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How much REALLY for Capitol renewal

A monument to Oregon or to Sen. Peter Courtney?

Oregon's Capitol is iconic — unique among state capitols for its 1930s look and its rotunda murals that project the quasi-socialist neo-realism of that Depression era.

It is a good bet that relatively small percentage of Oregonians have been inside the building. But to the Legislature it is home. And to Senate President Peter Courtney it's been home for 34 years.

Nigel Jaquiss of *Willamette Week* has delivered an alarming investigation of Courtney's plan to "renovate" the Capitol. The most salient aspect of Jaquiss' report is that Courtney has kept secret from his colleagues the true cost of the project. That would be \$337 million.

"Courtney wants the state to borrow \$161 million this year to begin the project," wrote Jaquiss. "That puts pressure on the state's bonding capacity and could squeeze out money for seismic upgrades for other public buildings such as courthouses and hospitals."

State Sen. Betsy Johnson doesn't like it that she would tell her constituents there is no money for seismic upgrades of their schools while Courtney's plan would suck up the state's ability to fund such projects.

Any building of the Oregon

Capitol's vintage undoubtedly needs an upgrade of some of its infrastructure — such as plumbing, electrical or heating. But as Jaquiss notes, this is much more than a remodel. Courtney's plans include a 3,000-square-foot legislative lounge, a 4,700-square-foot cafe and a 2,500-square-foot lounge for lobbyists.

Compared to what? That is the appropriations choice that legislators make every day. Unless we're missing something, Courtney's plan is extravagant when placed next to other public works needs around Oregon.

When challenged about his Capitol plan, Jaquiss reported, Courtney regarded such questions as "an assault" on him.

That comment betrays what's going on here. Courtney has spent an overly long time in the Legislature. He is a creature of the Legislature, for good or for ill. All politicians nurture myths about themselves (John Kitzhaber had one) and Courtney is confusing his personal pride and meaning with the building he works in.

Oil shipments no mere 'uptick'

A press release announcing Washington's and Oregon's plans to update their responses to oil spills on the lower Columbia River describes increasing rail shipments of crude oil in the area as an "uptick."

In fact, the volume of oil shipments by rail across both states has enormously expanded in recent years, going from essentially nothing at the start of this decade to tens of millions of gallons a year now. Even under the most optimistic of assumptions, derailments and spills are certain to occur. The U.S. rail industry has a good safety record, but there have been enough disasters that its record isn't anywhere close to perfect.

With proposals for new and expanded export terminals and refineries, there also are nearly certain to be ships carrying petroleum products up and down the Columbia, along with more oil flowing in pipelines. These, too, are subject to spills.

From being mostly just a recipient of fossil fuels, our two states will increasingly be integral parts of a national and international transportation and refining network. This is no mere "uptick," but potentially a multidecade increase in risk that policymakers must do their best to confront. As always in such matters, prevention must be the first priority,

accompanied by making certain those who profit are appropriately insured and bonded to pay for the damage done by spills.

The particular aspect of planning that is being updated is precisely how to respond in the immediate aftermath of spills, to contain damage and clean them up. The existing plan was completed in 2003, long before the current crude-oil boom. Part of it is now more than 20 years old. Besides an intensely increased scale of risk, much has changed in these years. The old plan, ways to comment, and a link to a similar draft updated plan for the Chehalis River are all accessible at tinyurl.com/NewOilSpillPlan

The revised plan will pay special attention to several wildlife refuges along the lower river, places where oil could be especially disastrous. It would make sense to include Willapa Bay in these plans, considering the hydrology of the Columbia River plume, which carries fish, nutrients and other things into the bay from the Columbia, at least during some months when the current flows northward.

Comments are due to June 30. This is an important matter that warrants careful attention by citizens who care about local riverine and maritime resources.

Fraternity of failure

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

Jeb Bush wants to stop talking about past controversies.

And you can see why. He has a lot to stop talking about.

But let's not honor his wish. You can learn a lot by studying recent history, and you can learn even more by watching how politicians respond to that history.

The big "Let's move on" story of the past few days involved Bush's response when asked in an interview whether, knowing what he knows now, he would have supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He answered that yes, he would. No WMD? No stability after all the lives and money expended? No problem.

Then he tried to walk it back. He "interpreted the question wrong," and isn't interested in engaging "hypotheticals." Anyway, "going back in time" is a "disservice" to those who served in the war.

Take a moment to savor the cowardice and vileness of that last remark. And, no, that's not hyperbole.

Bush is trying to hide behind the troops, pretending that any criticism of political leaders — especially, of course, his brother, the commander in chief — is an attack on the courage and patriotism of those who paid the price for their superiors' mistakes. That's sinking very low, and it tells us a lot more about the candidate's character than any number of up-close-and-personal interviews.

Wait, there's more: Incredibly, Bush resorted to the old passive-voice dodge, admitting only that "mistakes were made." Indeed. By whom? Well, earlier this year Bush

released a list of his chief advisers on foreign policy, and it was a who's-who of mistake-makers, people who played essential roles in the Iraq disaster and other debacles.

Seriously, consider that list, which includes such luminaries as Paul Wolfowitz, who insisted that we would be welcomed as liberators and that the war would cost almost nothing, and Michael Chertoff, who as director of the Department of Homeland Security during Hurricane Katrina was unaware of the thousands of people stranded at the New Orleans convention center without food and water.

In Bushworld, in other words, playing a central role in catastrophic policy failure doesn't disqualify you from future influence. If anything, a record of being disastrously wrong on national security issues seems to be a required credential.

