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Can we trust Union Pacific?

Wyden and Merkley stand up to the railroads

There was a time in America when railroads were a sovereign power — close to being a fourth branch of government. Through their enormous land grants and economic clout, they made and broke communities in the 19th century, and they held sway in Washington, D.C.

Even today railroads have the power to hold communities and regions hostage.

In the wake of June's oil train derailment at Mosier, it is encouraging to see Oregon U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley standing up to the railroads. The senators last week introduced legislation that would call for mandatory investigation of oil train derailments.

The Mandate Oil Spill Investigations and Emergency Rules (MOSIER) Act of 2016 calls on the National Transportation Safety Board to investigate oil train derailments and gives the Federal Railroad Administration the authority to put a moratorium on oil trains until the investigations are complete.

Following the Mosier

accident, the National Transportation Safety Board did not investigate, because there were no injuries or fatalities. Union Pacific conducted its own investigation and identified loose links between rails and ties.

Wyden offered a useful observation about the UP investigation. Having railroads investigate their own accidents is like "Colonel Sanders guarding the chicken coop," the senator said.

America's freight railroad network is essential to our transportation economy. But railroads historically have shown they sometimes cannot be trusted with community health and welfare. That is an especially important factor as giant oil unit trains move through places such as the Columbia River Gorge.

Few excuses not to vote

One more attempt to make Oregon's innovation universal

Oregon has led the way in eliminating cumbersome and overly restrictive processes for getting citizens registered to vote. Versions of the state's automatic voter registration system ought to be extended nationwide.

U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer have introduced legislation to compel states to move to vote by mail.

Oregon's homegrown system of voting by mail deserves universal adoption. We should make it as convenient as possible for people to exercise a citizens' right, not erect an obstacle course in their path that discourages all but the most engaged from participating.

Any election-related innovation brings meaningless chatter about the potential for introducing fraud into the process. Disenfranchised felons and noncitizens might, under this theory, slip a vote in for someone who they perceive as being more amenable to their concerns. Such a worry is quaint

to the point of nearly being amusing.

Meanwhile, it remains to be seen whether Oregon's most recent innovation — nearly universal voter registration — will make a difference in voter turnout or who gets elected. The choice by political parties to restrict who votes in partisan primary elections means that unaffiliated voters are left on the sidelines at that vital stage in the process. Only 18.7 percent of automatically registered voters turned in ballots in the Oregon May primary, well below the overall voter turnout of 53.7 percent, while 76 percent of automatically registered voters that month were unaffiliated, *The Oregonian* reported.

Keeping people from voting is a key way in which elections are rigged by the powerful and the political consultants who do their bidding. Voting in sufficient numbers is the main way that citizens have a sense of control over their destiny. In Oregon at least, there remain very few excuses not to vote.

Resisting the revisionists: A first step with NATO

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — "The most significant reinforcement of our collective defense any time since the Cold War," President Barack Obama called it. A bit of an exaggeration, perhaps, but it was still an achievement: Last week's NATO summit in Warsaw ordered the deployment of troops to Eastern Europe, the alliance's most serious response yet to Russia's aggression and provocations on its western frontier.

The post-Ukraine economic sanctions have been weak; the declamatory denunciations, a mere embarrassment. They've only encouraged further reckless Russian behavior — the buzzing of U.S. ships, intrusions into European waters, threats to the Baltic States.

NATO will now deploy four battalions to front-line states. In Estonia, they will be led by Britain; in Lithuania, by Germany; in Latvia, by Canada; in Poland, by the United States. Not nearly enough, and not permanently based, but nonetheless significant.

In the unlikely event of a Russian invasion of any of those territories, these troops are to act as a tripwire, triggering a full-scale war with NATO. It's the kind of coldblooded deterrent that kept the peace in Europe during the Cold War and keeps it now along the DMZ in Korea.

In the more likely event of a "little green men" takeover attempt in, say, Estonia (about 25 percent ethnically Russian), the sort of disguised slow-motion invasion that Vladimir Putin pulled off in Crimea, the NATO deployments might be enough to thwart the aggression and call in reinforcements.

The message to Putin is clear: Yes, you've taken parts of Georgia and Ukraine. But they're not NATO. That territory is sacred — or so we say.

This is a welcome development for the Balts, who are wondering whether they really did achieve irreversible independence when the West won the Cold War. Their apprehension is grounded in NATO's flaccid response to Putin's aggressive revanchism, particularly in Ukraine. Obama still won't provide Ukraine with even defensive weaponry. This follows years of American accommodation of Putin, from canceling a Polish-Czech missile defense system to, most recently, openly acquiescing to Russia's seizure of a dominant role in Syria.

And what are the East Europeans to think when they hear the presumptive presidential candidate of the party of Reagan speaking dismissively of NATO and suggesting a possible American exit?

