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OUR VIEW

Water funding a huge win for Eastern Oregon

We have been waiting with bated (but not held) breath for years now for a specific piece of really good news about Columbia River water.

That particular nugget came Friday, as the Legislature's capital construction committee approved $50 million for water development projects. The money will go toward infrastructure to pump water from the river onto high-value crops in Umatilla and Morrow counties, adding to what is already an agriculturally bountiful region with plenty of room to grow.

The work is not done, to be sure. Just because dollars are available doesn't mean the H20 will start flowing right away, and right now only $11 million of the funds are earmarked for the Umatilla Basin, though much more will likely be coming this way.

This allotment will lubricate the wheels of progress, and should allow the responsible draw of water from the river in the near future.

Work like this doesn't get accomplished in a day, or even in one Legislative session. Former Sen. David Nelson and Rep. Bob Jenson worked throughout their terms to lay the groundwork for this deal. Sen. Bill Hansell and Rep. Greg Smith carried out the work in this session.

> As the Legislative session comes to a close, it's nice to know Eastern Oregon at least got the top item from our wish list.

One of the biggest hurdles was getting the west side of the state to see how much could be created with the extra water, and how that value could come without further damage to the river ecosystem. By getting key legislators to actually visit us on the dry side, our representatives acted as ambassadors to the cause.

We'll watch carefully as the Northeast Oregon Water Association begins the first phase of its plan. We all know that clean water is a precious resource that is becoming more scarce, and it's important to use it as efficiently as possible.

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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.

YOUR VIEWS

Greece's mess won't be cleaned up easily

Those high and mighty souls who exercise aegis over the European Central Bank and over a variety of other transnational economic institutions apparently believe that they can somehow flog a monetarily strapped Greece into submission to their diktat. Rather than trying to meet the Athens government and its people halfway, Europe's financial bigshots persist in demanding that one of the continent's poorest economies be wrung of every last bit of wealth in order for it to meet debt payments and thereby make our world's powerful moneybags happy. The theory behind these tactics on the ECB's part is, we can presume, that it will somehow teach an irresponsible population of modern day Hellenes not to defy their alleged economic "betters" in Germany and elsewhere in northern Europe.

Greece is broke, and its people can practice austerity no more. It is immersed in a true economic depression that is at least partly the result of austerity measures imposed over the past few years. Athens at present is run by politicians who dare not submit to any more austerity measures. We can therefore see everything that is wrong with today's European political, social and economic order on prominent display. Anyone who thinks that the current situation will resolve itself in a benign manner is profoundly mistaken.

President Truman, worried about Greece and Turkey possibly falling into the Soviet orbit in 1947 and 1948, initiated a program of generous assistance to Athens and Ankara that he hoped would cement the two countries into the "Free World." That was then.

Sixty-eight years on, and as a result of both economic mistakes in Athens and a punitive attitude on the part of Europe's big banks, Greece has been plunged headlong into Third World-style penury. Stalin was kept out of Athens in the 1940s, but there is no assurance at all that Vladimir Putin will be kept out in 2015.

What a terrible mess this is!

Frank W. Goheen
Camas, Wash.

Custodial fathers face unfair bias

I am a custodial father of my two kids since my divorce in 2007. It has been a nightmare experience as a custodial father.

It has been my experience that the entire system of enforcement has bias against custodial fathers. In attempting to research support and legal help for custodial fathers, I have found my hundreds of hours in searching come up empty. I have experienced Child Support Enforcement to be dismissive and unavailable to custodial fathers, and the Department of Human Services to provide aid to the non-custodial mother without question. I have been charged to repay the DHS twice now for services provided to the non-custodial mother. I have been required to show proof of my custodial rights, both times, in order that I not be held with child support by the DHS.

My case is too involved to describe in a short note. I challenge you to research "Custodial Father's bias" and to see what you find — like me it will be prejudice, deceit, and bias. And like me, other fathers are abused by the system in spite of court orders, while non-custodial mothers abuse the system and remain free from contempt (as in my case) while "deadbeat dads" wind up jailed for lesser offenses.

I invite you to research my hell that you might be enlightened on this corrupt system.

Michael Williams
Heppner

Pendleton leaders have lack of vision

I was stunned when I read that the Pendleton City Council denied a group of businessmen time to come up with a plan to repurpose the Blue Mountain Recovery Center. I don't know any more about their idea than what I read in the paper, and clearly there would be some major hurdles to overcome in repurposing the building. I do know the McMenamin Brothers have been very successful in creating themed tourist attractions from old properties just like this.

I don't know if this group can come up with a plan that in the end will make sense or not, but I do know that once the building is gone, the opportunity is lost forever. The city council has thrown literally millions of taxpayer dollars away at failed or moribund projects with less merit than this, and to deny the group the opportunity to even put together a business plan is unbelievably short-sighted.

