

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Rating presidents requires a mirror

We take Presidents Day for granted, but it is one of those customs that sets America apart among Western democracies.

The British, for instance, do not take a day off to mark the birthday of its remarkable prime ministers such as Melbourne, Disraeli or Gladstone. Nor do the French take a holiday to remember Charles de Gaulle.

Today's holiday has its roots in George Washington's Feb. 22 birthday, which Congress in 1879 marked with a holiday. A subsequent Congress marked Lincoln's birthday. When Congress in 1968 moved all federal holidays to Mondays, this became Presidents Day.

Marking the first president's birthday was born of an era in which the memory of George Washington was nurtured and venerated. Washington's restraint — resigning his officer's commission before becoming president and leaving the presidency after two terms — was the essence of how he built our nation, says the historian Garry Wills in the book *Cincinnatus*.

Lincoln was deified for his heroic labor in saving the Union. The late Oregon Sen. Mark Hatfield said: "Clearly no other individual could have brought so much good out of the seemingly infinite seas of madness and blood with which he was forced to deal."

Americans in 2014 are a far more cynical population than those who sanctified Washington's memory. Could contemporary Americans venerate anything?

With or without emotion, we do reassess our presidents as the decades roll past. It's a bit like a person who gains new insight into his parents,

years after their passing.

In other words, presidential evaluation is like looking in a mirror.

Americans who are middle aged and beyond have seen the assessment of two presidents — Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower — rise dramatically.

President John F. Kennedy's is being reassessed. JFK is an especially elusive president. In *The New York Review of Books*, Frank Rich wrote: "... as those of us who lived through the 1960s die off — and as the passions of those culture wars, like those of the cold war, continue to erode in a post-boomer America — so too will Camelot's mythological status as a brief, shining moment before all hell broke loose."

Without the distraction of the Camelot myth, Rich concludes, Kennedy will "at long last (be) in actual human and historical scale."

We are now living in the presidency of a man whose meaning will be reassessed several times as the 21st century heads toward middle age. In 2016 Obama is a polarizing figure, in no small part because of his race. Because he is the first nonwhite president, historians will always find him and his presidency significant.

In our day, it is impossible to guess at what Americans 50 years hence will make of Obama. Will they notice the economic plummet that preceded his first oath of office? The ending of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars? Or will the intrusion on Americans' privacy by the National Security Agency loom large decades hence?

By the end of this century, how many other nonwhite presidents will there be? And how many women will have been president?

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

John Turner for mayor

We're fortunate to have someone of this caliber and credibility willing to step forward and run for mayor. John is a "can do" guy who operates with a sense of urgency and is well suited to lead the city through some of the challenges we face.

Mike Short
Pendleton

I am extremely excited to see John Turner run for the office of mayor of Pendleton.

I have known John for the past 12 years. John is a man of passion for his community and a natural born leader. His integrity and work ethic are above and beyond reproach. He is a master of human relations skills as demonstrated in his military career, Blue Mountain Community College, Rotary, Roundup City Development Corporation and many others too numerous to mention.

Please join me in supporting John Turner for Pendleton's next mayor.

Thomas A Young
Pendleton City Council, Ward III

Check Plute's tax record

Al Plute is quick to tell us about all the money necessary to fund various city of Pendleton projects and departments. He is first to explain why new fees and taxes are a necessary burden to be shared by the citizens.

A large portion of city, county and school district funds come from property taxes. A search of Umatilla County tax records shows Mr. Plute has neglected to pay his "fair share." As of Feb. 9, 2016, he or his various LLCs have not paid property taxes on several properties, including the Bowman and Temple (St. George) buildings. Some of the properties are four years in arrears.

A person who is in a position of deciding if new fees and taxes are to be levied on the citizenry should first pay his own.

This is another concern as to his qualification to be a councilor.

James Humphrey
Pendleton

Science above consensus on salmon recovery

The February 6 *East Oregonian* editorial opinion against defunding salmon and steelhead hatcheries and scolding the pending lawsuit might be short-sighted.

Further research of current fisheries science would reveal that artificial

propagation of salmon and steelhead actually impedes repopulating our rivers with self-sustaining fish runs. Some hatchery raised juveniles return from the ocean, but they lack the genetic diversity and stamina to re-establish self-sustaining runs. However, the hatchery jump-started fish out-compete natural born juveniles, which do have the diversity to build self-sustaining runs. Hatchery fish provide a short-term fishery, but once started, require annual and costly hatchery supplementation to maintain a fishery.

Independent audits verify that returning hatchery origin fish often cost taxpayers and power rate payers more than \$500 per returning adult. Combining the unbelievable high cost of hatchery operations with the fact that the fish they release contribute to the decline of wild fish runs, it appears that it would be prudent to consider alternatives to hatchery supplementation for salmon and steelhead.

Continuing hatcheries because they are a "vital lifeline for the economies of many communities" seems like an argument to fund hatcheries regardless of their effectiveness. It may be that shifting from hatcheries to more river restoration to create larger "natural hatcheries," would be a reasonable transition that provides better results at a lower cost.

