

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Conference center has the heart of the community

The citizens of Hermiston dug into their own pockets and willingly gave more than \$600,000 of their own money to help renovate a hulking, vacant downtown building once home to a grocery store.

It was an excellent use of funds — the money was used to create the Hermiston Conference Center, which has given a home to numerous events and helped the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, who in turn helped fuel Hermiston's explosive economic growth.

But now the future of the building is up for debate, as another publicly-owned competitor has been built just down the road. Many events are likely to migrate to the new Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

The city has informed the chamber of commerce, which has

operated the conference center, that it wants to go in a different direction with the building. It is considering a recreation center and recommends relocating the chamber to the basement of the old library across from city hall.

Some sort of rec center would be an excellent addition to Hermiston, and we imagine many residents would embrace that change. It topped a recent citizen survey commissioned by the city.

But because so many public dollars went into the conference center, public input must be heard. And councilors need to debate the issue openly and honestly with the community that made it possible. The future of the center should be decided by elected officials and their constituents, not city employees.

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

Freedom of speech under attack in America

Our nation faces a major crisis. The First Amendment is the glue that holds our system of government together and allows it to function. This concept of "free speech" allows for open debate without fear of retaliation. It embodies the idea that we must listen to opposing viewpoints with a degree of courtesy and to give equal time for each. It allows for all sides to have the opportunity to express their opinions and to be heard.

Unfortunately, the past decade or so has seen increasing numbers of attacks on these rules. On college campuses, in news and social media, and even in the halls of our Congress, free speech no longer exists. Opposing voices are no longer allowed to be heard in open debate. Under the guise of various rule and procedural changes, free speech is being buried. Allegations of "fake news" or "alternative facts" are being thrown back and forth. Our leaders are behaving like playground bullies.

Repeated rule-breaking will eventually create a new tradition of dictatorship, a "one-party" system where no one is allowed to speak except those following the approved party line. This must not be allowed to happen. Our elected representatives must all be held accountable in order to prevent this from going any further. This is not an issue for politics. We must stop the finger-pointing and the excuses that "they did it first."

We the people must speak with one united voice. The rules of free discourse and debate must be reestablished and set in concrete. If the current state of affairs continues, we may destroy our very democracy.

Dale Hilding
Pendleton

Republican proposals will make health care worse

As per David Brooks in a recent editorial, the Republican health care proposals fail the smell test because they contain no vision for providing health care and continue to be about a way to grab a huge hunk of billionaire taxes that support the ACA back as part of their plan to cut taxes. Their attempts to reduce cost all involve eliminating coverage no matter how they dress it up. The latest proposal would allow states to "opt out" of essential benefits and pre-existing condition coverage. For example, we will happily insure cancer patients but not for anything related to their cancer.

Republicans also seem to continue to promote the idea that people on Medicaid are no accounts and wastrels, and if we provide them with health care, we will "de-incentivize" them to go out and get better paying jobs. Those who cannot work or work at lower paying jobs should not get health care until they work their way up the rung of success.

Working at nursing homes and later in home health and hospice as a RN, nearly my whole clientele was on Medicare and/or Medicaid. Many of them were what we would consider poor as well. Most worked hard all their life but ended up with little, some had made poor choices or had bad luck they could never

Emily Wadkins
Hermiston

Bond would help schools keep up with growth

On May 16 voters will have a chance to vote on the approval of the Hermiston School District bond of \$104 million. I am writing to encourage voters to vote for the bond.

Our community is growing at an exceptionally fast rate and in seven years, according to Portland State University, it is expected for the district's population to grow 24 percent. That is approximately 800-1,100 students. To give you an idea of how large that number is, the high school can only accommodate 1,600 students at the maximum. Hermiston High School is very close to that maximum number currently.