The NATO action takes on even greater significance because of the timing, coming just two weeks after Brexit. Britain's withdrawal threatens the future of the other major pillar of Western integration and solidarity, the European Union. NATO shows that it is holding fast and that the vital instrument of Western cohesion and joint action will henceforth be almost entirely trans-Atlantic — meaning, under American leadership.

The EU, even if it doesn't dissolve, will now inevitably turn inward as it spends years working out its new communal arrangements with and without Britain. Putin was Brexit's big winner. Any fracturing of the Western alliance presents opportunities to play one member against another. He can only be disappointed to see NATO step up and step in.

After the humiliating collapse of



Charles Krauthammer

Putin was Brexit's big winner.

President Obama's cherished Russian "reset," instilling backbone in NATO and resisting Putin are significant strategic achievements. It leaves a marker for Obama's successor, reassures the East Europeans and will make Putin think twice about repeating Ukraine in the Baltics.

However, the Western order remains challenged by the other two members of the troika of authoritarian expansionists: China and Iran. Their provocations proceed unabated. Indeed, the next test for the United States is China's furious denunciation of the decision handed down Tuesday by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague — a blistering, sweeping and unanimous rejection of China's territorial claims and military buildup in the South China Sea.

Without American action, however, The Hague's verdict is a dead letter. Lecturing other great powers about adherence to "international norms" is fine. But the Pacific Rim nations are anxious to see whether we will actually do something.

Regarding Iran, we certainly won't. Our abject appeasement continues, from ignoring Tehran's serial violations of the nuclear agreement (the latest: intensified efforts to obtain illegal nuclear technology in Germany) to the administration acting as a kind of Chamber of Commerce to facilitate the sale of about 100 Boeing jetliners to a regime that routinely uses civilian aircraft for military transport (particularly in Syria).

The troop deployments to Eastern Europe are a good first step in pushing back against the rising revisionist powers. But a first step, however welcome, 7 1/2 years into a presidency, is a melancholy reminder of what might have been.

Cartwright Pump Track a community celebration

By SUE CODY

For The Daily Astorian

Mountain bikers rejoice! There is a new pump track for bicycle enthusiasts near Seaside's Cartwright Park.

"Years ago, Cartwright Park was just a bunch of blackberries and a phone booth where people made their deals," said Seaside Mayor Don Larson.

Now, the new pump track is adjacent to a park that already has a picnic shelter, swing sets, restrooms and play structures. "The pump track is a real neat addition," Larson said.

A pump track, which opened Saturday, is a looping bike track with bumps and berms where bikers can "pump" their body up and down, creating momentum without pedaling over the bumps.

"Pump tracks are gathering places for the community," said Chris Quackenbush, a North Coast Trail Alliance member. "Riding the track gets kids and adults off their phones and computers for great exercise outdoors."

"The pump track idea came as a stepping stone to promote more bike riding in the community," said Morgan Soller, one of the driving members of trail alliance.

"We came up with a location that we thought would accommodate a bike track on city property," said Quackenbush. The location is in an area easily accessible by bicycle.

After developing a basic track design for the space, the trail alliance approached the Seaside Parks Advisory Committee with the idea.

Seaside Public Works Director Dale McDowell was impressed with the meeting. "The presentation featured members from ages 7 to 70, who explained to the board with photographs and concept drawings how they would like to develop the space."

"It was an unsightly space near the park that was simply flat ground breeding invasive species," said Quackenbush of the space behind the Seaside School District Administration Building.

After talking to Kiwanis, which



Sue Cody/Submitted Photo

River Quackenbush catches some air while riding on the new pump track in Seaside.

'Pump tracks are great exercise and a chance for kids and older people to improve their bike skills.'

Morgan Soller

one of the driving members of trail alliance

has adopted Cartwright Park, a neighborhood survey, redesigns and more presentations to Seaside's Planning Commission and the City Council, the project was approved at the end of April.

"The Seaside City Council is pleased to see this group of men doing something upbeat for their kids, families and visitors," Larson said.

Brush clearing, rock loading, sifting through materials to pack into the curved surface of the track were all tasks that were accomplished by the trail alliance and community volunteers. Materials and supplies were donated by All Rents, Keith Keranen Excavating, Teevin & Fischer Quarry, Erickson Excavating, Osburn/Olson LLC, Angelina's Pizza, Seaside Coffee House, Fairweather Press, Terra-Com Web Design. Northwest Coast Trails Coalition donated funds for the sign.

Volunteers spent many hours building, packing and refining the track. "Moving tons of rock by hand was back-breaking," Soller said.

"Pump tracks are great exercise and a chance for kids and older people to improve their bike skills," said Soller.

McDowell said he likes the idea of families participating in outdoor activities together. "More experienced riders can teach younger riders how to ride the track, bringing the community and neighbors together."

"I have witnessed firsthand the use of the pump track — especially young children on their bicycles — they are having a blast. I feel this is a great asset to our park system and to our community."

Sue Cody is communications lead for Way to Wellville in Clatsop County. She is also a former deputy managing editor of *The Daily Astorian*.