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OUR VIEW

OSAA should imagine there's no borders

Each time the Oregon School Activities Association looks to reclassify the state's schools, Eastern Oregon has the most at stake.

Our schools are spread out under big skies, split apart by wheat fields and mountain ranges. Where the Portland metro area has dozens of schools of all different sizes, you must scour tens of thousands of square miles in the rural parts of the state to find enough like-sized schools to create a balanced conference. And the largest two of those northeastern Oregon groupings, the 5A Columbia River Conference and 4A Greater Oregon League, consist of just four teams each.

Hermiston in particular is caught in a difficult spot, with growth outpacing all other nearby districts and pushing them into the largest classification in the state.

Because of this, the OSAA is considering putting Hermiston into a newly-formed Mt. Hood Conference with Portland-area schools or an Inter County Conference with a mix of Portland and Bend-area schools.

On paper, the leagues make sense. Unless that paper is a map.

Size-wise, Hermiston fits nicely with schools like Gresham, Centennial, Bend and Barlow and is athletically competitive with all of them. The OSAA has posted its league suggestions on its website and the chart shows leagues with both balance and depth.

But if you start adding up the miles (and hours) it would take to compete in such a league, the competitive balance starts to matter a lot less.

Each season, each Hermiston team would spend the equivalent of a bus trip from Portland to Detroit, Michigan for league games alone, according to calculations from Hermiston athletic director Larry Usher.

Remember that we're talking about student-athletes, most of

whom will rely on academic scholarships and not athletic ones once high school is over. It's hard to justify so much time on the road.

There are two good options, in our view.

The first is a classification waiver, allowing Hermiston to stay with Pendleton, The Dalles and

Hood River in a league moving forward. Sure, the Dawgs will increasingly be the big dogs in such a conference, and competitive balance will be lost for the sake of classroom hours and cost savings. But in our view, that's more than a reasonable trade off.

Each season, each Hermiston team would spend the equivalent of a bus trip from Portland to Detroit, Michigan — for league games alone.

The second is a partnership with the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association, allowing Hermiston to slide into a sixth spot with Tri-Cities and Walla Walla schools in the Mid-Columbia Conference. This idea, proposed by Hermiston, could rightfully be considered a long shot. Washington schools would get little out of bringing Hermiston on board, and the Tri-Cities schools would be adding miles to their own schedules.

Logistically, though, it makes great sense for Hermiston and is worth vigorously pursuing. The teams often play in non-conference games anyway, and the case could be made that adding Hermiston strengthens the league.

There would be some hiccups. Washington schools play soccer in the spring instead of the fall, for instance. And closing out the regular football season against anyone other than Pendleton would just feel wrong.

But Hermiston's growing pains aren't going away. Until the school district splits the high school in two — which is still more than a few years away — it will never fit well in any Eastern Oregon athletic conference.

Thinking outside the box — and state lines — is the best way to balance academics and athletics.

OTHER VIEWS

What a failed Trump Administration looks like

I still have trouble seeing how the Trump administration survives a full term. Judging by his Thursday press conference, President Donald Trump's mental state is like a train that long ago left freewheeling and iconoclastic, has raced through indulgent, chaotic and unnerving, and is now careening past unhinged, unmoored and unglued.

Trump's White House staff is at war with itself. His poll ratings are falling at unprecedented speed. His policy agenda is stalled. FBI investigations are just beginning. This does not feel like a sustainable operation.

On the other hand, I have trouble seeing exactly how this administration ends. Many of the institutions that would normally ease out or remove a failing president no longer exist.

There are no longer moral arbiters in Congress like Howard Baker and Sam Ervin to lead a resignation or impeachment process. There is no longer a single media establishment that shapes how the country sees the president. This is no longer a country in which everybody experiences the same reality.

Everything about Trump that appalls 65 percent of America strengthens him with the other 35 percent, and he can ride that group for a while. Even after these horrible four weeks, Republicans on Capitol Hill are not close to abandoning their man.

The likelihood is this: We're going to have an administration that has morally and politically collapsed, without actually going away.

What does that look like?

First, it means an administration that is passive, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. To get anything done, a president depends on the vast machinery of the U.S. government. But Trump doesn't mesh with that machinery. He is personality-based while it is rule-based. Furthermore, he's declared war on it. And when you declare war on the establishment, it declares war on you.