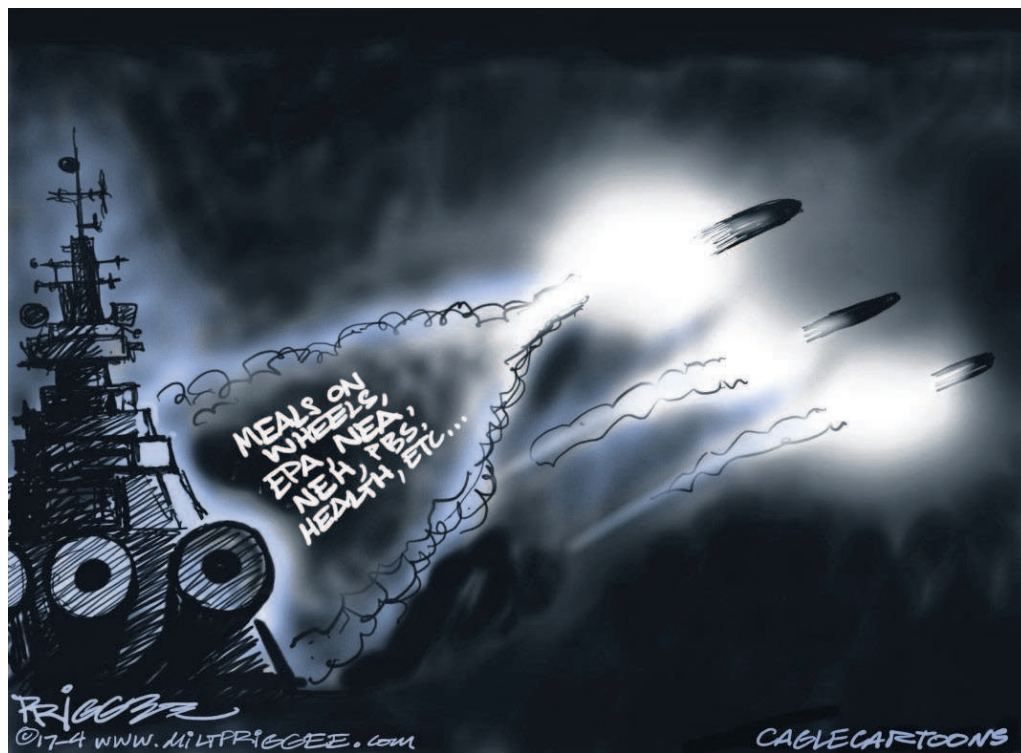
Not only is the high school dealing with capacity issues, but many elementary schools have similar situations. Without the needed expansions, there will be many problems in the future.

Adding modules will not solve this problem. We would need a total of 56 new modules in order for the predicted students to fit in the school district. The schools do not have enough space to have that many modules rented and put on site. As a student at Hermiston High School, I've learned that modules can cause some problems, including having to walk across campus just to use the bathroom or having to walk across campus to return a book. The school district needs a long-term solution to the enrollment growth and the bond will give the district that solution.

If you vote yes on the bond, you won't just be saying yes to expanding the district, but you will also be saying yes to creating a better education for the students now and for the students in the future. Make sure to vote yes for the Hermiston School District bond to improve the future of the district and future education of your community's students. These are your kids or your neighbor's kids, they need to be educated happily and safely.

Emily Wadkins
Hermiston

OTHER VIEWS



Trump was right to strike Syria

President Donald Trump's airstrikes against Syria were of dubious legality. They were hypocritical. They were impulsive. They may have had political motivations. They create new risks for the United States.

But most of all, they were right. I'm deeply suspicious of Trump's policies and competence, but this is a case where he is right and Barack Obama was wrong. Indeed, many of us believe that Obama's worst foreign policy mistake was his passivity in Syria.

One of Trump's problems is that he has lied so much and so often that he doesn't have credibility at home or abroad in a foreign crisis like this. I likewise find it unnerving that he came to the right decision in an impulsive way, changing policy 180 degrees after compelling photos emerged of children gassed in Syria. Should a president's decisions about war really depend on the photos taken?

Yet for all my distrust of Trump's motivations and capacity to execute a strategy, here's why I believe he was right.

Since the horrors of mustard gas during World War I a century ago, one of the world's more successful international norms has been a taboo on the use of chemical weapons. We all have an interest in reinforcing that norm, so this is not just about Syria but also about deterring the next dictator from turning to sarin.

For an overstretched military, poison gas is a convenient way to terrify and subdue a population. That's why Saddam Hussein used gas on Kurds in 1988, and why Bashar Assad has used gas against his own people in Syria. The best way for the world to change the calculus is to show that use of chemical weapons carries a special price — such as a military strike on an air base.

Paradoxically, Assad may have used chemical weapons because he perceived a green light from the Trump administration. In recent days, Rex Tillerson, Sean Spicer and Nikki Haley all suggested that it was no longer U.S. policy to push for the removal of Assad, and that may have emboldened him to open the chemical weapons toolbox. That mistake made it doubly important for Trump to show that neither Assad nor any leader can get away with using weapons of mass destruction.