Voters, even Republican primary voters, may not share that view, and the past few days have probably taken a toll on Bush's presidential prospects. In a way, however, that's unfair. Iraq is a special problem for the Bush family, which has a history both of never admitting mistakes and of sticking with loyal family retainers no matter how badly they perform. But refusal to learn from experience, combined with a version of political correctness in which you're only acceptable if you have been wrong about crucial issues, is pervasive in the modern Republican Party.

Take my usual focus, economic policy. If you look at the list of



Paul Krugman

economists who appear to have significant influence on Republican leaders, including the likely presidential candidates, you find that nearly all of them agreed, back during the "Bush boom," that there was no housing bubble and the American economic future was bright; that nearly all of them predicted that the Federal Reserve's efforts to fight the economic crisis that developed when that nonexistent bubble popped would lead to severe inflation; and that nearly all of them predicted that Obamacare, which went fully into effect in 2014, would be a huge job-killer.

Given how badly these predictions turned out — we had the biggest housing bust in history, inflation paranoia has been wrong for six years and counting, and 2014 delivered the best job growth since 1999 — you might think that there would be some room in the GOP for economists who didn't get everything wrong. But there isn't. Having been completely wrong about the economy, like having been completely wrong about Iraq, seems to be a required credential.

What's going on here? My best explanation is that we're witnessing the effects of extreme tribalism. On the modern right, everything is a political litmus test. Anyone who tried to think through the pros and cons of the Iraq War was, by definition, an enemy of President George W. Bush and probably hated America; anyone who questioned whether the Federal Reserve was really debasing the currency was surely an enemy of capitalism and freedom.

It doesn't matter that the skeptics have been proved right. Simply raising questions about the orthodoxies of the moment leads to excommunication, from which there is no coming back. So the only "experts" left standing are those who made all the approved mistakes. It's kind of a fraternity of failure: men and women united by a shared history of getting everything wrong, and refusing to admit it. Will they get the chance to add more chapters to their reign of error?

In Bushworld ... being disastrously wrong on national security issues seems to be a required credential.

Republicans must step up on trad

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — That free trade is advantageous to both sides is the rarest of political propositions — provable, indeed mathematically.

David Ricardo did so in 1817. The Law of Comparative Advantage has held up nicely for 198 years.

Nor is this abstract theory. We've lived it. The free-trade regime created after World War II precipitated the most astonishing advance of global welfare and prosperity the world has ever seen. And that regime was created, overseen, guaranteed and presided over by the United States.

That era might be coming to a close, however, as Democratic congressional opposition to free trade continues to grow. On Tuesday, every Democrat in the Senate (but one) voted to block trade promotion — aka fast-track — authority for President Obama, which would have given him the power to conclude the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade deal being hammered out with 11 other countries, including such key allies as Japan, Australia and Singapore.

Fast-track authority allows an administration to negotiate the details of a trade agreement and then come to Congress for a nonamendable up-or-down vote. In various forms, that has been granted to every president since Franklin Roosevelt. For good reason. If the complex, detailed horse trading that is required to nail down an agreement is carried out in the open — especially with multiple parties — the deal never gets done.

Like all modern presidents,

Obama wants a deal. But he has utterly failed to bring his party along. It's not just because for six years he's treated all of Congress with disdain and prefers insult to argument when confronted with opposition, this time from Democrats like Elizabeth Warren. It's also because he's expended practically no political capital on the issue. He says it's a top priority. Has he given even a single televised address?

The trade deal itself will likely pass the Senate eventually, there being eight or so Democrats (out of 46) who support the deal but wanted to extract certain guarantees before fast-tracking it. (They got the guarantees and on Thursday approved fast track.) The problem is the House. Very few House Democrats will vote yes. House passage will require Republican near-unanimity. And it's not there.

One group of GOP opponents are traditional protectionists of the Pat Buchanan paleoconservative school of autarky. The others are conservatives so reflexively anti-Obama that they oppose anything he proposes, especially anything that appears to give him more authority.

Having strongly opposed Obama's constitutional usurpations on immigration, health care, criminal justice and environmental regulation, I'm deeply sympathetic to that concern. But in this case, there is no usurpation. There is no congressional forfeiture of power. Fast track has been the norm for 81 years. And the final say on any trade



Charles Krauthammer

agreement rests entirely with Congress.

As for the merits, the TPP is a boon for America. It reduces tariff barriers to vast Asian markets and strengthens protection for intellectual property, America's forte. To be sure, any trade deal, while a net plus overall, produces winners and losers. But the TPP will be accompanied by so-called Trade Adjustment Assistance, training and subsidies to help those negatively affected.

Moreover, the overall gain is more than just economic. In our deadly serious competition with China for influence in the region, the TPP would anchor our relations with Pacific Rim nations. If we walk away, they will inevitably gravitate to China's orbit. The question is (as Paul Ryan and Ted Cruz succinctly put it in *The Wall Street Journal*): Who is going to write the rules for the global economy — America or China?

And one final consideration. Watching America's six-year retreat under Obama, the world wonders whether this is the product of one idiosyncratic presidency or of an inexorably declining America. Republicans have been telling the world that decline is not a condition but a choice, and that America's standing will be restored when U.S. policy is entrusted to geopolitically serious people. Here is the GOP's chance to show seriousness.

The Democrats, inventors of the postwar free-trade regime, have now turned against it (and their own president). This is the Republicans' chance to demonstrate that they can think large by advancing an important strategic objective — giving substance to Obama's as yet stillborn "pivot to Asia."

I wouldn't mind seeing Obama sunk by his own arrogance in intra-party fratricide over trade. But the issue is bigger than Obama. In 20 months, he will be gone. Asia will not. And it will get away from us if Republicans don't step up and step in where Obama and the Democrats have failed.

Where to write

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