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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to neighbors helping neighbors fight fires. Whether Helix farmers or Pendleton urbanites, people in both environs have stepped up to help save lives and property recently when a frightening flare-up showed its fiery face.



We have professional hose haulers in a few Umatilla County municipalities, but for many people, saving your residence can come down to how willing and able you and your neighbors are to protect your property. And it should be noted: people should never put their own safety, or the safety of others, at risk to save a few slabs of wood or a field of straw.

But it is admirable when people do what they safely can to help themselves and the people around them. We’re happy when we hear it and see it, and it makes us glad to live in a place where the community supports each other.

A kick in the pants to the mess that is the Oregon Trail Library District, which is still being mopped up despite finally naming an interim director after the disastrous tenure of Marsha Richmond.

It seems like the library district and the city of Irrigon were the weekly recipients of a kick in the pants when the Columbia River town’s library remained closed because the two groups could not get in the same room and each sign the same piece of paper.

Frankly, we should have been kicking twice a week. Barring taxpayers from something they paid for because of the squabbling incompetence of public employees and a publicly-funded organization was disgraceful.

It’s now clear that the library district was the least functioning of the two. Later, board members went incommunicado for months and the district was barely able to legally conduct business. Often they were not even able to do that.

Richmond deserves much of the blame for steadily diminishing operations. So it’s hard to believe that she would then be able to flee that sinking ship and be hired as coordinator of the Umatilla County Special Library District. Did anyone in the district check Richmond’s work history, or read media reports of the mess she left behind in a neighboring library district?

We hope her damage is more limited in the new position than her last, but Umatilla County library-goers and employees should worry.

A tip of the hat to those truly patriotic and conscientious citizens who use fireworks safely this Fourth of July weekend. Or, better yet, who opt to put them away until New Year’s, when loose sparks and flames are less likely to ruin everyone’s day.



It doesn’t take a meteorologist to know this spring and summer have been brutally hot and unusually dry. Your basic sparklers, poppers and snakes aren’t going to get too out of hand (with proper adult supervision, of course), but the more flashy fireworks can be a real hazard. Especially if the users aren’t paying close attention.

If you are going to set off your own display, remember to keep a hose and bucket of water nearby, small children away and pay attention to the burnt out shell even when the spectacle is over.

But the real question is, why bother? Pendleton will kick off the weekend with a Friday night display, and Hermiston, Boardman, Stanfield and Ione all offer their own shows Saturday night.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

National Park fees go up again

The (Eugene) Register-Guard

Nearly a century ago, Congress passed the National Park Service Organic Act, creating a federal agency to manage the nation’s parks and monuments. The agency’s mission was as broad and impressive in scope as the lands to which it applied: to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects” of the parks and to “provide for the enjoyment of the same ... by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

That mission has been endangered in recent years by a massive backlog in maintenance and construction projects — nearly \$12 billion worth — that threaten to cast a shadow over the National Park Service’s celebration of its centennial in August 2016.

The agency’s maintenance needs have been exacerbated by congressional budget cuts that have taken an increasing toll on both operating and capital budgets. In a recent report, agency officials reported that of the national park system’s paved roads are in “fair to poor condition” and dozens of bridges need repair. An estimated 6,700 miles of hiking trails need maintenance.

Name the park, and the agency has a corresponding list of deferred maintenance projects. At Crater Lake, the list consists largely of roads, including the iconic Rim Road, which takes visitors around the lake and is scheduled for a major renovation later this year. At Yosemite, the list ranges from up. The park headquarters at Lassen Volcanic National Park needs a

new utility system, and Sequoia National Park needs a water treatment facility. The list goes on. And on.

