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OUR VIEW

The right to review

Here in Umatilla County, we've got weak mayors — and that's no disrespect to Phillip Houk, David Drotzmann or the other elected leaders of our towns. It's by design.

The city charters call for a mayor to be elected and paid a small stipend for their service, which can entail as little as a couple of meetings a month. In Pendleton and Hermiston the mayor's official duties during the council meetings include keeping everyone on the agenda and casting a vote in the case of a tie — a rare occurrence in both towns.

Outside of council chambers, however, they are the embodiment of the city they represent, cheering the town at events, meeting with dignitaries from other governments, businesses and interests and speaking on behalf of their city in other public forums.

The day-to-day operation of the city is left to the city manager, a paid position that serves at the pleasure of the council and mayor and oversees the city's various departments and operations. The city manager's performance is reviewed annually by the elected representatives.

The short arithmetic is that the annual review is the voice of the people evaluating the city's highest paid employee. The council and mayor are then evaluated directly by voters every four years if they choose to run for re-election.

There are pros and cons to having an indirect link between the voters and the person at the full-time controls of a city. But the system only works if the city manager is treated with the same level of scrutiny as a candidate making a case for re-election.

That means the voters must know what their voice is saying in these evaluations, down to the specific criticism and commentary. And if the commentary doesn't match the

public's sentiment, the voice can be changed.

The East Oregonian spent six months of this year arguing the public's right to know what the Pendleton councilors and mayor had to say about City Manager Robb Corbett in his annual review. The initial request was denied, but after taking the request to the district

attorney's office we finally got to view the evaluation.

There were few surprises, and in our estimation the council gave Corbett a fair review — he's a steady hand who doesn't like to ruffle feathers, even though sometimes it's necessary to ruffle feathers. His strengths outnumber his weaknesses, and he should strive to

develop better communication with the people of Pendleton. And we agree with the council that he has made progress on that front.

Most likely based on the DA's ruling, the city of Hermiston quickly turned over Byron Smith's review when it was requested, just a week after it was given in August. Smith has been in Hermiston for two years now and was roundly praised for his accomplishments in that time, while being directed to focus on the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center, the new senior center and several other priorities in the coming year.

These are the kinds of things the public needs to hear. And while Corbett and Smith surely hear regular criticism — constructive and otherwise — from the citizenry, it only carries real weight if their bosses on the council reiterate it.

While the city council and mayor are paid a pittance for the responsibility they bear in leading their towns, their words in this valuable annual exercise of evaluation are as important as their votes in the council chambers.

The annual city manager review by the city council is the voice of the people evaluating the city's highest paid employee.

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.

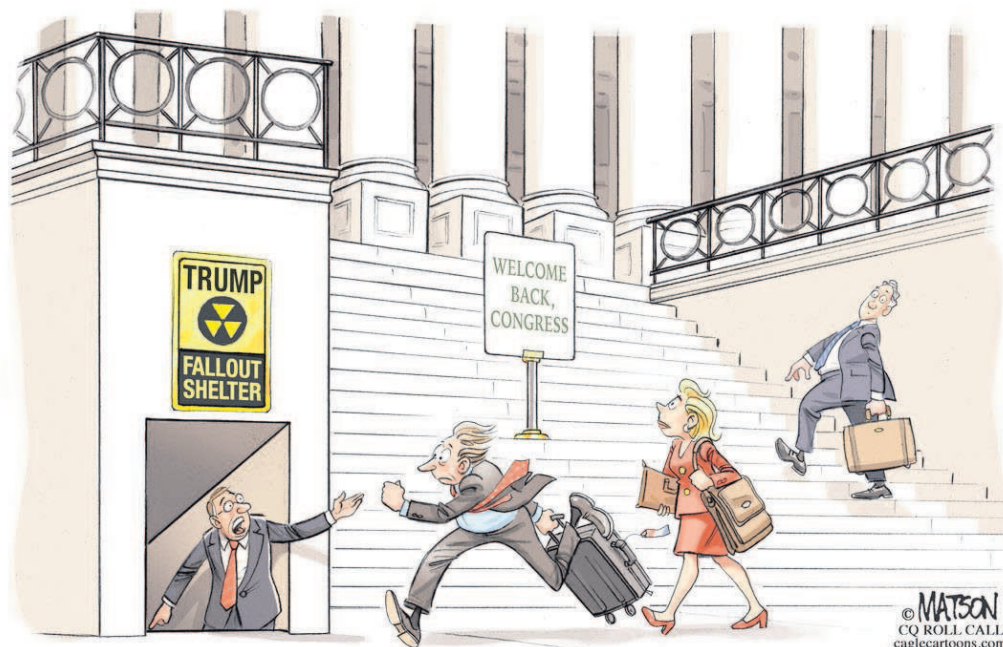
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"QUICK! DOWN HERE!! UNTIL THE ELECTION BLOWS OVER..."

