

OUR VIEW

# Elgin contract shows how democracy should work

The recent decision by the Union County Board of Commissioners to approve ratification of a new six-year contract between the sheriff's office and the city of Elgin was completed with little fanfare, but the saga attached to the final approval should serve as a prototype regarding problem-solving for future local lawmakers and officials.

Readers may recall at one point in the spring the Elgin City Council planned to reestablish the city's police department after years of contract protection services from the sheriff's office. The decision was a weighty one because it would mean new costs for city taxpayers and would have forced Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen to lay off two deputies.

Elgin taxpayers eventually became involved — as they should — and raised a number of good questions regarding the nuts and bolts of the idea. Eventually Bowen and Elgin lawmakers were able to work out a compromise that we believe will prove highly beneficial down the road for both the city and the county.

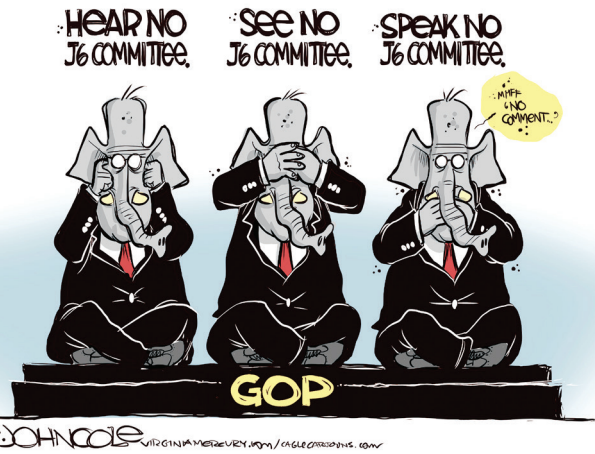
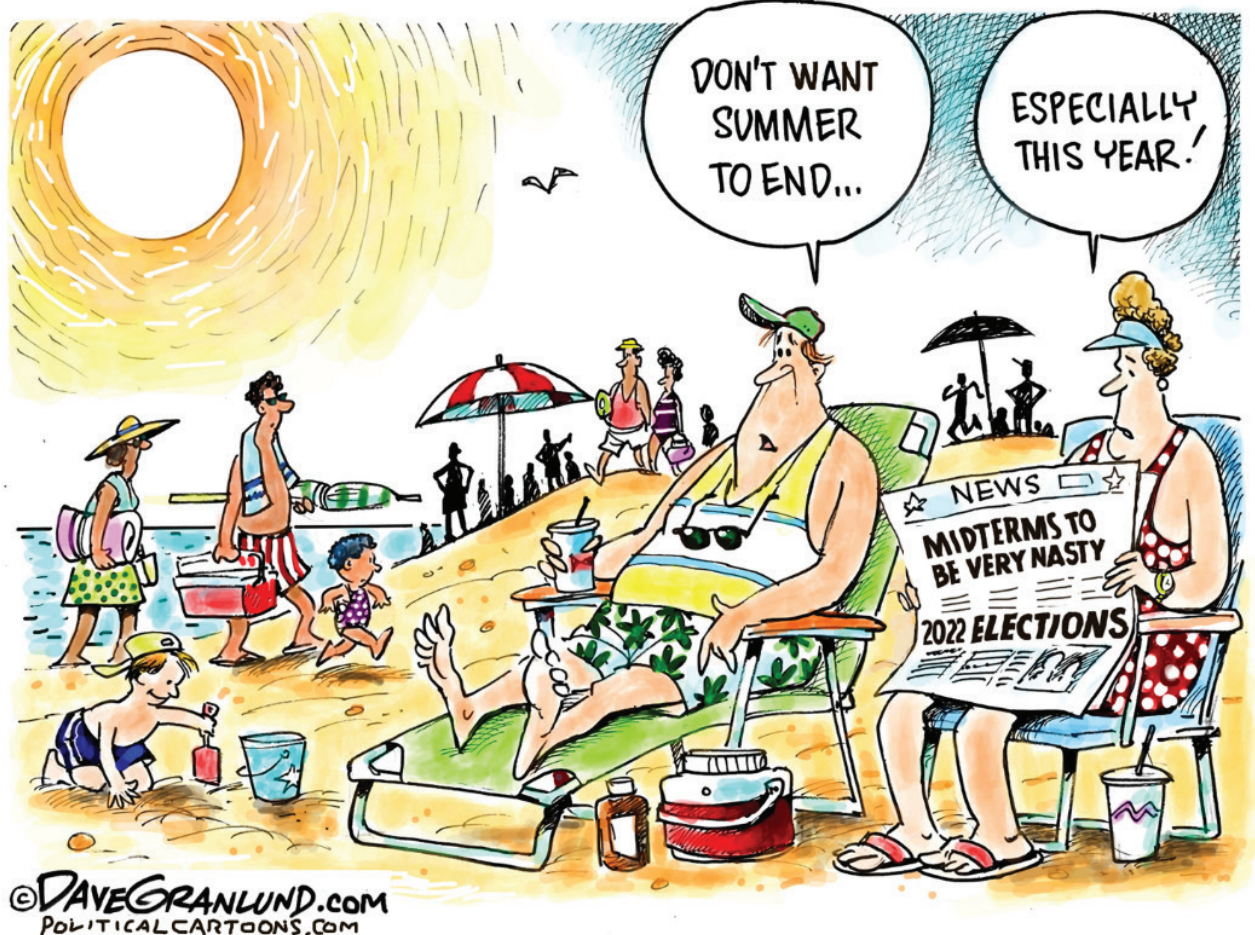
Why this specific example of what may appear to be a routine government matter is crucial is because of the way it played out. A compromise was never a sure thing and any number of elected leaders in the mix could have decided to do what is so often seen at the national political level: dig in their heels and refuse to budge.

