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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat;
kick in the pants

On the Wednesday agenda of the Umatilla County Commissioners meeting for a "construction update," EOTEC board members somehow came away with \$600,000 without ever having to give that pesky update.

Commissioners Larry Givens and Bill Elfering's votes to award the money — against the advice of county staff and without asking a single question of the EOTEC and Umatilla County Fair board members — was a questionable use of funds given to the county for economic development, as well as funds set aside for maintenance and operations of the facility.

Certainly, the county has a lot to gain by getting rid of the old, obsolete fairgrounds and trading up to a newer facility south of Hermiston. But the county has a lot to lose, too. And commissioners should be questioning why they were petitioned to contribute to a \$2.2 million last-minute ask for a project that has been in the works for years and well short of its fundraising goals the whole time.

EOTEC fair board member Don Miller said that without the county's \$600,000, the authority is in jeopardy of not being ready in 2017 — the absolutely must-move date.

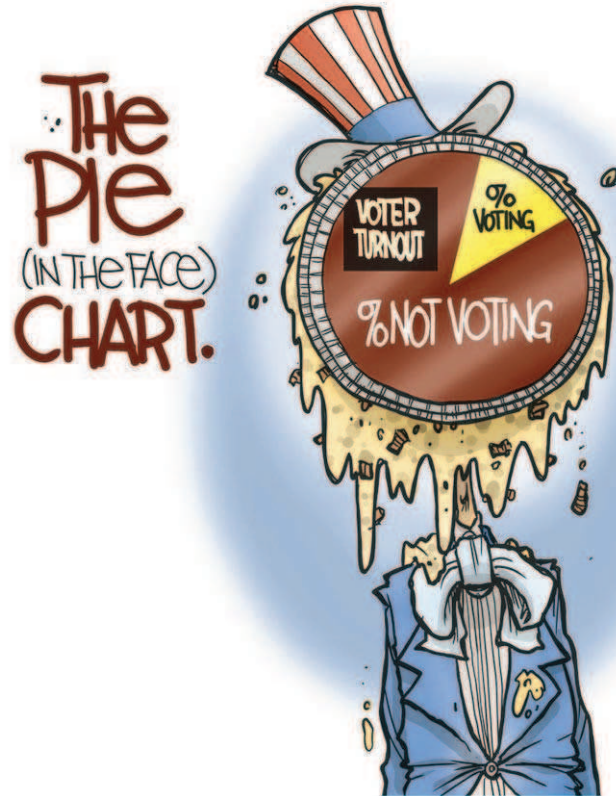
"If we don't continue to move forward, we have no place, no access, no ability (to host the fair and rodeo in 2017)," he said.

The next question is pretty obvious: Why? No one asked it. Nor the dozens of other questions that still need to be answered.

Clearly, everyone in Umatilla County thinks EOTEC is important, everyone thinks it's a great idea and everyone thinks a multi-million dollar building is going to be good for developing south Hermiston.

But everyone is not of the same mind on how construction is progressing at the site, if the design is dialed in, the planning was precise and the scope is apropos. At the very least, commissioners should have asked EOTEC authority to make the case on all of the above, like the Hermiston City Council did just a week prior.

George Murdock refused to vote, saying he was not prepared to make a decision on the matter. Givens and Elfering just handed over a check — not knowing if they had the funds to cover it, nor where those funds would come from. They deserve a kick in the pants for it.



JOHN COLE
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SEASIDE, OREGON

OTHER VIEWS

GOP campaigns ponder if it's safe to attack Ben Carson

Even before Ben Carson shot to the lead of the Republican presidential race in Iowa, rival campaigns from Donald Trump down began grappling with the question: How to defeat the genial, soft-spoken, African-American brain surgeon who has quietly captured the imagination of so many GOP voters?

The answer: very carefully. "I don't think we run against Carson," said a strategist for a GOP campaign recently. "He's just so well-liked that it is tough." The problem, of course, is that if Carson remains atop the polls in Iowa, and sits in a solid second place in the national polls, other candidates will likely feel compelled to go after him.