Look, for a Syrian child, it doesn't matter much whether death comes from a barrel bomb, a mortar shell, a bullet, or a nerve agent. I hope Trump will also show more interest in stopping all slaughter of Syrians — but it's still important to defend the norm against chemical weapons (the United States undermined that norm after Saddam's gas attack by falsely suggesting that Iran was to blame).

Critics note that Trump's airstrikes don't have clear legal grounding. They're right, and that was one reason Obama didn't act. But Bill Clinton's 1999 intervention to prevent genocide in Kosovo was also of uncertain legality, and thank God for it. Clinton has said that his greatest foreign policy mistake was not intervening in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide; any such intervention also would have been of unclear legality — and the right thing to do.

There are risks ahead, of Russia or Syria targeting U.S. aircraft or of Iran seeking revenge against Americans in Iraq. War plans rarely survive the first shot, and military interventions are easier to begin than to end. But as long as we don't seek to topple Assad militarily, everybody has an interest in avoiding an escalation.

It's also fair for critics to highlight Trump's hypocrisy, and raise concerns that he may have fired missiles for political reasons, to show himself as a leader and distract from political problems. Certainly Trump previously objected to what he is now doing.

Referring to Obama in 2013, he tweeted: "The president must get Congressional approval before attacking Syria." And when Trump speaks about the suffering of Syria's "beautiful little babies," one wonders how he



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

justifies vilifying and barring those same babies with his travel ban. Yet I'd rather Trump inconsistently do the right thing than consistently do the wrong thing.

Many of my fellow progressives viscerally oppose any use of force, but I think that's a mistake. I was against the Iraq War, but some military interventions save lives. The no fly zone over northern Iraq in the 1990s is one example, and so are the British intervention in Sierra Leone

and French intervention in Mali. It's prudent to be suspicious of military interventions, but imprudent to reject any use of force categorically.

Want proof that military interventions in the Middle East can work? In 2014, Obama ordered airstrikes near the Syria-Iraq border against ISIS as it was attacking members of the Yazidi minority. Those U.S. strikes saved many thousands of Yazidi lives, although

they came too late to save thousands more who were killed or kidnapped as sex slaves. In Syria, the crucial question is what comes next.

There's some bold talk among politicians about ousting Assad from Syria. Really? People have been counting on Assad's fall for six years now, and

he's as entrenched as ever.

Moreover, air strips can be rebuilt, and if this was a one-time strike then the larger slaughter in Syria will continue indefinitely. But I'm hoping that the administration may use it as a tool to push for a cease-fire.

As Secretary of State, John Kerry worked valiantly for a peace deal in Syria. But he had neither carrots nor sticks to offer. Kerry pleaded with Obama for leverage in the form of military strikes, but Obama refused.

Now the State Department finally has leverage. But, tragically, we seem to lack a secretary of state with the clout and inclination to seize that leverage and push for a peace deal.

My proposed course in Syria is the same one that Hillary Clinton and many others have favored: missile strikes to ground Assad's small air force. This should help end the barrel bombs and make Assad realize that he has no military solution, and that it's time for negotiation. The most plausible negotiated outcome would be a long-term cease-fire and de facto partition of Syria, putting off reintegration until Assad is no longer around.

Even if we can't leverage military strikes into a peace deal, the strikes are still worthwhile by degrading the air assets that Assad uses to kill his own people.

Syria is a spectacular country redolent with history, and inhabited by a normally warm and hospitable people. Yet Obama's well-meant caution has allowed Syria's downward spiral to turn it into a symbol of brutality and suffering that has also aggravated the Sunni-Shia schism all over the world.

Because there was no good option on any given day, we always chose to do little or nothing. The result was that more than 300,000 people were killed, vast numbers were tortured and raped, almost 5 million refugees fled Syria and destabilized other countries, ISIS sowed terrorism worldwide, and genocides unfolded against the Yazidi and Christian communities in Syria and Iraq.

For all the legitimate concerns about the risks ahead, now again we just might have a window to curb the bloodshed in Syria. I'm glad Trump took the important first step of holding Assad accountable for using chemical weapons. But it's all going to depend now on whether Trump, who so far has been a master of incompetence, can manage the far more difficult challenge of using war to midwife peace.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. Kristof, a columnist for The New York Times since 2001, writes op-ed columns that appear twice a week. He won the Pulitzer Prize two times, in 1990 and 2006.

LETTERS POLICY

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