That type of behavior seems legion in the halls of Congress but thankfully, in this rural area at least, cooler heads prevailed.

The key was compromise, dialogue and the involvement of taxpayers. So often in our digital day and age the involvement of voters is often lacking. Or, there is involvement by voters on a specific issue, but they tend to be members of the lunatic fringe on the left and right. Why Americans generally allow those who carry a fairly large ax to grind — both liberals and conservatives — to steer the ship of state remains one of those early 21st century mysteries that defies explanation.

The good news for us, though, is this governmental issue that could have cost jobs and millions of dollars was worked out by local people with input from voters.

That is how democracy is supposed to work.



## Optimistic about the future of news



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

News about my industry isn't good. Recently, the New York Times reported more than 300 newspapers closed across the nation during the COVID-19 pandemic. That's about two closures a week. Interestingly enough, more newspapers were predicted to fail than actually did because of the economic hit the pandemic delivered.

So good news, bad news? Perhaps.

No one I know of carries a crystal ball that accurately predicts the future (if you do, we need to talk — that would be a good story) so it is hard to tell what the latest industry news means for the long-term. Is it time to panic? Of course not. There is always a fair amount of hand-wringing and gloom-and-doom predictions when such news is released. But the fact that more than 300 newspapers failed during the pandemic is by no stretch of the imag-

ination positive. In fact, it's dismal. And it should matter to you.

Newspapers and digital, broadcast and radio outlets are crucial to delivering information that matters to Americans. If you, the reader, the voter, can count on information you receive from a news outlet you are better informed. That means you can make more wise decisions regarding who and what you vote for. Americans in every state and every county are far better off with a robust news organization striving to keep us informed.

A good newspaper must be a watchdog of government expenses and policies, yet it also must be a vehicle for showcasing what is good and positive in a community. Those two separate goals often collide. Yet a hard-hitting investigative piece and a feature about a positive community issue can co-exist inside a newspaper. Once more, they should.

The problems we face as news men and women now is one of perception for many. Our political climate has made concepts such as "fair" and "balanced" news coverage

a zero-sum game, where information is tailored and manufactured by fringe elements who then spin it into the mainstream.

We have to guard against allowing those who seek to always wave the bloody shirt to have more sway than they deserve. Everyone has a right to express an opinion, but as Americans, and Oregonians, we need to use a certain degree of common sense as well.

I believe Americans want a reliable news source, that deep down they understand how important it is to have a "fourth estate" that provides an overwatch of government and delivers trustful information on a regular basis.

So, while I cringe and worry about the loss of newspapers, I am also optimistic that our industry isn't dead nor will it die. I am optimistic that we can, and do, provide fair and balanced coverage of our local area.

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