The editorial reported that "killing hatchery funding would also mean loss of tens of millions of funding dollars for conservation and recovery." Fish recovery resources fund both hatcheries and restoration. Reducing the hatchery funding component could free up fish recovery resources for in-stream improvements that increase natural reproduction of salmon and steelhead.

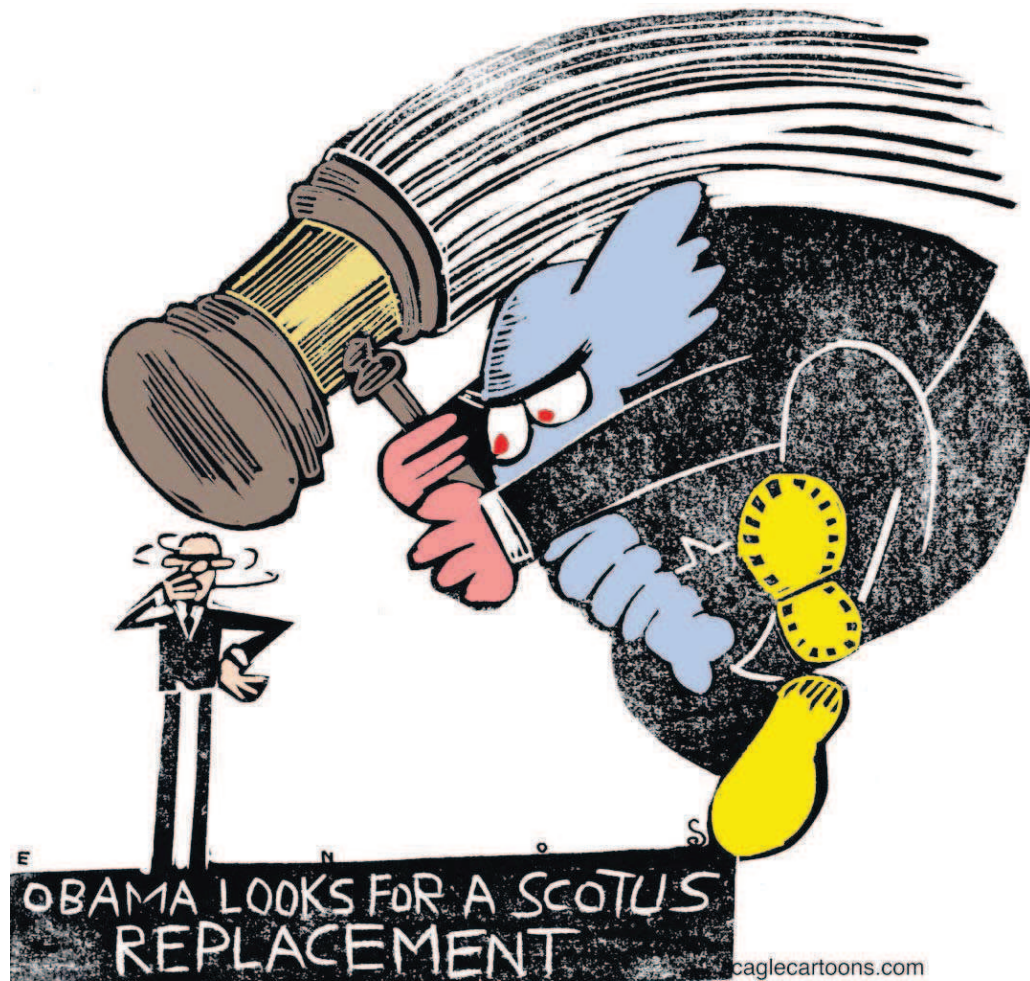
Tax and rate payers have provided hundreds of millions and maybe over a billion dollars for river restoration and habitat improvement. Shifting salmon and steelhead propagation from hatchery propagation to natural propagation in our restored river systems appears reasonable. However, competition with hatchery fish has to be reduced or eliminated to assure success.

The February 6 editorial concludes with "communities should demand science and consensus-driven management practices." However, science should probably have more weight than consensus, if consensus is heavily influenced by vested interests.

Hopefully, the *East Oregonian* will continue in-depth reporting on this issue.

Patrick Dunham
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS



How America was lost

Once upon a time, the death of a Supreme Court justice wouldn't have brought America to the edge of constitutional crisis. But that was a different country, with a very different Republican Party. In today's America, with today's GOP, the passing of Antonin Scalia has opened the doors to chaos.

In principle, losing a justice should cause at most a mild disturbance in the national scene. After all, the court is supposed to be above politics. So when a vacancy appears, the president should simply nominate, and the Senate approve, someone highly qualified and respected by all.