And it's not just because that's the way campaigns work. It's because rival operatives see Carson as ultimately vulnerable. As much as they respect Carson as a human being, and are awed by his record of medical achievement, many rival operatives firmly believe Carson knows next to nothing when it comes to governing.

"The lack of knowledge Carson has is staggering," said the strategist. "Where are his voters going to go when people realize that Carson doesn't know anything about policy?"

With any other candidate, competitors might pounce now. But not with Ben Carson. For three reasons.

The first is likability. Carson's personal favorability ratings with Republican voters are through the roof, easily the best in the field. Whoever attacks him would by definition have a lower favorability rating than Carson, and the fear is that such an attack would just drive the attacker's rating lower and Carson's higher.

The second is fairness. Carson hasn't gone after his fellow candidates. Indeed, part of his appeal is that he has specifically eschewed Republican-on-Republican violence.

"I really refuse to really get into the mud pit," Carson said on Fox News recently. Voters respond well to that, even if they also sometimes reward candidate attacks. So far, at least, Carson has particularly impressed those voters who want to see Republicans attack Democrats, and not each other.

The third reason is race, and it is by far the most complicated. Carson is the only black candidate in the contest. Republican voters admire his rise-from-poverty life story, and Carson represents a chance for the GOP to connect with black voters in a way the party hasn't done in generations.

Perhaps more importantly, in the years of Barack Obama's presidency, many Republican



BYRON YORK
Comment

voters have deeply resented the accusation from the left that they oppose the president because of his race; they are intensely frustrated by what they view as Democrats repeatedly playing the race card against them. To those Republicans, supporting Carson is proof that the slanders aren't true: Here's a black candidate who shares our beliefs, and we support him wholeheartedly.

In addition, Carson offers Republican voters a broader sort of absolution on race. In the first GOP debate, in Cleveland in August, Carson made a statement on race that has since become wildly popular with Republicans, shared millions of times on social media: "When I take someone to the operating room, I'm actually operating on the thing that makes them who they are," Carson said.

Many Republicans are grateful to Carson for relieving them of the burden of all those accumulated accusations of racism.

"The skin doesn't make them who they are. The hair doesn't make them who they are. And it's time for us to move beyond that. Because our strength as a nation comes in our unity."

After the debate, pollster Frank Luntz conducted a focus group of Republican voters and was struck by the off-the-scale positive response to Carson's remarks.

"Ben Carson represents a powerful vehicle for conservatives to be able to say out loud — I am a conservative, and that does not make me a racist," Luntz said. "When Carson said in the first debate that he doesn't see ethnicity in his patients, our focus group dials shot through the roof. 'Finally!' several participants said. 'Finally we have a credible conservative who thinks like we do, and you can't use the race card against him.'"

So beyond agreeing with him on issues, or admiring his personal story, many Republicans are grateful to Ben Carson for relieving them of the burden of all those accumulated accusations of racism. That's a big deal.

Which is why rival campaigns almost instinctively sense that they should tread lightly with Carson. "I'm not sure I have the best answer for it," says another strategist with another GOP campaign when asked how to deal with Carson. The hope in his camp is that Carson will begin to attract the normal, heightened scrutiny that comes with leading a race, even if it's just in one state.

So Republican candidates have a Ben Carson problem. He's ahead of most of them. They want to win. But how do they defeat him without offending the voters who admire him? No one has yet found the answer.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

YOUR VIEWS

Oregon commercial fishing changing, but still strong

The Daily Astorian/EO Media Group

For fishing communities, NOAA Fisheries' annual publication about commercial landings makes for great reading — in much the way farmers enjoy the crop report.

Make no bones about it: Irrespective of decades of impressive economic diversification, the Lower Columbia and nearby places like Garibaldi, Willapa Bay and Westport, Wash., are fishing communities in essential cultural and monetary senses.

