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OUR VIEW

A shameful defeat for public access

There’s a commendable focus on racial, ethnic and gender diversity in appointments to the incoming Biden administration, while one characteristic goes unremarked and possibly neglected. That is geographical diversity.

While our U.S. Constitution justly requires that Congress represent every area of the nation, there is no such requirement for the White House, the administrative bureaucracy or Supreme Court. As a consequence, Ivy League graduates and other East Coast elites are grossly over-represented in the upper echelons of government, while the vast bulk of agency headquarters is jammed into Washington, D.C., and a narrow nearby strip of the Atlantic Coast.

As a result, vast areas have little connection with the federal government, and often in fact feel neglected and even victimized by it. Some who were otherwise unimpressed by the Trump administration quietly applauded relocation of the Bureau of Land Management headquarters from Washington, D.C., to the interior West — though Denver or Salt Lake City would have been a far more logical choice than isolated Grand Junction, Colorado.

One agency that has historically done a better job than most of maintaining diverse geographical connections is the National Archives and Records Administration. In the Pacific Northwest, its facility down the road from the University of Washington in Seattle is a major focal point for our region’s recorded history — everything from Indian treaties and genealogical records to photographs and the voluminous paperwork generated by scores of other federal offices. In a nation that is supposed to be “by, for and of” the people, these are literally our records.

It thus was hugely disappointing when the Trump administration announced it was closing this repository of a million boxes of military, land, court, tax and census papers and shipping them off to Riverside, California, and Kansas



Pacific Northwest and Alaska archives are being moved to Missouri and California, and an obscure federal board is planning to quickly sell off the archives facility on Sand Point Way in Seattle.

THERE SHOULD BE AN EXPLICIT COMMITMENT BY EACH INCOMING PRESIDENT TO MAKING CERTAIN THAT THE BEST TALENT FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE NATION IS REPRESENTED IN THEIR ADMINISTRATION. BY THE SAME TOKEN, PUBLIC ASSETS LIKE ARCHIVES SHOULD BE DECENTRALIZED AND KEPT AS CLOSE TO THE PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE.

City, Missouri. All of Alaska’s federal archives — moved to Seattle in 2016 — will also be put effectively out of reach to most who might want to see them.

Some may suggest that in this age of digital everything, surely all papers of interest must be available online. This is an idle dream. The Seattle archives has been digitizing documents. It estimates it currently has finished about one-thousandth of 1% of the collection.

While there was some hope this misguided misappropriation of our

history could be countermanded, the Seattle Times reported a sneaky rush to sell off the 10 acres of prime real estate — presumably to high-end developers or some cash-flush tech company.

Although he has squandered some of his impact by suing too often in these past four years, Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson is fighting a good and worthwhile battle to force the obscure five-person federal Public Buildings Reform Board to disclose information about sale of the

archives facility. Washington state’s U.S. senators have also weighed in, with Sen. Patty Murray saying, “I have been incredibly disappointed over the past year as the Trump administration has consistently ignored public input and failed to act in a transparent manner ...”

Democrats and Republicans alike should believe in keeping government as close as possible to the people. Eliminating important regional outposts of the National Archives flies directly in the face of such basic goals as providing citizens with access to the records created by agencies that are supposed to be accountable to us.

There should be an explicit commitment by each incoming president to making certain that the best talent from every corner of the nation is represented in their administration. By the same token, public assets like archives should be decentralized and kept as close to the people as possible.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Setting the noose

Of the 40,000 residents of Clatsop County, one mature person with pre-conditions, as reported in the newspaper, and one more, as of the latest report, died relating to COVID-19 for the whole year, and we are heading into “extreme risk” condition. I wish to know who is setting the noose, and tightening up, to hang the rest of us.

Economic depression has already descended upon the city: Simply take a walk downtown, look at multiple closed businesses and empty open ones. Well, as they say in Vietnam: “God up high has eyes.” Guess we must do whatever necessary to survive, while taking care of one another, right along with the planet, and watch what happens.

Frustrated as I am, I live my life with gratitude, regardless of the circumstances, because even though the full scheme of the universe is beyond me, I have faith.

NGUYEN T. TRUNG
Seaside

Please listen

To the Sunset Park and Recreation District Board: Serving on a government board is very difficult. The knowledge required is immense, plus the time to research and analyze all sides of an issue. The role may also lead to sleepless nights trying to decide what is best for all.

I asked each of you several months ago to stop and research the proposal to purchase Broadway Middle School thoroughly, and get the public (taxpayers)

involved, but it appears you are proceeding without doing this.

Where is SEPRD’s business plan for the property and district, the strategic plan (being worked on now), and is this something your bosses (the taxpayers) want? Maybe they do, or would, after they have all the facts.

Over the past few months, more information has been uncovered. It seems many discussions have been held behind closed doors and we, the taxpayers, would appreciate having the information.

Ideas have been floated that maybe your employees haven’t thought of, i.e., asking the school district to split the property. Private individuals, who wish to use the gyms for their private financial gain, could purchase them. The school and SEPRD could rent the space as needed, and the property would be back on the tax rolls.

Also, removal by a private developer of the old school, and new construction for commercial use, could be another opportunity.

Please listen and talk to us. We all wish what is best for our community, so let’s work together.

MARGENE RIDOUT
Former SEPRD board member
Seaside

Act now

The eviction moratorium has saved lives, and it is about to expire too soon.

The overwhelming majority of Oregon renters have been paying all, or part of,



their rent. Even in the face of astonishing job losses, we’ve done a good job in Oregon preventing a new wave of homeless children, families and individuals. We cannot let that protection expire.

The Community Alliance of Tenants has been working with tenants to address their concerns since the pandemic began, and the stories we are hearing are more than concerning.

Tenants are facing pressure, threats, harassment and even unsafe living conditions as some landlords neglect safety concerns from tenants who have used legal means to notify them they will be unable

to pay rent. Come January, tenants outside Multnomah County could owe up to four months rent immediately, and will face imminent eviction.

Legislators need to act now to extend the eviction moratorium, provide protections for renters and rent assistance to help pay back rent. This action protects renters, protects public health, prevents homelessness and helps landlords continue their necessary services.

KIM McCARTY
Executive director,
Community Alliance of Tenants
Portland