

Lawmakers wrong to fight Depot decision

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Instead of our lawmakers protesting the Office of General Counsel's decision to take the Umatilla Chemical Depot (UMCD) off of the BRAC closure list, they ought to be rejoicing, as this decision could bring continued economic stability and new potential for local area economic opportunities.

It's no secret that I have not been a fan of the Local Reuse Authority's (LRA's) final plan for the depot lands. It will do very little to either bring jobs or enhance the local area's tax base because of its having the majority of depot land becoming both a training area and wildlife refuge. Neither does the LRA itself seem sure what they want done with the smaller land area designated as business-industrial, as they summarily trumped the City of Irrigon's plan for industrial expansion and utilization of Depot property. Irrigon's Plan was certainly ambitious (which they freely admitted), but it was one with the realistic potential for creating jobs and millions of dollars in local-area (sustaining) revenue.

For some reason, our lawmakers just still don't seem to get it. We are starved for “family sustaining” jobs, and with the closure of the Depot and an end to its mission, the current \$52 million payroll goes away. It's gone, and it's not going to be rebuilt overnight.

We were very lucky when Simplot closed because the economy was able to assimilate many of those lost jobs. However, if it's not obvious, our state and local economies are not robust.

We have nothing coming that I'm aware of to replace that depot payroll. For certain, Hermiston has brought in a fair share of service jobs, but they're (individually) not sufficient to sustain a family. The LRA's Plan sure as heck isn't going to get us there (jobs); not tomorrow, and maybe never. So, let's stop and think a minute about what the UMCD has really meant to us and our regional economy, and then ask why in the world we would want to see it go away.

Fighting as our lawmakers are doing now to keep it on the BRAC list is condemning it to a most certain death; and, with no viable plan to provide jobs (and an equal payroll) once it's gone, its closure condemns us right along with it.

What is so wrong with helping the Army find a new mission for the base? The Army has been our neighbor and friend for 70 years (1941). What would be so wrong with redeploying some of our troops coming back from Afghanistan to the UMCD? We are certainly proud of our young

men and women who have fought for us there, and I'd sure as hell turn out to shake every one of their hands as they came to make the UMCD their temporary home.

While it is difficult to predict the number of civilian jobs that might still remain at the base if it were to stay open, for sure our troops would be spending a good portion of their money in our local economy; which if nothing else, will help sustain some of those service jobs that have been recently created. But that's not to say this could be the Depot's only (new) mission.

Our lawmakers were recently quoted as writing, "To try and use the BRAC statute to keep UMCD in federal hands and waste more than \$1 million is shameful."

No lawmakers, what is shameful is your tired and boring, and visionless, rhetoric that keeps talking about creating jobs; then making stupid decisions that stifle their being. That's what's shameful!

It's all about jobs, and "family-sustaining" jobs; go ahead and ask any of your constituents! You made a bad decision calling for the closure of the UMCD, and you've now been given a reprieve and an opportunity to make better decisions and just maybe this time get it right. Don't be shortsighted. Think about your constituents — some of whom are unemployed, and many more who are under-employed.

Your continued efforts to close the base demonstrates a similar lack of vision, just as I believe does the LRA Plan. Your misguided intentions do absolutely nothing to backfill the wage-base that is soon to leave us. Take this opportunity and run with it!

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