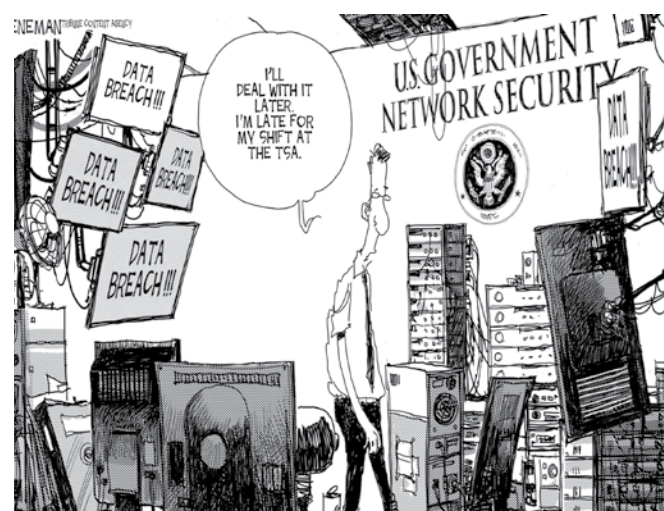
I wonder if the shooter that wounded the magnificent 2-year-old female osprey, which then broke its legs on landing by our pond in south Bozeman, could know, as he or she certainly should, of the pain and suffering not only of the wounded bird, but of the people she touched as we tried to save her, especially Becky of the Raptor Center, who came out Sunday afternoon and gently explored the broken legs and bird shot in her emaciated body before she died.

Birds like this beautiful osprey are such a grace to our wonderful valley, and should have a much more kindly, honored and cherished fate.

*Nicholas Davis
Bozeman*

City commended for equal pay stance

On Monday, June 8, the Bozeman City Commission unanimously passed Resolu-



tion 4601 for Equal Pay for Equal Work. This action places Bozeman as a leader in recognition of the value of women and of equal pay in the workforce, and will ensure economic fairness for our city's employees.

It is also an important step toward closing the gender wage gap in Montana and toward alleviating what has been a long history of financial struggle and unequal treatment for women and their families due to an unfortunate, unjust, and most

often unexplained gender wage gap.

Bozeman Business and Professional Women would like to express our extreme gratitude to the Bozeman City Commission for their commendable leadership in advancing this important Resolution. Their partnership in this work has been invaluable, and we thank them for their unwavering commitment to the citizens of Bozeman. Their promotion and implementation of the Equal Pay for Equal Work

Resolution will strengthen and enrich our community and make Bozeman an even better place to call home.

We would also like to thank all of the individuals, organizations, and businesses who endorsed the Resolution, wrote letters, testified at City Commission meetings, and have given their time and energy to make it a reality.

We also appreciate the Bozeman Chronicle's editorial endorsement and thoughtful reporting by Eric Dietrich plus other media interviews that added to community conversations about these significant issues of gender equality and economic fairness. Equal Pay leader Lilly Ledbetter powerfully reminds us: "We sought justice because Equal Pay for Equal Work is an American value."

Now we can unequivocally add this value to the City of Bozeman.

*Melissa Herron and Jan Strout
Bozeman Business and Professional Women
Bozeman*

No one's nest will stay full forever and that's OK

Last summer, I made my off-off Broadway debut. While the show opened and closed in the same afternoon, my performance was delivered to critical acclaim. It was so exceptional, even Meryl herself would have deemed me worthy of that coveted golden statue.

Because that's the one-woman show Younger Boy saw when I dropped him off for his year-long exchange in Germany. And that was exactly how I planned it.

What Younger Boy saw was his calm, cool, and collected mom wishing him bon voyage. With a fake smile plastered on my face, I gave him a kiss and hug and told him to have the time of his life. I meant it too.

What Younger Boy didn't see was after we turned to walk away, I forced myself to keep walking. Don't look back, don't look back. Because if I did, I might not have let him go.

He didn't see that right after I left the terminal, I began to sob. Uncontrollably. As The Husband and Older Boy watched helplessly, I cried so hard I blew snot bubbles like a hysterical 3-year-old. When I finally calmed down enough to ride the hotel shuttle bus, I'm sure the poor driver wondered about this quite possibly deranged woman with puffy eyes and no luggage.

To you, sir, my sincerest apology. But this Thursday, I'm returning to



DENISE MALLOY

Local columnist

Dulles for my encore. And there will be tears — of joy. Because Younger Boy is coming home.

It's been a long time coming: 317 days to be exact, which was roughly the length of my first pregnancy.

Not like I've been counting.

After sending Younger Boy across the pond for his high school adventure, a few weeks later, we dropped Older Boy off at college. In those first few days of the Pre-Mature Empty Nest, the house was quiet. Too quiet. I could barely stand to look in their bedrooms. My plan was to keep myself so busy and distracted that I wouldn't have time to think.

But the truth is those 7,608 hours gave me a lot of time to think. Even though my chickies had flown the coop, albeit temporarily, I spent my time thinking about being a parent.

As a parent, I assumed I was the teacher. That somehow my parental efforts would shape my tiny beings into grand creations that I'd launch into the world. While that may be true, the funny thing

I began to realize is how much I had learned over the years — from my kids.

That's not what I was expecting. When they were little guys, I learned that peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are still good. I discovered that, most of the time, a nap can cure a cranky mood.

A few years later, I learned that a 6-year-old, even when sworn to secrecy, will never be able to keep his mouth shut if a pan of eggs Dad was trying to boil while mom was out-of-town burst into flames and the entire house had to be doused in Febreze.

During the teenage years, I learned the hard way to never ask what is causing that smell and to never, under any circumstances, actively look for the source of said vile stench.

Now that they're older, I've learned that they are much more capable, independent, and self-sufficient young men than I ever imagined. Which means the inevitable is going to happen: I'm going to work myself right out of my Mom Job.

Which really should be the goal. But in those long hours of thought, solitude, and contemplation, I probably learned the most surprising lesson of all: The Empty Nest is going to be just fine.

Denise Malloy won't be able to sleep until Thursday. She can be reached at dmalloy@bresnan.net.

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