OTHER VIEWS

Incredible shrinking Obamacare

During the debate over Obamacare, both supporters and opponents assumed the giant law would transform the American health care system. The supporters argued that the system would help Americans purchase health insurance through carefully regulated state exchanges. President Barack Obama envisioned a day when consumers could shop for health coverage "the same way you'd shop for a plane ticket on Kayak or a TV on Amazon."

In 2010, the Congressional Budget Office estimated there would be 21 million Americans using the exchanges by now. Many supporters argued that the exchanges would eventually replace the current dominant employer-based system. The promise of Obamacare was that it would foster competition and offer lower premiums while covering tens of millions of Americans without, as Obama often put it, adding a dime to the deficit.

Unfortunately, most of the exchanges are in serious trouble. As many critics pointed out at the time, the law is poorly designed to induce younger, healthier people to get into the system. The penalties attached to the individual mandate are too weak. The subsidies are too small. The premiums are too costly. The deductibles are too high. Many doctors aren't participating in the networks.

Only about 12 million people are in exchanges. More important, the exchanges are attracting sicker, poorer people, who drain money, and are not attracting the healthier people who pour money in.

Many insurers are suffering catastrophic losses and pulling out. As James Capretta of the American Enterprise Institute has noted, Aetna has lost \$430 million since January 2014 on insurance plans sold through Obamacare and is withdrawing from 11 of its 15 states. United Healthcare has lost \$1.3 billion on the exchanges and will cut its participation to three states from 34.

That means less coverage: 24 million Americans still lack health insurance. That means less competition. Before too long, a third of the exchanges will have just one insurer in them. That also means higher premiums. Blue Cross Blue Shield has requested a 62 percent increase for next year in Tennessee and an average 65 percent increase in Arizona. Some experts put the national requested increase at 23 percent.

The exchanges are also producing less coverage. The insurers that are staying offer pared-down restrictive plans that look more like Medicaid.

Does this mean Obamacare is failing? No. The law has produced many positive outcomes across the health care world. More than 20 million more Americans have coverage because of it, and the evidence



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

suggests their health has improved. But it does mean Obamacare is not what we thought it would be. It's a much more modest add-on to the pre-existing system. Sarah Kliff put it well in Vox: "Obamacare's insurance expansion is on the path to looking like other safety net programs we know, offering limited services to a predominantly low-income population."

Kliff quotes former administration official Michael Adelberg: "The exchange population — 85 percent of which qualifies for financial assistance — looks a lot like the Medicaid population. And with it, we're seeing the start of the Medicaid-ization of exchange plans: narrow networks with no frills."

Again, this is not bad. But we'd have had a very different debate if we knew the law was going to be a discrete government effort to subsidize health care for more poor people. For one thing, Democrats would have probably paid a much

smaller political price if their effort wasn't billed as an extravagant government grab to take over the nation's health care system. The administration imagined something transformational; it ended up with something significant but incremental.

There are also lessons for people who think about policymaking. First, designing technocratic systems that will actually work is really hard. Second, designing effective technocratic systems that can pass politically is really, really hard. Third, designing politically plausible technocratic systems in a country divided on fundamental philosophy is hardness on stilts.