In reality, of course, things were never that pure. Justices have always had known political leanings, and the process of nomination and approval has often been contentious. Still, there was nothing like the situation we face now, in which Republicans have more or less unanimously declared that President Barack Obama has no right even to nominate a replacement for Scalia — and no, the fact that Obama will leave soon doesn't make it OK. (Justice Anthony Kennedy was appointed during Ronald Reagan's last year in office).

Nor were the consequences of a court vacancy as troubling in the past as they are now. As everyone is pointing out, without Scalia the justices are evenly divided between Republican and Democratic appointees — which probably means a hung court on many issues.

And there's no telling how long that situation may last. If a Democrat wins the White House but the GOP holds the Senate, when if ever do you think Republicans would be willing to confirm anyone the new president nominates?

How did we get into this mess?

At one level the answer is the ever-widening partisan divide. Polarization has measurably increased in every aspect of American politics, from congressional voting to public opinion, with an especially dramatic rise in "negative partisanship" — distrust of and disdain for the other side. And the Supreme Court is no different. As recently as the 1970s the court had several "swing" members, whose votes weren't always predictable from partisan positions, but that center now consists only of Kennedy, and only some of the time.

But simply pointing to rising partisanship as the source of our crisis, while not exactly wrong, can be deeply misleading. First, decrying partisanship can make it seem as if we're just talking about bad manners, when we're really looking at huge differences on substance. Second, it's really important not to engage in false symmetry: Only one of our two major political parties has gone off the



PAUL KRUGMAN
Comment

deep end.

On the substantive divide between the parties: I still encounter people on the left (although never on the right) who claim that there's no big difference between Republicans and Democrats, or at any rate "establishment" Democrats. But that's nonsense. Even if you're disappointed in what Obama accomplished, he substantially raised taxes on the rich and dramatically expanded the social safety net; significantly tightened

financial regulation; encouraged and oversaw a surge in renewable energy; moved forward on diplomacy with Iran.

Any Republican would undo all of that, and move sharply in the opposite direction. If anything, the consensus among the presidential candidates seems to be that George W. Bush didn't cut taxes on the rich nearly enough, and should have made more use of torture.

When we talk about partisanship, then, we're not talking about arbitrary teams, we're talking about a deep divide on values and policy. How can anyone not be "partisan" in the sense of preferring one of these visions?

And it's up to you to decide which version you prefer. So why do I say that only one party has gone off the deep end?

One answer is, compare last week's Democratic debate with Saturday's Republican debate. Need I say more?

Beyond that, there are huge differences in tactics and attitudes. Democrats never tried to extort concessions by threatening to cut off U.S. borrowing and create a financial crisis; Republicans did. Democrats don't routinely deny the legitimacy of presidents from the other party; Republicans did it to both Bill Clinton and Obama. The GOP's new Supreme Court blockade is, fundamentally, in a direct line of descent from the days when Republicans used to call Clinton "your president."

So how does this get resolved? One answer could be a Republican sweep — although you have to ask, did the men on that stage Saturday convey the impression of a party that's ready to govern? Or maybe you believe — based on no evidence I'm aware of — that a populist rising from the left is ready to happen any day now. But if divided government persists, it's really hard to see how we avoid growing chaos.

Maybe we should all start wearing baseball caps that say, "Make America governable again."

Paul Krugman joined The New York Times in 1999 as a columnist on the Op-Ed Page and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

OTHER VIEWS

Obama's budget further expands government control

The Orange County Register, Feb. 10

When President Obama submitted his proposed budget one year ago, he claimed that he wanted to do away with the "mindless austerity" of the sequestration, which had provided some measure of limitation on government spending. Then in December, aided and abetted by a Republican-controlled Congress, he eradicated those minor restrictions and replaced mindless austerity with clueless profligacy.

Now he puts forth a budget for the 2017 fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1, that calls for \$4.15 trillion in spending, a \$223 billion increase over the current year's budget. His proposal, curiously released while all eyes are focused on the New Hampshire primary, spans more than 2,300 pages, which, in itself, serves as a testament to the federal government's bloat and overreach.

The president's budget contains \$3 trillion in proposed tax increases over the next 10 years, according to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget. The most controversial of these is a \$10.25-per-barrel oil tax, which would be used to fund "clean" transit projects

and low-carbon technologies such a self-driving cars, which the private sector is already rapidly developing. With oil prices currently hovering around \$30 a barrel, that is a roughly 35 percent tax, which experts project would translate to a price hike of about 25 cents per gallon at the pump. Fortunately, this is a nonstarter for congressional Republicans.

The president's budget message reads like his State of the Union addresses, espousing his wish list, from "green energy" subsidies to universal preschool to high-speed rail and increased transit funding to \$4 billion for a K-12 computer science program to two years of "free" community college to apprenticeship programs to "encouraging" state paid leave policies — none of which is the province of federal, state and local governments.

President Obama's budget would, once again, expand government control over our lives and further burden current and future generations with debt. It is understandable that a lame-duck president with a somewhat hostile Congress would advance a budget sprinkled with fairy dust, but Mr. Obama's proposal should not be taken seriously with regard to fiscal responsibility.