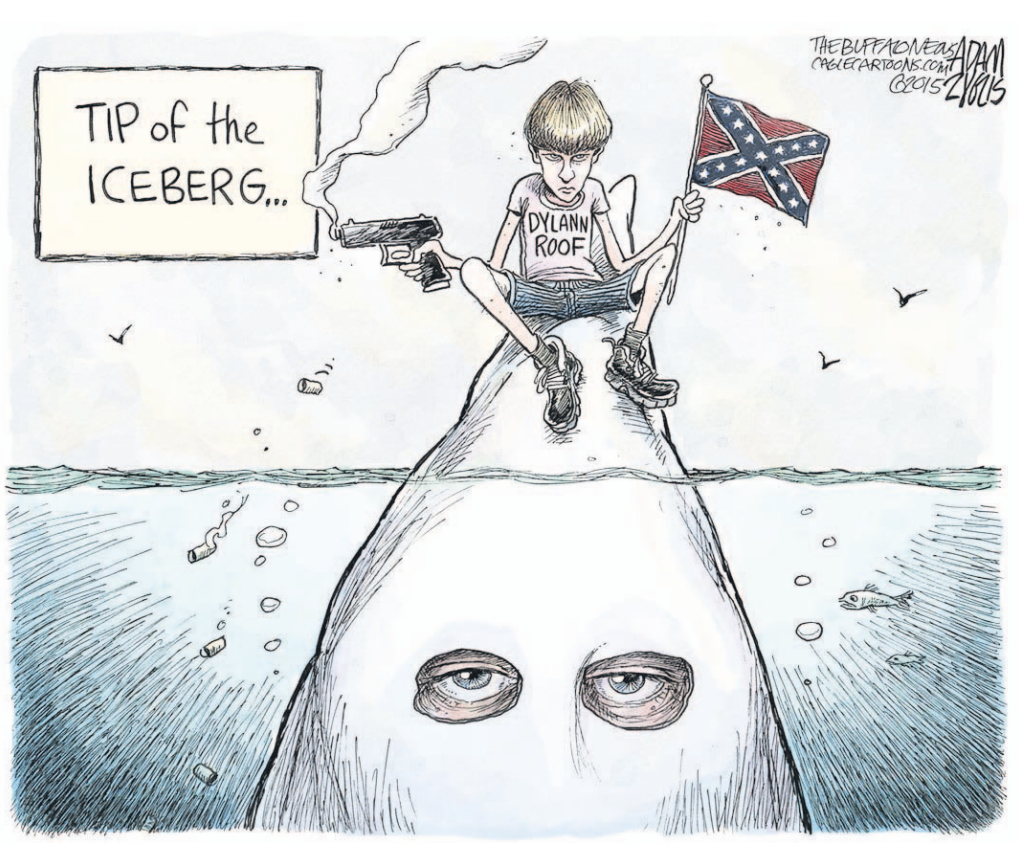
The National Park Service has asked Congress for \$243 million in new funding over the next 10 years to restore its non-transportation facilities to good condition. That’s a modest request in light of the maintenance backlog and the increasing popularity of national parks — an estimated 292 million people visited national parks last year.

At 130 national parks across the country, the agency recently began charging visitors more to get inside, with entrance fees doubling, even tripling at some sites. The price of daily admission went from \$10 to \$15 a couple of weeks ago at Crater Lake. Across the nation, park visitors will also face higher fees for other amenities.

It’s unfortunate that park visitors will have to pay more to visit and play in national parks, and it’s possible the new increases will price some Americans out of visiting them. National parks, which represent some of the most extraordinary examples of America’s landscape and heritage, should be available for the enjoyment of all citizens.

Yet most national fees have not changed since 2008, and agency officials say 80 percent of the fees stay at the park where they were collected.

Americans can also take solace in the fact that revenue from the fee increases will be used to keep the nation’s parks from falling further into disrepair and, hopefully, to reduce a monumental — and unacceptable — maintenance backlog.



OTHER VIEWS

GOP searches for strategy to counter Obama winning streak

Republicans have tried to pin the lame duck label on President Obama for quite a while now. But for a lame duck, Obama is doing pretty well.

He won on Obamacare. He won on gay marriage. He won on trade. His party was even able to leverage a horrendous crime — the killings in Charleston — to put Republicans on the defensive over the Confederate flag.

A president’s approval rating, and his general image of success or failure, affect the candidate of his party seeking to succeed him. From that perspective, Obama’s victories are a gift to Democratic frontrunner Hillary Clinton.

Indeed, Clinton was quick to embrace the Supreme Court Affordable Care Act decision. “Yes!” she tweeted just minutes after the news broke. “SCOTUS affirms what we know is true in our hearts & under the law: Health insurance should be affordable & available to all.”

A short time after Clinton’s statement, I sent notes to several Republican operatives, some working on presidential campaigns and some unaffiliated. How do GOP candidates deal with a president on a winning streak? How does it affect the campaign? Does it give Clinton a stronger hand? The answers that came back showed a party struggling to figure out exactly how to deal with the Democrats’ recent run.

Some stressed that the president’s wins aren’t really his, pointing especially to the trade deal, in which Obama succeeded almost entirely because of Republican help.