Mike Navratil
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

Confederacy myth and reality

By WILLIAM PERKINSON

To many readers, the Confederate flag is viewed as a symbol of racism, yet on occasion one sees it displayed outside of a museum, even in Oregon. In response to recent calls to eliminate its use, we have heard the refrain of "heritage not hate." Despite its heritage, the hatred represented by the Confederate flag is unmistakable and unacceptable.

Way down yonder where I was born, in a city that was the site of an epic siege ended by a crater caused by a Union bomb, just south of Dixie's capital, my childhood home was surrounded by Civil War memorials and museums, abandoned and undiscovered earthworks and artifacts and many, many Confederate flags. Dedicated and passionate historians regularly re-enact battles and retell war stories that took place in the area of what would become the strip mall and the barbecue restaurant in the neighboring town. No one has an accurate count of the number of this era's ghosts still haunting the South.

School field trips sometimes consisted of visiting these places throughout Virginia and learning about our state's rights against our nation's eventually successful preserving of the Union. Family reunions always included storytelling about my great-great-grandfather, who fought for the Confederate Army of North Carolina, a true tarheel. He was injured twice prior to later dying in the Battle of the Wilderness, a grisly event where one was lucky to be shot dead. The lives of those merely gravely injured over the four days of intense fighting were claimed when the thick, dry underbrush caught fire and consumed the entire area of battle.

One of his earlier battle injuries consisted of being shot in the chest, but the minié ball struck and lodged in the Bible he carried in his front shirt pocket, breaking his ribs but saving his life for a time — a fascinating story accompanied by the very Bible with the bullet still in it, which my grandmother displayed on her living room shelf.

My experience was not wholly unique. Many Southerners grew up hearing stories of predecessors' valor and bravery, and many Americans have been indoctrinated that the Civil War was primarily about states' rights under federalism, even today a very compelling legal theory. Dixie's flag has been romanticized by artists, sold as a toy and decorated the most famous orange Dodge Charger in history. You know the tune: Just a good ol' boy, never meanin' no harm.

In this context, many white Southerners associate the flag with sweet tea and family tree. Many white Americans have adopted it as a symbol of the right to rebel, to dissent, or to be free within a larger society. Each perspective is based on myth and revisionist history.

The cause of the Confederacy and the very states' right at issue was enslavement of human beings of a particular race. Perhaps the darkest time in our nation's past — the institutionalized and systematic abuse of African-Americans to economically benefit a select few of wealthy, white aristocrats — was and still is one of the worst human rights violations possible.

The cause of states' rights and tales of courage about one's ancestors diminish and conceal the South's sins that prompted the "war of Northern aggression."

Confederate leaders' true purpose can be viewed in their response to losing the war. By crafting new methods of racial oppression in the reconstruction era that later evolved into Jim Crow laws, Southern states' leaders managed to maintain legal subjugation of slave descendants for over a century. Allowing all children simply to attend school together had to be instituted by force. Fear was maintained through a campaign of terrorism by lynch mobs and the KKK, all the while waving the Confederate flag. The impact of these actions can still be seen and felt in the South and, frankly, throughout the U.S. in both social and legal contexts.

As a child I never deeply considered how my African-American classmates viewed these field trips and history lessons. As an adult, I cannot understand how they or their families endured the institutional elevation of this chapter of U.S. history and whitewashing its rationale.

Despite the treasonous vintage and subsequent adoption by hate groups, some states still incorporate the Confederate flag into their state flag. Some white Americans display the Confederate flag at their homes and on their vehicles, even in this state whose official seal bears the phrase "The Union." As a person that acknowledges both the heritage and the hate, I have often had a hard time determining what the person displaying a Confederate flag is trying to communicate.

The recent, racist-motivated mass shooting in Charleston was done under the banner of the stars and bars.

A symbol can mean many things to many people. My childhood experience permits me to recognize why some still defend the heritage represented by the Confederate flag, but the heritage of the flag cannot redeem it. As it exists today, the Confederate flag represents racism far more than it represents anything else.

Sparked by reflection on recent acts of racist, domestic terrorism in the South, many white Southerners, their African-American neighbors, and the rest of the U.S. are calling complete removal of the Confederate flag from use. Blind to most of U.S. history or harboring ulterior motives, some slow moving white Southerners are resisting the call. Regrettably, I am sure that we will still see it from time to time on our city streets.

Each Independence Day, we celebrate all Americans' freedom from oppression, yet some resist letting go of a symbol of the most insidious oppression in our nation's history, perpetuating its impact. It has long been time to bury the Confederate flag and to put to rest the ghosts of the era that it represents.

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William Perkinson is a lawyer in Pendleton.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.