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OUR VIEW

Growing pains hit Hermiston

Hermiston hit a rough patch this week, as growing pains caught up to Eastern Oregon's largest city with the defeat of a \$104 million school bond.

It came as a shock to many in the city and school district, where bonds had been in the habit of going to the ballot and returning with a stamp of approval. The steady stream of building upgrades was necessary to keep up with the steady stream of rising enrollment, and voters seemed to understand that when passing four consecutive bonds.

But there was a change in the political currents this year, and the district must face that reality head on. It must regroup quickly with something more palatable to voters in order to keep district facilities from falling any farther behind than they are now, and before voters get in the habit of filling in the "no" bubble on their ballots.

Perhaps the district could look to Blue Mountain Community College for help in doing that. BMCC saw an important facilities bond fail in 2014, but got up off the mat quickly by holding listening sessions throughout the region, gathering public feedback at every stop. Just a year later, they kept that feedback in mind when crafting a bond that did find majority support.

If the Hermiston board goes that route, they will likely hear similar sentiments to what our reporter gleaned at the Hermiston Senior Center about why most people there voted against the bond. Many felt the school district unceremoniously booted them from their longtime home, as part of the many changes being made at the old Umatilla County Fairgrounds. While relocating the senior center was clearly necessary, the district will have to deal with the unavoidable political fallout from that action — no one votes likes senior citizens.

We also heard the ever-present fears for those on fixed incomes — perpetually rising tax burdens and cost of living increases — as well as unsavory racial complaints that Hispanic residents were responsible for most of the student growth but are not paying their fair share in taxes.

Unfortunately, race does play a part in some voter's minds and the school district needs be upfront about that discussion as well. Getting those attitudes into the light of day, and confronting them, is a way to move past such boorish opinions.

Another school bond is likely to come before Hermiston voters soon, and there are likely to be some changes to what voters saw this time around.

The district must regroup quickly and find a plan more palatable to voters.

In our opinion, a new elementary on Theater Lane — the district's sixth — is critical to educating the growing numbers of young children in Hermiston. It's the most important piece.

The second-biggest need is expanding the high school. Modular classrooms offer a poor learning environment and are terribly expensive — they represent a poor use of taxpayer dollars. And forcing students to go to school in shifts is no way to go through a high school career. The community should make sure that's not the sole viable option for educating more students that can fit in the building's halls. An addition to the high school that could handle additional class sizes until a second school is built in the next decade or so is key — and it was included in this year's failed bond.

But perhaps both Highland Hills and Rocky Heights will have to stand a little longer. Although both schools are imperfectly designed, they are needed and should remain in place. Limited upgrades can be completed, rather than a wholesale raze and replace for buildings just a few decades old.

Pushing the "economic benefit" of the bond also seemed like poor strategy — people want well-educated children when their money goes to their schools, and they aren't thinking about monetary return on their investment.

The Hermiston School District has challenges before it. Navigating the next two decades will require dexterity, both in educating a rapidly changing student body as well as operating an increasingly complex fiscal and facilities plan.

It needs the support of voters to do both, and should take this opportunity to reconnect and retool.

OTHER VIEWS

'The Flight 93 Election' crashes again

In case you've had the pleasure of forgetting, "The Flight 93 Election" was the title of a portentous essay, published in September under a Roman pseudonym in The Claremont Review of Books, that declared the stakes for the United States in 2016 thus: "Charge the cockpit or you die."

In the lurid imagination of the author — it turned out to be Michael Anton, who now holds a senior job in the White House — the American republic was Flight 93, a plane deliberately set on a course for destruction by liberals and their accomplices in the Republican establishment and the globalist "Davoisie." As for Donald Trump, Anton implied that he was the political equivalent of Todd Beamer, the heroic passenger who cried "Let's Roll" in a desperate bid for salvation.

"You may die anyway," Anton warned. "You — or the leader of your party — may make it into the cockpit and not know how to fly or land the plane. There are no guarantees. Except one: If you don't try, death is certain."

And here we are, not four months into the collapsing Trump presidency, living Anton's dreams.

In recent days, radio host Michael Savage has acknowledged "the administration is in trouble." John Podhoretz in the *New York Post* and later *The Wall Street Journal's* editorial page compared Trump to Jimmy Carter — the most damning of all conservative indictments.

Then there's Ann Coulter. In an interview with *The Daily Caller*, the author of "In Trump We Trust" said of the presidency that "it has been such a disaster so far," and that it was possible that "the Trump-haters were right." She even dropped the f-bomb — "fascist" — to describe Trump's hiring of his relatives to senior White House posts.

"If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost Middle America," Lyndon Johnson is reputed to have said (perhaps it's apocryphal) after the CBS anchorman said in 1968 that the Vietnam War was unwinnable.

