

OUR VIEW

# Council decision highlights how democracy works

There were and are a lot of good things to point out in the recent decision by the Elgin City Council to move ahead on a new contract with the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Readers may recall the city council pondered an idea to create its own police force recently, voting in May not to renew its contract with the sheriff's office for enhanced law enforcement services and announcing plans to add back its own police department, one it disbanded about 10 years ago.

The sheriff's office tasks three deputies for Elgin coverage, and a new city police department was projected to start with a chief and one officer. That decline in numbers was just one of a series of key questions that haunted the idea for a separate police force. Another issue was cost, and it was debatable whether — in the long run — creating a new, separate police force would be as cost effective as continuing a contract with the sheriff's office.

The June 21 decision by the council was a good one, and Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen should be lauded for going back to the drawing board and crafting a new contract that was more affordable and less arduous for the city.

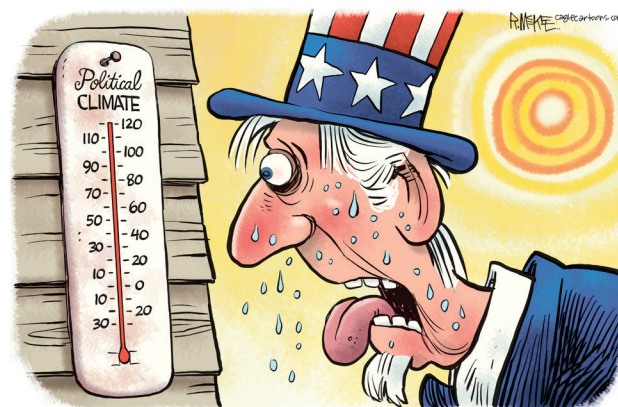
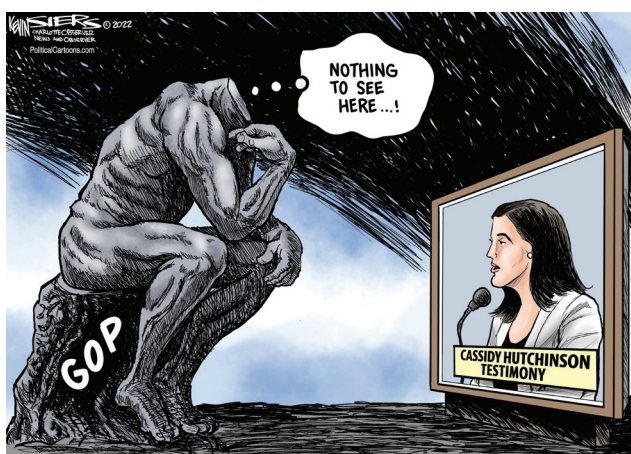
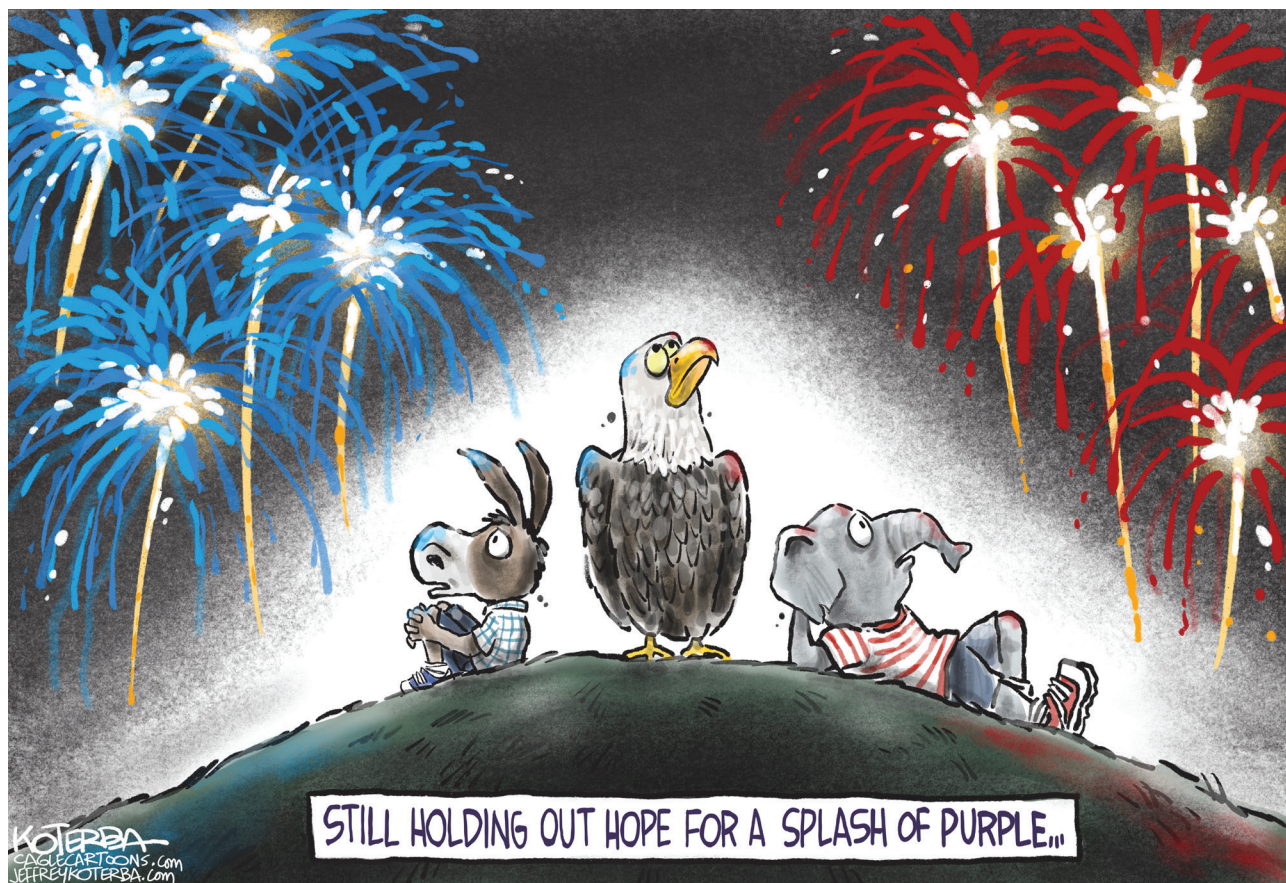
Another good element to the meeting was the number of residents who showed up. Elgin City Hall was packed, and for good reason. Residents — voters — did the right thing by attending and giving input in a constructive manner.

