

OUR VIEW

## Resolve to be more involved

A new year signals a new beginning for all of us. While many of us will make our standard new year resolutions, as a community there are several pledges we should make for 2020.

In the upcoming 12 months, local voters will once again secure an opportunity to get more involved in their city, county and state government.

Democracy should not chiefly be a spectator sport. Instead, the founders designed a framework that, in large part, depended upon the commitment and interest of voters. Our nation is divided along partisan lines, which isn't a good thing for democracy, but what could be even more troubling is a lack of interest in public business.

Getting involved is never easy and can be, at times, a downright challenge. After a long day of work, who wants to eat dinner, and then attend a city council meeting?

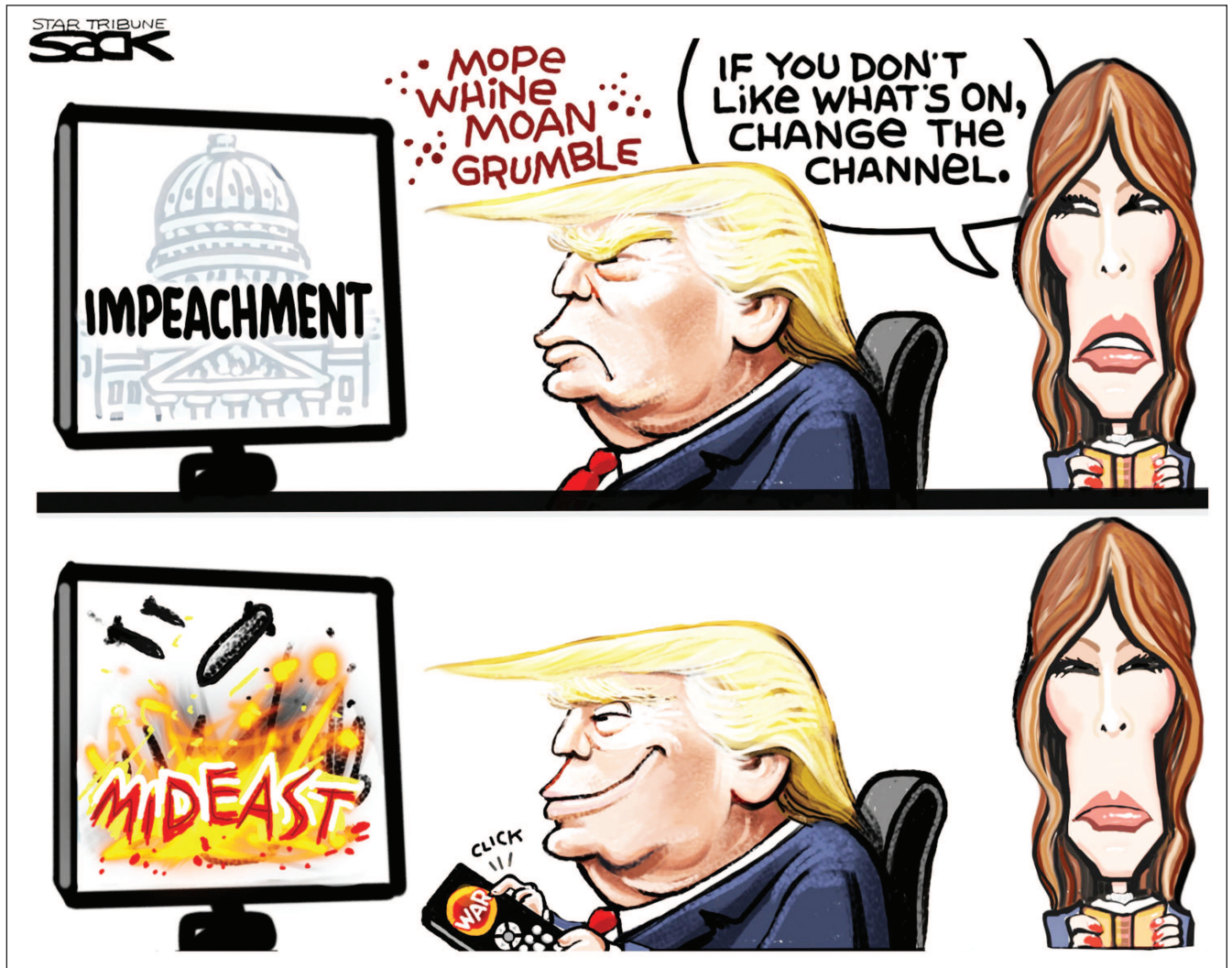
The truth is, though, that finding the time to participate in our government is crucial. We simply can't vote a lawmaker into office, and then turn our backs. Often that becomes the reality. We tend to make our decision at the ballot box, and then expect government to operate on autopilot. When a major issue seems to rise up like the phoenix we are shocked, and suddenly the seemingly mundane acts of city government became critical.

Yet, most of those flashpoint issues that seemingly come out of nowhere are actually well-known to lawmakers and have been debated and discussed at meetings. They should be no surprise, but often are because not enough of the body politic is participating in our democracy.