“Yes, he can claim some victories, but few of his own making and mostly due to other actors, for their own reasons, making things happen,” said Dave Carney, the New Hampshire-based strategist who advised Rick Perry in the last election. “He has become the Forrest Gump of presidents.”

Others laid blame on GOP lawmakers in Congress, arguing they must do more to stop the president’s agenda.

“Republicans in Washington need to act and put pressure on Obama to veto conservative legislation or come to the table,” said Tim Miller of the Jeb Bush campaign. “There has been a lot of talking, but Republicans need to start getting results.”

Still others argued that Obama’s wins don’t say much about the merits of his agenda. “He won the (Obamacare) case, but just having the Court say it was legal doesn’t make it good



BYRON YORK
Comment

policy, popular with the American people, or good healthcare,” noted Curt Anderson, a top adviser to the Bobby Jindal campaign.

Some saw Obama’s wins as tangential to the issues that matter most with voters, explaining that Obama is still a loser when it comes to the big stuff.

“When the voters start giving the president credit for a booming economy and a globe-spanning string of foreign policy successes, then the

Republicans will have to worry,” said Vin Weber, a longtime GOP strategist who is an outside adviser to the Bush campaign.

Finally, others saw Obama’s wins as mainly the work of a Washington establishment out of touch with economic suffering going on beyond the Beltway.

“President Obama and America’s elites are winning, winning, winning,” said Alex Castellanos, a longtime GOP strategist who is not affiliated with any campaign this time around. “Let the peasants eat cake, Obamacare, and unemployment. A lot of steam is building up in the populist pressure cooker. In 2016, some very angry peasants are going to storm Washington with torches and pitchforks.”

One could spend a long time searching those statements for a single, fully coherent strategy to counter the president and neutralize the benefit his victories might confer on Hillary Clinton. That’s not really a surprise, given that there are currently 13 declared candidates, with three more likely to come, in the race for the Republican nomination. But whichever course they choose, Republicans will have to connect with the people who lose when Obama wins.

After the Supreme Court decision, the GOP candidates themselves issued mostly boilerplate statements. They pledged to keep fighting. They vowed, as Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said, to make the 2016 election “a national referendum on repealing Obamacare.” They promised to replace Obamacare with something better.

But what’s going on now is bigger than simply Obamacare. The president is on a roll at the moment, and the Democrat who hopes to follow him to the White House is looking to roll along. Republicans need a focused strategy to stop that momentum. So far, the GOP is still looking.

■
Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

YOUR VIEWS

Meth is the real problem in Pendleton — not marijuana

Marijuana is legal. Months have gone by since the election but there is no plan for the implementation of this law. There are hundreds of locals who rely on medical marijuana for its medicinal qualities.

There was a recent *East Oregonian* editorial on the topic of medical marijuana dispensaries. It reminded me of the movie “Reefer Madness,” made in 1936 and based on the exaggerated effect of marijuana.

The *EO* had a quote from our police chief that was alarming: “How many deaths is it going to take?” I have read dozens of obits in the *EO* and have never seen one where the death was caused by marijuana. Former city councilman Keith May said that “he would close his business and move away if a marijuana shop opened on Main Street.”

That is amusing because his store is equidistant to two businesses that sell drug paraphernalia, Thur’s and Pandora’s Box. The third head shop, “Out of Action,” is located nearby on Main Street. The fourth business, “Wicked Kitty,” is on Main Street and it sells paraphernalia in its “green room.”

In an *EO* story published in November 2014, Wicked Kitty manager Angela

Treadwell stated that glass products are their number two revenue generator.

The distressing news is that these businesses do not simply cater to marijuana users.

Pendleton has had a history of drug abuse for years. Meth is an epidemic in the town. Residents in a motel manufactured meth in a room.

Since meth is made from battery acid, drain cleaner, lantern fuel and antifreeze, I find it odd that the owner of the motel and his employees had no knowledge of this activity. The same thing occurred in another Pendleton motel. Both were shut down for months to detoxify the rooms.

The glassware that is sold in the four head shops are not just for marijuana. It is also purchased by meth users. Meth addiction is a major issue in Pendleton and accounts for many of the crimes committed in town.

With the city council prohibiting rigidly controlled medical marijuana dispensaries, the city is forcing local residents to purchase marijuana on the black market. As a result, Pendleton will lose millions of dollars over the long term from taxes that won’t be collected to benefit the community.

Jerry Cronin
Pendleton