Elgin City Councilor Teresa Hylton-Shaffer's plea to residents to attend council meetings often and not just when there is a major issue to debate was also well-reasoned.

Residents should, when possible, attend city council sessions. We often vote for our elected leader and then sort of turn down the volume and let them handle things. Democracy works only when there is a healthy give-and-take between voters and their elected representatives. The council session regarding the sheriff's office contract was a perfect example of democracy working exactly the way it is supposed to, but Hylton-Shaffer is correct: More people need to attend council sessions on a regular basis.

Another positive piece to the decision by the council is how elected leaders — the council, the mayor and the sheriff — seemingly worked together to find a way to overcome a potential challenge. That's what voters expect from their representatives.

All and all, this time our elected leaders made the right decision at the right time.



## Striving to deliver 'just the facts'



**ANDREW CUTLER**  
FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Since at least 2015 the ability of Americans to trust their media outlets has slowly eroded, creating profound questions about the future of our democracy.

In addition to that trend, many Americans have stepped back from reviewing information in a value-free manner and simply retreated into whatever ideological silo they happen to feel most comfortable with.

That, too, is not good news for our democracy.

Coming up through the ranks in the journalism business, one theme I remember having the most impact was the notion of delivering "just the facts."

More than 20 years ago that seemed like a pretty easy thing to do. If I was deployed to cover a car accident, I knew there was a certain number of facts I needed to acquire. When did the accident

happen, where did it happen, how did it happen? Who was involved? Was anyone hurt? If so, how serious were their injuries?

Easy questions with, ideally, easy answers. I used the same template when I tackled larger, more complex stories as I moved up the journalism food chain. I focused on the old "who, what, when, where and how" theme that is, or was, a key part of journalism in America.

Yet, over the past six years or so there has been a troubling and serious backlash against what the facts are. The nation has dropped into a kind of bizarre Alice in Wonderland arena where "facts" may not be "facts" at all. Or "facts" are manipulated. Or, at times, outright lies are substituted for facts. Lies that can probably be shown to be inaccurate. Often, that doesn't seem to matter.

I am concerned because, naturally, I take factual reporting seriously. While neither I, nor EO Media Group, can change America, we can make a difference in our little piece of the Republic. That's why I emphasize the "just the facts" mantra so

much to the great group of reporters and editors we have. Now, more than ever, we must not let any type of bias intrude into our reporting.

In the past, such notions were seen as "something we should always try to watch" but I don't believe now that is appropriate. It's much more important than that. No, now, as journalists the stakes — even out here in Eastern Oregon — are just too high. Not only is the very nature of democracy at stake, but so is the ability to build on our readers' trust. If we are to be criticized, I don't want it to be because there is an obvious bias in a story.

I think what we do is important, and I believe our biggest strength is our readers. Readers deserve to be respected and they deserve to be delivered stories that do not contain bias and are, in the end, "just the facts."

■ Andrew Cutler is the interim editor of The Observer and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing The Observer, East Oregonian and four more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.

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