Just so for Trump: If he's lost Coulter, he's lost angry America. That's not his entire base, but — let's face it — it's a critical fraction of it.

Now the hope of the president's dismayed supporters is that this moment of near-political bankruptcy will lead to a reinvention and a turnaround. Perhaps Trump can delegate his executive authorities in the same way as he used to license his name, pretending to be president just as he once pretended to be a real-estate tycoon.

That would suit Trump's sole talent for playing a successful character on TV. But the reality of the presidency is that it tends to

reflect and magnify the inner truth of the officeholder. The job requires — and exposes — that most conservative of concepts: character. And if we've learned anything about Trump, it's that his character isn't just bad. It's irrepressible.

Hence the past 10 days of our national life. Firing Jim Comey. Threatening Comey. Lying about the reasons for firing Comey. Blabbing secrets to Sergey Lavrov. Denying that secrets were blabbed. Then blabbing about blabbing to Lavrov.

No staff shake-up would have prevented any of this from happening.

It would have descended on a hapless White House staff like a superheated pyroclastic flow from a presidential Pinatubo. And it will continue to descend, week after grim week, until Trump leaves or is forced from office.

That is the Trump reality. A man with a deformed personality and a defective intellect runs a dysfunctional administration — a fact finally

visible even to its most ardent admirers. Who could have seen that one coming? Who knew that character might be destiny?

To reread "The Flight 93 Election" today is to understand what has gone wrong not only with the Trump presidency, but also with so much of the conservative movement writ large. In a word, it's become unhinged.

To imply, as Anton did, that Barack Obama, for all his shortcomings, was Ziad Jarrah, Flight 93's lead hijacker, is vile. To suppose that we'd all be dead if Hillary Clinton, for all her flaws, had been elected is hallucinatory. To argue that the United States, for all its problems, was the equivalent of a doomed aircraft is absurd. To suggest that Donald Trump, a man who has sacrificed nothing in his life for anyone or anything, is the worthy moral heir to the Flight 93 passengers is a travesty.

It is the mark of every millenarian fanatic to assume that the world stands on the verge of a precipice, and that only radical or violent action can save it. That's the premise of Anton's essay. It's also the kind of thinking that has inspired extremists from time immemorial, including the people who grabbed the planes on 9/11.

Maybe 2016 was the Flight 93 election, or something like it. Maybe the pilots are dead. Maybe the passengers failed to storm the cockpit. Maybe the hijackers reached their target by landing on the White House after all.

Bret Stephens won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2013.



BRET STEPHENS
Comment

The conservative movement writ large has become unhinged.

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.



"IN THE PRESIDENT'S DEFENSE, HE HAS NO IDEA WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT."

LETTERS POLICY

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YOUR VIEWS

Public option the best choice for American health system

On Feb. 10, I attended a town hall meeting held by Rep. Walden in Boardman, pretty far from my home in Juniper Flat in south Wasco county. At the time it was the closest scheduled town hall in District 2. I have since attending town halls in The Dalles and Burns. The similarity of concerns in all three areas was striking: health care dominated questions and comments at all three meetings.

At the Burns meeting Rep. Walden lamented that under the ACA large numbers of counties have only one insurance provider and next year are likely to have no providers.

This is a valid concern, particularly in our rural counties. And it is a compelling argument for structuring health care around a public option, which would guarantee at least one provider everywhere. There is a working model we can look at: the German health care system.

Germany is another large industrial democracy with a diverse population. Its system provides universal coverage with a better outcome than ours at two-thirds the per capita cost. Life expectancy at birth in 2013 in Germany was 80.9 years versus 78.8 here, and infant mortality at birth was 3.3 per thousand live births in Germany versus 6.1 here. The German system also provides

choice, a guiding principle for many U.S. reformers. There is a base public option so that no one slips through the cracks and options to purchase enhanced private-sector insurance if even better coverage is desired. Private insurance, pharmaceutical sales and medical device sales are regulated by the state to contain costs, probably necessary in any full-service system.

Opponents of a public option often say that government involvement will lead to rationing (recall the overblown "death panel" concerns during the Obamacare debate). But before the ACA, we had rationing by income level in this country. Any financially-viable system using advanced medical technology cannot afford unrestricted use of expensive devices, procedures and drugs. This is a fact of life. More vigorous regulation of drug costs, procedures and a ballooning insurance industry coupled with relief from excessive malpractice litigation can reduce the need for rationing.

Finally, a public option actually should be good for business, particularly small businesses. A public option would relieve employers of the burden of providing health care and guarantee employees unbroken coverage that they can take with them as they change or lose jobs.

David Harris Maupin