

OUR VIEW

History won't let us forget

There is no way to sugarcoat the bewildering and abysmal departure of the United States from Afghanistan. Over the weekend, the Taliban entered the capital of the nation — Kabul — effectively ending a more than 20-year war that killed 2,400 Americans and mauled thousands more. The speed of the collapse of Afghanistan's military against the Taliban was extraordinary and rests solely on the policymakers of the United States. Back home, the big headlines are COVID-19 and whatever partisan political fight is going on, but voters everywhere should at least take notice that the effort they funded — to the tune of \$83 billion — just went down the toilet.

Polls over the past few years showed Americans, as a rule, don't care about Afghanistan. Who can blame them? It is a far-off place with difficult sounding names for its cities and the memory that the deadly 9/11 terrorist attacks were spawned in that nation has faded. Now, Afghanistan is just another developing nation everyone wants to forget.

But history won't be so kind. History won't let everyone forget. History has a habit of coming back to haunt nations and lawmakers who decide — for whatever reason — to abandon ambitious foreign policy ventures.

Never let anyone fool you. We had a chance to win in Afghanistan. Not last year, nor in the past five or six years. But once there was a window, narrow for sure, to get things right.

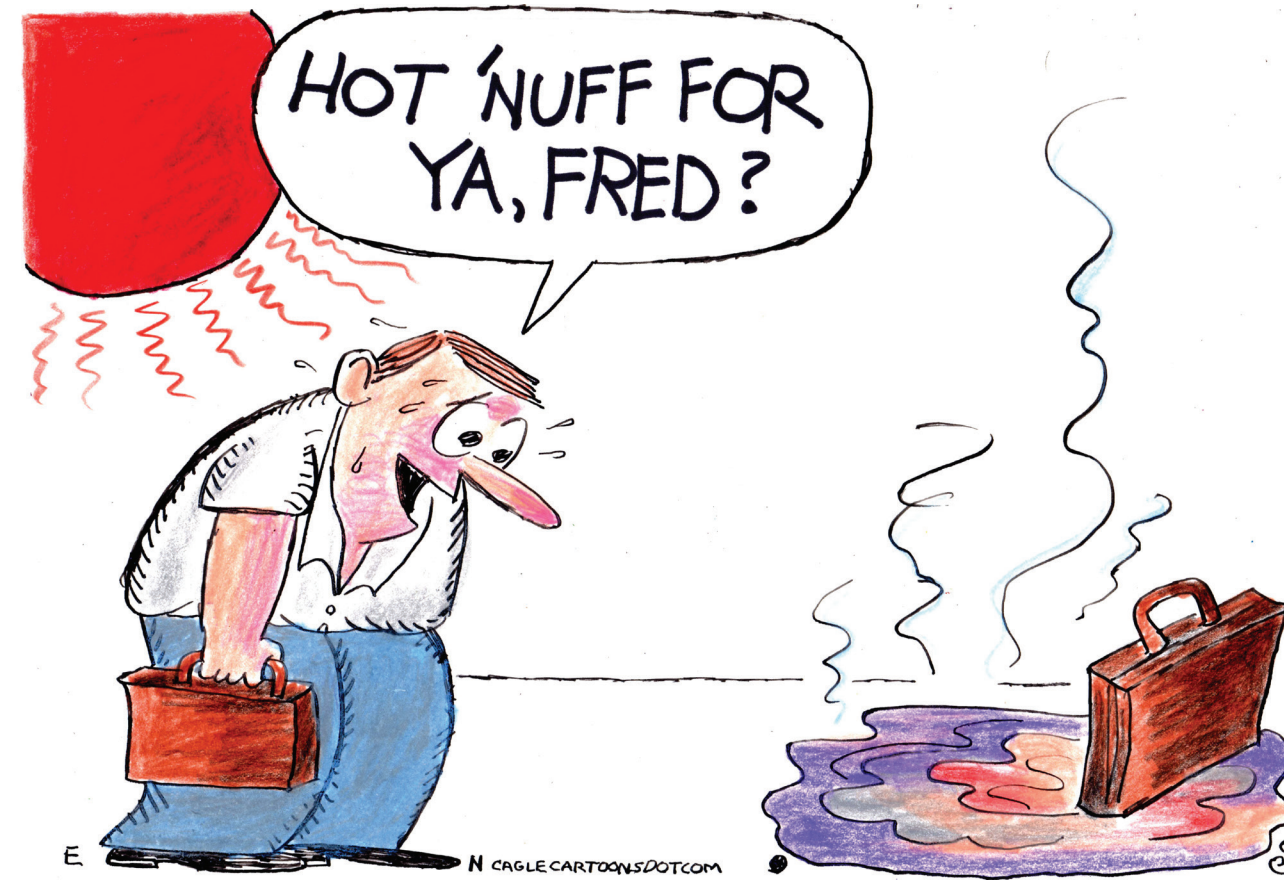
We failed. Miserably. You, the reader, and taxpayer, spent more than \$80 billion to repair and prop up a nation. Your money was supposed to build a robust Afghani military to protect the nation, to ensure it was never again a haven for terrorists. That money — your money — was for nothing.

