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At what cost?

Questions about preserving the Waldorf Hotel

It is common in the world of real estate and development to require earnest money upfront to bid on a property. Putting money down establishes two things: the bidder is serious and has the financial wherewithal to pull it off.

Among Astoria preservationists there is strong belief that saving the Merwyn Hotel, also known as the Waldorf, is essential to the cause of historic preservation in Astoria. The Waldorf has been empty for some two decades. The Astoria City Council in 2014 voted to raze the building as a component of renewing the Astoria Public Library.

At last Friday’s City Council goal-setting session, the doubts that three councilors raised about demolishing the Waldorf have put a different face on library renewal.

For the council and for preservationists, there are some essential questions.

What does preserve the Waldorf mean? Does it mean mothballing the structure behind the facade? Does it mean full-blown restoration?

If physical restoration is the goal, how much would that cost?

Who would lead the drive to raise that money? And how much of their own money would the preservationists commit to the Waldorf project?

Once restored, what would be the rental structure per square foot? What users could afford to pay that rent?

These are not idle or academic

How pure must Rep. Herrera Beutler be?

Clark County Tea Party goes after congresswoman

A classic example of rigid and self-destructive partisanship is playing out in Southwest Washington, where a traditionally conservative Republican is threatened with censure for being something less than radically right wing.

Third-term incumbent U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler represents the state’s 3rd Congressional District, encompassing counties along and near the lower Columbia River, including the district’s largest population center, Vancouver. Although it was somewhat reweighted to the Republican Party when Olympia was removed during the 2010 redistricting process, it is still a “swing” district. Within its boundaries are not only right-leaning Portland suburbs, but also loyal Democratic strongholds like Pacific County. It has elected Democrats to Congress in 32 of the past 40 years.

Most politicians — and especially Republicans — would look at this and conclude it’s a good idea to take a balanced approach and cultivate a reputation for effective cooperation. In Herrera Beutler’s case, during the recently completed 113th Congress, this translated into voting for Democrat-favored positions 12 percent of the time, according to an analysis by the *Washington Post*. But this runs counter to organizational reality in Clark County. There, the most passionate activists who participate

in the party’s central committee prefer zero cooperation with Democrats, and also a good deal less cooperation with even the GOP’s top-tier congressional leaders.

Herrera Beutler is intelligent and personable, but certainly far to the right of many of her constituents, particularly on social issues. For example, she recently voted in lockstep with her party to reinstate deportation policies for undocumented immigrants — a position that would decimate the coastal economy if actually carried out, in addition to wrecking the lives of thousands of hard-working families.

But for the most avid members of the GOP’s tea party wing, anything short of blowing up democracy as we know it is a form of betrayal — apostasy, to use a religious term for someone who strays from the faith. To these folks, Herrera Beutler’s work to keep the ports of Ilwaco and Chinook open to the Columbia River via federal dredging is a step on the road to socialism and/or national bankruptcy.

Smart observers have noted that this move by the Clark County GOP is likely to strengthen Herrera Beutler’s mainstream popularity. Certainly, a young Hispanic woman who plays her cards right could have a bright future in statewide politics. This future depends on seeking additional — not fewer — ways to work across party lines.

It’s all in how you finish

By TIMOTHY EGAN
New York Times News Service

As the world contemplates the deflated football scandal in Boston — ballghazi — please allow me one last moment of undiluted sports delirium.

I live in Seattle, where this week the sky is always blue, trees are blossoming early, all children are not only above average but get into the college of their choice, free.

Timothy Egan

We are a city transfixed, rhapsodically floating, after the most are-you-kidding-me experience my hometown has ever been through.

To recap: With a little more than three minutes to go in last Sunday’s NFC championship game, the Seattle Seahawks were trailing Green Bay 19 to 7. At that point, according to the odds crunchers, the team had a 1 percent chance of winning — 1 percent! The Seahawks promptly scored two touchdowns in 44 seconds. They recovered an onside kick, converted a two-point Hail Mary, won the coin toss to get the ball first in overtime, and scored to put them in the Super Bowl.