Becoming a small-town lawmaker isn't like serving on a high school student body elected board. It isn't a popularity contest. The job of a city council member or mayor is — or should be — serious business and our lawmakers need our input and our vigilance.

That means voters must keep a close eye on what is going on. That is also where the newspaper comes in handy. We also have an obligation to ensure the actions of our public leaders are well-known so that readers — voters — can debate them and fashion opinions.

This year we should all reflect on the state of our city and county and endeavor to work to ensure we participate. The founders bestowed upon us a rich tapestry of democracy, but that fabric remains strong only if voters remain vigilant and get involved.



## Check those sources

There's an old journalism cliché that goes something like this: "If your mother says she loves you, get a second source."

The cautionary quip reminds reporters and editors to remain skeptical, double-check the information you're going to relay to readers and question authority. That's something we all need to keep in mind after the U.S. killed Qassem Soleimani and other people in an airstrike.

The facts from the White House have been less than sketchy on what led to Friday's assassination of the top military leader of an enemy regime.

Supporters of President Donald Trump don't like the term "assassination," arguing this was a military strike. Some commenters on The Observer's Facebook page expressed their discontent with the term. And Trump detractors are hyping up the killing as illegal. We're not weighing in on that. There's nothing wrong with calling the strike an assassination. That's just what it was.

There were plots, after all, in World War II to assassinate Hitler. Not that Soleimani is anywhere on par with Hitler, but the point is newspapers need to call things what they are. And in times of crisis, reporters and the rest of us



**FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK**  
PHIL WRIGHT

need to stick to facts and be wary and critical of opinions no matter who gives them and particularly when they smell like propaganda.

Since the killing of Soleimani, the political spin machine began working overtime. Here are some of the early assessments and statements that came out after Trump announced the killing:

John Bolton, former Trump national security adviser, took to Twitter to praise the strike and express hope this leads to regime change in Tehran.

Ari Fleischer, the press secretary for the administration of President George W. Bush from 2001-03, chimed in on Fox News how Iranians could end up celebrating the death.

Fox News talking head Ainsley Earhardt on Friday called Soleimani a "bad guy," and there is little to quibble with that. She also said Soleimani was responsible for killing 600,000 U.S. troops.

Bolton is about as hawkish as hawks get. He has advocated for the U.S. to use military force in Venezuela, North Korea and other countries. He has yet to meet a war he doesn't like.

Ari Fleischer is the guy who in the lead-up to the war with Iraq claimed the small county had weapon of mass destruction when it did not. He claimed the Saddam Hussein regime was in cahoots with al-Qaeda, when, again, the facts did not bear that out. And he lied about telling reporters that Valerie

Plame was a CIA covert agent until he received immunity from prosecution.

Iranians admired Soleimani. Thousands of Iranians marched in funeral processions this weekend to honor him. The takes from Fleischer and Bolton look like opinions detached from reality.

Earhardt's assertion is dubious at best. The total number of U.S. Armed Forces that died or went missing in World War II is a little more than 407,000. The U.S. Civil War — our bloodiest war — had 620,000 military deaths.

There is no way an Iranian general was responsible for the deaths of 600,000 U.S. troops.

Even Farnaz Fassihi of The New York Times fell for misinformation. She tweeted on Friday the largest U.S. military base in Iran was under attack. She later tweeted that was not true. The initial post garnered some 1,600 retweets before Fassihi deleted it. Her correction received less than 400 retweets.

The point is the amount of misinformation passing as fact and wishful thinking passing as expert opinion after Soleimani's killing spread fast and can be all too easy to fall for, particularly on social media. And Iran's retaliation Tuesday with a missile strike on U.S. bases in Iraq is going to add a fresh round of Facebook memes and hot takes.

Don't buy into the bogus mess. Don't let confirmation bias get in the way of critical thinking and reality. Find that other source before spouting off about how much your mother loves you.

— Phil Wright is the editor of The Observer.

## Your views

### What a difference a president could make

As we enter 2020, the year in which we will elect a new president of the United States, let's pause to consider some differences a new president could make.

There are key executive orders a new president could issue on day one: Set aggressive greenhouse gas and energy use reduction goals across the federal government, including the military. Establish an interagency task force to develop the framework for a Green New Deal.

Stop lease sales for coal, oil and gas extraction and uranium mining on federal land. Bar from federal contracts any corporation with environmental violations during the past decade.

Close federal private prisons including immigrant detention centers and end all federal contracts with private prison companies. Direct the Department of Justice to abandon mandatory minimum sentences in federal prosecution and to pursue alternatives to incarceration for low-level offenders. Direct the U.S. Postal Service to begin

offering public banking.

Establish a task force to determine a real living wage across the United States and set the federal worker minimum accordingly.

Direct the Secretary of Education to write off all student loan debt for which the federal government is the creditor.

And much more. These are a few of the reasons I believe we need to elect Bernie Sanders president.

**Bill Whitaker**  
La Grande

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