There will be plenty of excuses, for sure, but in the end, the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan only marginally better than it did Vietnam. That should give everyone pause.

Finally, the most poignant piece of our departure is the sacrifice made by so many brave men and women of our armed forces in Afghanistan. They were deployed to that nation and performed admirably. They did everything that was asked of them. Their legacy deserved better than a hurried retreat and the abandonment of a nation.

President Joe Biden will, unfairly or fairly, take a large share of the blame for the last chapter in our longest war and he should.

Our strategy in Afghanistan failed. Now we, and future generations, will have to live with the results.



LETTERS

'Politics' is not a dirty word

Many people these days tend to think the word "politics" is a dirty word and that it is OK to cast aspersions on anyone's ideas that may be different. Actually, the word "politics" in my dictionaries means the science or activities of government. It is a way of discussing or conducting policies regarding government. Now, in the USA, a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, it is the duty of every citizen to be involved in discussion regarding our government. Thus, to be loyal citizens, we ought all to be engaged in discussing the kind of country we want to live in. That brings up what we mean by discussion. Discussion is the process of sharing one's ideas with others and listening in turn to their ideas. Discussion is not arguing or debating. It is definitely not using labels or pejorative terms to show disdain for someone else's ideas. In other words, politics is a way to discuss respectfully with each other about what is needed for our country. Politics is only a dirty word when made so by the speaker. Evelyn Swart Joseph

Anti-mask opinions ignore reality of situation

I've never read anything as disgusting as the report of the school board meeting, where parents wanted to pull their kids out of the La Grande School system because they hate Gov. Kate Brown. After watching many documentaries of Hitler during World War II, I can see little difference between the Nazis getting the Germans to hate Jews. The purpose of which was to get Hitler accepted as a demagogue. Furthermore, Sheriff Cody Bowen and county commissioners kept silent, giving their tacit support to this insanity after being vaccinated themselves. I have never heard of such cowardliness since Trump didn't join the insurrection he encouraged. I can't get over the fact that parents would condemn their children

to COVID-19 infection rather than protect them in the school district, merely because they hate Brown because of local propaganda supported by our cowardly county officials. These parents spend much time believing and little time knowing, thinking their beliefs are reality. Doing so merely blinds them to the reality of the moment. I voted for Republican governors Mark Hatfield and Tom McCall. They must be spinning in their graves knowing what the Republican Party has turned into. They, most certainly, would have done what Brown is now doing. They're all guilty of tautological thinking, only accepting information that agrees with their beliefs. This applies to many pseudo-Christians as well. I have no casual friends. My only friends are those who are willing to call BS on me when I get out of line. Stuart Croghan La Grande

We must protect our sources of precious fresh water

I am encouraged by yet another opinion piece ("River Democracy Act benefits everyone," Aug. 5, 2021) in The Observer showing support and making note of the overwhelming bipartisan desire of Oregonians to protect our waterways and sources of precious fresh water. I feel this act would be another step toward full realization by Oregonians of the need to protect our sources of fresh water and appreciate the full range of ecosystem services provided by the incredibly complex and vast system of drainages required by this resource. If we are able to marry this support and enthusiasm with science and the developing earth observation technologies, we may be able to restore natural function to many drainages that have been subjected to misguided management and abuse over the last 150 years. This will be especially important in order to meet the challenges and stress impacting our watersheds now and into the future.

Please support the River Democracy Act and ask your elected officials to do the same. Chuck LeBold Union

The virus is calling the shots, not the governor

When I called Grande Ronde Hospital on Friday, Aug. 13, to speak with a specialist, no one was available. I was told that everyone was "upstairs with COVID patients." Jackson County has run out of beds and they're turning away surgical patients. They went from 99 cases on July 4 to 655 cases in one month — 0 to 60 in no time flat. The National Guard is being sent to 20 hospitals across Oregon to help with logistics. The president and chief executive officer of St. Charles Health System in Bend thanked Gov. Brown for that help, saying that the "stress on Oregon hospitals was unprecedented." Here's the reality — the virus is calling the shots, not the governor. The Oregon Health Authority makes recommendations about what steps should be taken and that's what happens next. Propaganda on Facebook downplaying the severity of the virus, asking people to ignore vaccination and attacking the governor is very destructive. It has cost lives and it will cost more, including young people. That's already happened. My recommendation is simple — get off of Facebook now to keep the poison from spreading. There is no freedom without responsibility, including responsibility to the others around you. Anyone who doesn't understand that should step aside. All of our community leaders, political, religious, and those involved in health care, need to come forward with one voice and state clearly and publicly that we all need to get vaccinated. That is the only thing that will keep this from wrecking our medical systems. Please do your part. Norm Cimon La Grande

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