Our story last week focused on the horse race between Astoria and Newport for top West Coast fishing port — Newport edged us out in poundage in this latest tally — but there is much else to be gleaned from "Fisheries of the United States 2014." (www.tinyurl.com/2014FishReport)

Here are a few eye-catching items and our reaction to them:

- Estimated U.S. per capita consumption of fish and shellfish was 14.6 pounds of edible meat in 2014, up from 14.5 pounds in 2013. It is safe to guess that some in our area eat several times this amount.
Nationwide, U.S. fishermen landed 9.5 billion pounds valued at \$5.4 billion in 2014. This was a decrease of 394 million pounds and \$43 million from 2013, but the average ex-vessel price paid increased 57 cents a pound, compared to 55 cents a year earlier. Normal economic theory suggests that higher prices go hand in hand with a diminishing supply.
Oysters — which play an enormous role in Washington's Pacific County's

economy — are on a sharp upward trend in terms of price. The average price was \$7.04 in 2014, up from \$4.85 the year before. Overall, the U.S. produced 34.1 million pounds valued at \$240.3 million. Gulf states produced 16.4 million pounds, the West Coast 10.6 million and Middle Atlantic states 5.3 million. Washington state alone produced 9.1 million pounds, 86 percent of the West's total.

Shrimp are surprisingly large factor in West Coast fisheries. Oregon landed 51.7 million pounds (up 9 percent) and Washington 31.4 million pound (up over 120 percent).

Dungeness crab are amazingly lucrative but 2014 was an off year. Landings were 54.5 million pounds valued at \$209.5 million, a 38 percent decrease in poundage and 17 percent decrease in dollars from 2013.

Washington leads, with 19.3 million pounds and 35 percent of landings, followed by California (18 million pounds, 33 percent) and Oregon (11.9 million pounds, 21.8 percent). The average ex-vessel price was \$3.84 in 2014, way up from \$2.88 in 2013

Salmon, once the foundation of the Lower Columbia economy, are now pretty tiny here in a commercial sense. Alaska accounted for 95 percent of 2014 landings, Washington nearly 4 percent. Oregon, California and the Great Lakes combined for the remaining 1 percent. Even so, 2014 was a comparatively good year for Oregon salmon, up 82 percent in poundage and 62 percent in value.

This all is much to discuss and wonder over for old fishermen gathering for strong black coffee.

LETTERS POLICY

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YOUR VIEWS

Reason for voting down tax was to protest city government

There was an EO editorial published Thursday with this statement as to why the gas tax was resoundingly defeated: "The reason that nearly two out of every three voters were against is not quite clear."

I beg to differ. It is very clear. This issue was much more than a 5 cent increase on a gallon of gasoline. This election was a mandate by the people to criticize the performance of its city's leaders.

The East Oregonian evaluated the city's decision to subsidize Makad's \$45 million data center. This project "includes an immediate expense of \$300,000 to install water and sewer connections to the proposed site" despite the company's shady record for its performance.

Let's consider another decision that impacts the city's ability to maintain its streets. This information was published in the EO on June 3, 2014. In return for matching funds from the county, the city agreed to proceed with the Eighth St. Bridge project and to maintain 10.6 miles of county roads.

The city can't even patch potholes in the city. How can it maintain another 10.6 miles of roads?

Here is a headline from the EO that

illustrates what the modus operandi is for the city's capital projects: "Pendleton to borrow \$700k from sewer fund." This expenditure was to finance the road and utility infrastructure of the Olney Housing project.

The city's practice of using interagency loans to finance pet projects has been so common that the EO had this headline on February 6, 2014: "Pendleton audit clean, but not without issues." When Dickey and Tremper performed its annual audit, Rob Tremper had this to say: "The largest issue may be the number of inter-fund loans the city carries over from year to year." More importantly, "The firm recommended the city figure out how to cease operating at a deficit and begin repayment of the large loan balance."

Now, the city wants to spend matching funds for radar for the airport. The airport has lost millions of dollars year after year and resulted in the city taking \$650,000 from the library budget to try to put a finger in the dike.

Then, Chrisman said this today, "UAS Range has yet to sign its first customer." The city has spent over \$500,000 on the project.

I've just scratched the surface. Time for a recall and continue the momentum of the gas tax defeat.

Jerry Cronin
Pendleton