The Civil Service has a thousand ways to ignore or sit on any presidential order. The court system has given itself carte blanche to overturn any Trump initiative, even on the flimsiest legal grounds. The intelligence community has only just begun to undermine this president.

Trump can push all the pretty buttons on the command deck of the Starship Enterprise, but don't expect anything to actually happen, because they are not attached.

Second, this will probably become a more insular administration. Usually when administrations stumble, they fire a few people and bring in the grown-ups — the James Baker or the David Gergen types. But Trump is anti-grown-up, so it's hard to imagine Chief of Staff Haley Barbour. Instead, the circle of trust

seems to be shrinking to his daughter, her husband and Stephen Bannon.

Bannon has a coherent worldview, which is a huge advantage when all is chaos. It's interesting how many of Bannon's rivals have woken up with knives in their backs. Michael Flynn is gone. Reince Priebus has been unmaned by a thousand White House leaks. Rex Tillerson had the potential to be an effective secretary of state, but Bannon neutered him last week by denying him the ability to even select his own deputy.

In an administration in which "promoted beyond his capacity" takes on new meaning, Bannon looms. With each passing day, Trump talks more like Bannon without the background reading.

Third, we are about to enter a decentralized world. For the past 70 years most nations have instinctively looked to the U.S. for leadership, either to follow or oppose. But in capitals around the world, intelligence agencies are drafting memos with advice on how to play Donald Trump.

The first conclusion is obvious. This administration is more like a medieval monarchy than a modern nation-state. It's more "The Madness of King George" than "The Missiles of October." The key currency is not power, it's flattery.

The corollary is that Trump is ripe to be played. Give the boy a lollipop and he won't notice if you steal his lunch. The Japanese gave Trump a new jobs announcement he could take to the Midwest, and in return they got presidential attention and coddling that other governments would have died for.

If you want to roll the Trump administration, you've got to get in line. The Israelis got a possible one-state solution. The Chinese got Trump to flip-flop on the "One China" policy. The Europeans got him to do a 180 on undoing the Iran nuclear deal.

Vladimir Putin was born for a moment such as this. He is always pushing the envelope. After gifting Team Trump with a little campaign help, the Russian state media has suddenly turned on Trump and Russian planes are buzzing U.S. ships. The bear is going to grab what it can.

We're about to enter a moment in which U.S. economic and military might is strong but U.S. political might is weak. Imagine the Roman Empire governed by Monaco.

That's scary. The only saving thought is this: The human imagination is vast, but it is not nearly vast enough to encompass the infinitely multitudinous ways Donald Trump can find to get himself disgraced.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in 2003.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

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YOUR VIEWS

Pendleton fire station, and EOTEC update

Public safety, though important, did not make it into the top four goals of the mayor and new city council. Could it be because of the dramatic increase in the estimated cost of a new fire station at near double the original estimate? Perhaps it was due to the inclusion of a museum and the need for a satellite police station, since the proposed location is at the opposite end of town from the proposed site? Never fear, though, the city has decided to realign the fire station bond issue into the maintenance of buildings, roads, water and sewer category, moving it from the number 5 category right up to number 1.

I guess those 245 respondents to the survey were just wrong.

Perhaps a more realistic alternative such as a central location, elimination of the museum and satellite police station would have rated a more favorable public response. Sometimes the public just can't get it right. I guess we'll find out in May if a bad plan is better than no plan at all.

As for EOTEC, George Anderson is correct, the fairgrounds needed to relocate. No argument there. Maybe, since he appears