Sports metaphors crowd the language of politics, usually for the worse. John McCain’s pick of an uninformed demagogue, Sarah Palin, was supposed to be a “game changer.” Desperate campaigns look for a “knockout punch,” or make a “swing for the fences.” My favorite is President Obama’s description of Joe Biden’s endorsement of gay marriage ahead of his boss — he “got out a little bit over his skis.”

But back to the miracle finish last Sunday, and the lesson beyond pro football: It’s not about the miracle, it’s about the finish. Obama has been sleepwalking through the middle part of his presidency. The brutal midterm electoral crushing, with Republicans gaining their largest House majority since Herbert Hoover, slapped him from his stupor.

No longer does he care about pleasing the insiders, or playing nice with the opposition, or conforming to the expectations of a lame duck. He said it’s the fourth quarter of his presidency, “and I’m going to play offense.” He’s decided to be Russell Wilson after throwing four interceptions.

Many have written him off. The reliably dyspeptic Charles Krauthammer said the epitaph of the Obama presidency would be: “He couldn’t govern, but he sure knew how to campaign.” And yes, little of what Obama proposed in his State of the Union address will find its way out of the dead zone of Con-

AP Photo/Elaine Thompson
Seattle Seahawks’ players celebrate after overtime of the NFL football NFC Championship game against the Green Bay Packers Jan. 18 in Seattle.

gress. Just 5 percent of his 2013 proposals became law — and that was before Republicans gained the Senate.

The president’s proposals “are so out of touch you have to ask if there’s any point to the speech,” said Reince Priebus, chairman of the Republican National Committee.

But if you look beyond capital gasbags, and consider the big ideas in Obama’s speech, you can see the inevitability of his philosophy. His proposals — raising the minimum wage, paid maternity leave, making college more affordable and the tax system more fair — are popular across the political divide. They’re mainstream anywhere but the fundraisers that Reince Priebus presides over.

Obama has already changed health care in a country that lags far behind the rest of the world in access. He’s overseen an economic recovery that defied all the apocalyptic predictions of his enemies, and would be the envy of any European country — let alone one governed by Mitt Romney, who’d be taking a victory lap with the kind of numbers Obama has generated on his watch.

Consider Idaho, arguably the reddest state in the union, where Republicans control everything but a handful of latte stands. After much bluster and protest, Idaho politicians caved and set up a state health care exchange under Obamacare. To the surprise of the experts, Idahoans have embraced the private coverage available under the Affordable Care Act — “one of the most successful enrollments of any state,” as Kaiser Health News reported.

Obama was in Boise Wednesday, speaking to a crowd of more than 6,000 people at an event where all tickets were gone within an hour. “Now there are 10 black people in Idaho,” was one of the tweets from Boise. The president was fully energized, jocular, primed for a strong finish. A handful of protesters

held up the usual hate posters, one comparing him to Hitler. But it did not escape notice that his motorcade passed a Shell station selling regular gasoline for \$1.77 a gallon.

To the west, in the Eastern Washington district of Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, people represented by this robotically doctrinaire leader of the Republican House have signed up for Obamacare coverage at a rate far beyond the national average.

To the east, Gov. John Kasich of Ohio told a group of Montana Republicans this week that they would be crazy not to embrace the president’s program of health coverage for the poor. “I gotta tell you, turning down your money back to Montana on an ideological basis, when people can lose their lives because they get no help, doesn’t make a lot of sense to me,” he said, in remarks reported by the *Great Falls Tribune*.

Obama has been sleepwalking through the middle part of his presidency.

Nearly every proposal in the State of the Union address polls with majority approval, nationwide. The great issue of the early 21st century is how to elevate a stagnant middle class. When 80 people hold the same amount of wealth as 3.6 billion of the world’s poorest, that equation of inequality can catch the attention of even the most heartless.

So, to the end game, in Idaho, Kansas and beyond. “It’s amazing what you can bounce back from when you have to,” Obama said last Tuesday. He was quoting from a Minneapolis woman, invited to the speech, but it sounded like a motto for his last two years in office.