Philosophically, Obamacare tried to split the difference between European-style government coercion (the individual mandates) with a traditionally American respect for competition and freedom of choice (the exchanges).

But lawmakers couldn't stomach a law involving forceful coercion (punishing penalties to make the young take part) and they couldn't stomach a more purely market-based system. They wound up with a nonfunctioning compromise.

From here on out the health care debate will return, but in polarized form. Democrats are already really pushing for the public option, a heavier state player. Republicans are pointing out that technocrats are bad at designing dynamic systems and the insurance markets should work more like traditional markets. The next president will have to deal with all this, especially if the exchanges go into a death spiral, even though the subject has been basically ignored in the campaign.

It will be hard to govern after a campaign about nothing.

David Brooks's column on the Op-Ed page of The New York Times started in September 2003.

The administration imagined something transformational; it ended up with something significant but incremental.

YOUR VIEWS

Trump listening to the witch doctors

Letter writer Stuart Dick's premise that this election is about globalism vs. the American people is an imaginative but unpersuasive reading of the signs of the times. Is he bewitched?

When Donald Trump asked the witch doctors "What's your prescription to make America great again?" they prescribed a large dose of fear to generate a huge vote of hate. They identified America's most pressing problem as over-population due to illegal immigration and a timid foreign policy. Their proposed solution was to build a border wall and make Mexico pay for it, deport illegals, and kill more in war. Send our young people to die in never-ending wars against dark-skinned foreigners. Build more bombs not bridges! Torture terrorists! Gin up hate!

Donald took great delight in that advice. To gin up hate Donald calls all political opponents names

and says Hillary is guilty of caring about dark-skinned people and of being corrupt. In fact, Donald says Hillary is "the most corrupt candidate ever." Can anyone name even one corruption conviction for Hillary? Without hard evidence that could prevail in a Supreme Court decision, allegations and accusations of corruption and criminal activity are not persuasive because they deny the foundation of our legal system: that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty!

In America, legal indictments require proof of legal wrongdoing. Who knows our legal system better than our top law-enforcement agency, the FBI? They examined the evidence against Hillary in her so-called email scandal and recommended against indictment. Yet arrogant political opponents and media pundits without law degrees continue to promote the false narrative that anyone other than Hillary would have been indicted and convicted. Evidence means nothing to partisans,

paranoids and haters.

Millions continue to cheer the witch doctors' prescription. Millions more weep! While demagogue Donald daily sows seeds of hate and division, the witch doctors are convulsed with demonic laughter.

Tom Driscoll
Poulsbo, Wash.

Request for clemency for Hammonds

Dwight and Steven Hammond are the Oregon ranchers serving five years in a federal prison for fires that burned some 140 acres of BLM land.

Steven is 46 and a father. Dwight is 74 and a father and grandfather. Additionally, the Hammond family has paid \$400,000 to the BLM in a separate settlement with regards to these fires.

They were convicted as terrorists. This is just wrong. How can you prosecute people as terrorists when they aren't

terrorists? These men are family men, Americans, and ranchers. They are making a home and living off the land they own. They are manufacturing food to feed others.

Here is what they were found guilty of: In 2001 a prescribed weed burn got away from them and accidentally burned 139 acres of BLM adjacent to their property. In 2006 there was a raging wild fire, caused by lightning, that was threatening their ranch/homes, and winter feed. They lit a "back fire," which spread to BLM land and burned one acre.

Judge Michael Hogan said the five years was "grossly

disproportionate" to the crime. Mr. Ward, range conservationist, reported that the 2001 fire "improved the rangeland conditions on BLM." BLM employee Mr. Maupin reports numerous times the BLM has lit fires that jumped to private land. No compensation to the ranchers for burned/lost cattle, feed, structures, etc., was ever paid.

The president may grant pardon for federal crimes under Article II, Section 2 of the US Constitution. I URGE you to please ask President Obama to do this. Surely they have been punished enough.

Karen Wilde
Arlington

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.