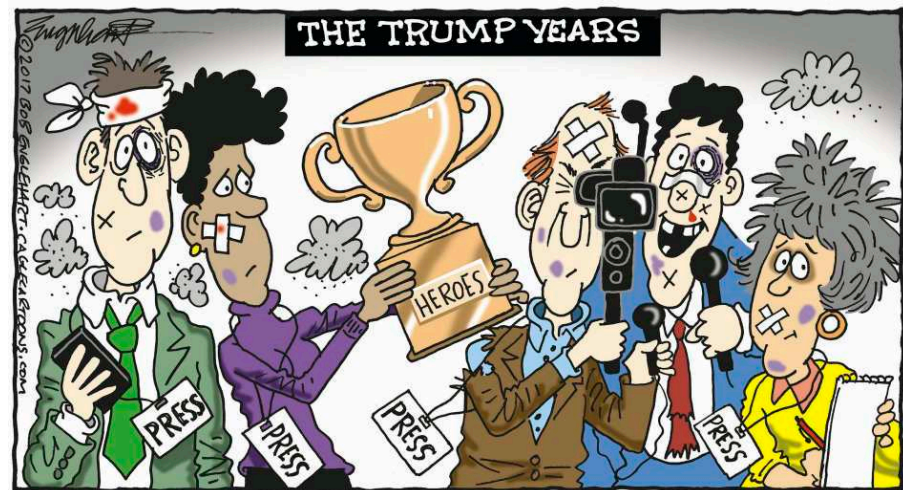
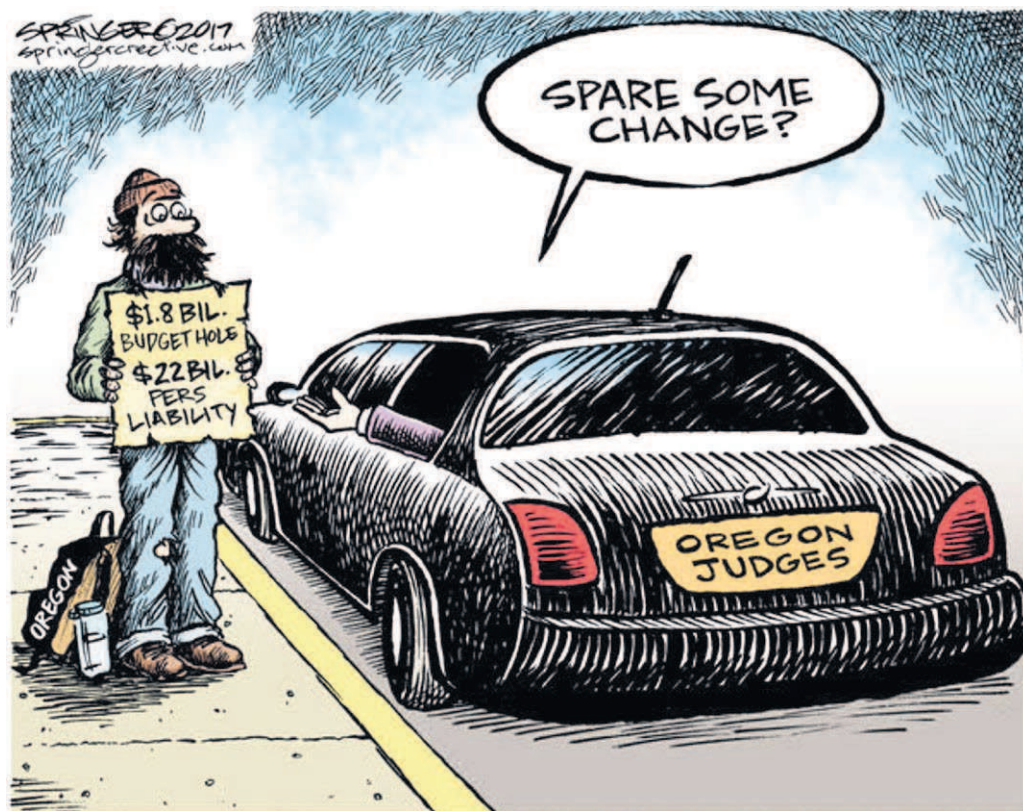
to be the expert on the project, it's time to step up and take control, and since EOTEC is asking the county and Hermiston city manager to pay their fair share as per their agreement, perhaps he should be counseling them on their responsibilities.

Rumors abound that after ignoring numerous warnings of the pitfalls in signing such a generous agreement, the EOTEC board may now have to sue the county and city for postponing payment of the \$45,190 each for their share of expenses, and charge a late payment fee for questioning the management of the project.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Larry Givens, worried about the extremely dangerous environment of working in the courthouse, might consider moving his office to a more secure location such as the county jail. Killing two birds with one stone, this move could add security and deflect interest away from the precarious situation with EOTEC.

Other security measures that should be considered are installation of retinal scanners on all office doors, enclosing all customer service counters in bulletproof glass, adding armed guards at all entrances, or permanently banning public access altogether.

Rick Rohde, Pendleton



LETTERS POLICY

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