The president is playing for a legacy. He won’t get much of it this year, or even next. But eventually, if Obama’s finish matches the flourish of the last two months, the United States will resemble the country he envisioned last Tuesday night. Long odds make for better endings.

Son held at gunpoint after library visit

By CHARLES M. BLOW
New York Times News Service

Saturday evening, I got a call that no parent wants to get.

It was my son calling from college — he’s a third-year student at Yale. He had been accosted by a campus police officer, at gunpoint!

This is how my son remembers it: He left for the library around 5:45 p.m. to check the status of a book he had requested. The book hadn’t arrived yet, but since he was there he put in a request for some multimedia equipment for a project he was working on.

Then he left to walk back to his dorm room. He says he saw an officer “jogging” toward the entrance of another building across the grounds from the building he’d just left.

Then this: “I did not pay him any mind, and continued to walk back towards my room. I looked behind me, and noticed that the police officer was following me. He spoke into his shoulder-mounted radio and said, ‘I got him.’

“I faced forward again, presuming that the officer was not talking to me. I then heard him say, ‘Hey, turn around!’ — which I did.

“The officer raised his gun at me, and told me to get on the ground.

“At this point, I stopped looking directly at the officer, and looked down towards the pavement. I dropped to my knees first, with my hands raised, then laid down on my stomach.

“The officer asked me what my name was. I gave him my name.

“The officer asked me what school I went to. I told him Yale University.

“At this point, the officer told me to get up.”

There is no amount of respectability that can bend a gun’s barrel.

The officer gave his name, then asked my son to “give him a call the next day.”

My son continued: “I got up slowly, and continued to walk back to my room. I was scared. My legs were shaking slightly. After a few more paces, the officer said, ‘Hey, my man. Can you step off to the side?’ I did.”

The officer asked him to turn around so he could see the back of his jacket. He asked his name again, then, finally, asked to see my son’s ID. My son produced his school ID from his wallet.

The officer asked more questions, and my son answered. All the while the officer was relaying this information to someone over his radio.

My son heard someone on the radio say back to the officer “something to the effect of: ‘Keep him there until we get this sorted out.’” The officer told my son that an incident report would be filed, and then he walked away.

A female officer approached. My son recalled, “I told her that an officer had just stopped me and pointed his gun at me, and that I wanted to know what this was all about.” She explained students had called about a burglary suspect who fit my son’s description.

That suspect was apparently later arrested in the area.

When I spoke to my son, he was shaken up. I, however, was fuming.

Now, don’t get me wrong: If indeed my son matched the description of a suspect, I would have had no problem with him being questioned appropriately. School is his community, his home away from home, and he would have appreciated reasonable efforts to keep it safe. The stop is not the problem; the

Charles Blow

method of the stop is the problem.

Why was a gun drawn first? Why was he not immediately told why he was being detained? Why not ask for ID first?

What if my son had panicked under the stress, having never had a gun pointed at him before, and made what the officer considered a “suspicious” movement? Had I come close to losing him? Triggers cannot be unpulled. Bullets cannot be called back.

My son was unarmed, possessed no plunder, obeyed all instructions, answered all questions, did not attempt to flee or resist in any way.

This is the scenario I have always dreaded: my son at the wrong end of a gun barrel, face down on the concrete. I had always dreaded the moment that we would share stories about encounters with the police in which our lives hung in the balance, intergenerational stories of joining the inglorious “club.”

When that moment came, I was exceedingly happy I had talked to him about how to conduct himself if a situation like this ever occurred. Yet I was brewing with sadness and anger that he had to use that advice.

I am reminded of what I have always known, but what some would choose to deny: that there is no way to work your way out — earn your way out — of this sort of crisis. In these moments, what you’ve done matters less than how you look.

There is no amount of respectability that can bend a gun’s barrel. All of our boys are bound together.

The dean of Yale College and the campus police chief have apologized and promised an internal investigation, and I appreciate that. But the scars cannot be unmade. My son will always carry the memory of the day he left his college library and an officer trained a gun on him.