

EAST OREGONIAN

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OUR VIEW

You care, we care

July was a reaffirming month for this newspaper on two fronts.

The first was winning yet another General Excellence Award at the Oregon Newspaper Publishers' Association annual contest. It's an honor to be recognized by peers from another state (Pennsylvania this time) for producing a broadly excellent newspaper, from content to design to reproduction. The fact that the *East Oregonian* has taken the top prize among papers our size for three years running is a matter of professional pride for all of us.

The mission of this family-owned newspaper for four generations has been to inform the people of Eastern Oregon, and fellow journalists have commended that effort.

But awards were just the start. In the days after, we sent out a survey to subscribers and non-subscribers alike asking how we're doing as a news agency. The questions were basic and open-ended in an attempt to get the true pulse of how people feel.

The results were astounding, and honestly more helpful than the assessments of Pennsylvanian journalists.

More than 900 people took the time to fill out the survey, offering encouragement to keep up the good work, analysis of places we are missing the mark and direct, sharp criticism of the newspaper. Each response was helpful, and especially those that included detailed comments.

For those who feel we are excelling, we appreciate the pat on the back. As a business, we hope to meet the needs of our customers. As a newsroom, we hope to have their trust.

We won't pretend the glowing praise was the vast majority of what we received. The rest of the comments and complaints could be broken down into several categories, which we'd be happy to address.

Approximately eight percent of respondents were concerned about a liberal bias they sense in our pages. Most felt that bias was exposed most clearly on our opinion pages, through both our syndicated columnists and cartoons, but also through our own editorial view. Some felt a liberal perspective filtered its way into the news pages, including our use of Associated Press stories and even our own reporting.

Our local news content is the work of journalists right here in Umatilla County, a few of whom grew up here and others who have decided to make this place their home. For all of us, giving an accurate account of the happenings in these communities and the issues affecting them is the top priority. Our individual political affiliations run the gamut but have nothing to do with our day jobs.

On the opinion page, some have asked that we calibrate our editorial view to the conservative region we serve. This is Donald Trump country, the election results show, and they feel the local newspaper should align itself.

We frequently and often enthusiastically endorse Republicans for statewide and national seats (Greg Walden, Bud Pierce and Dennis Richardson in the last election) and try to make our recommendations based on what is best for Eastern Oregon, not which color pin the candidate wears. That same thinking led us to sharply rebuke the corporate sales tax of Measure 97 and several times during the legislative session question the direction the Democrat-controlled Capitol is taking the state.

We also whole-heartedly hope to be debated. We do not turn away letters unless they come too frequently (we allow each writer to weigh in on a single topic once every three weeks) or contain libelous or intentionally misleading information. Rather than expecting an editorial board of politically disparate people to speak for you, we encourage you to speak for yourself.

To further that effort, we have asked locals from outside the newsroom to write about their life experience each week. If you haven't gotten to know the world through the eyes of Matt Woods, Bette Husted, J.D. Smith, Lindsay Murdock and Pastor Colin Brown, you're missing out.

On a last note, we continue to refine our selection of syndicated columnists and always appreciate specific feedback. Along with two of the more right-center

New York Times writers (David Brooks and Ross Douthat) and a handful of the left-leaning ones, we have made a regular space for no-doubt conservative thinker Byron York and are currently reviewing a few others. Stay tuned.

Another complaint we heard with enough consistency to warrant notice is the prevalence of misspellings and grammatical errors in our stories.

There are many reasons this has become more difficult — not easier — in the age of digital publishing, but we will not make excuses. We ask readers to pay a premium for local news and readers expect a highly professional product. A

typo or confusing sentence runs contrary to our goal of publishing trustworthy news.

One way you can help us achieve the goal of limiting errors and confusion is letting us know specifically when and where you see them. Shoot us an email at editor@eastoregonian.com, gather up some red-marked clippings and bring them to the office or give editor Daniel Wattenburger a call at 541-278-2673. It's part of this business, but a part we're willing to address and get better at.

The other criticisms focused largely on what we cover and what we don't. In nearly equal parts we heard the call for more Hermiston news, more Pendleton news and more smaller town news.

On the one hand, this is encouraging. Readers want us to do more of what we're doing, just more of it where they live.

On the other hand the balance is nearly impossible. If we ignore the smaller towns to cover the bigger two cities more extensively, we'll lose their interest entirely and not be providing the service a newspaper should. If we devote more of our time to each of the 20 or so smaller towns in our area, how much do we lose in our population centers?

Again, we'd like to tap into the energy and interest that we saw in the survey results. We will continue to make the effort to report the news and events in your communities, but if you see a story we're overlooking, give us a call. We're glad to publish reader submissions in our weekly Your EO News page to relay the exciting hyper-local news, and we will dedicate reporting power to bigger issues you see in your towns.

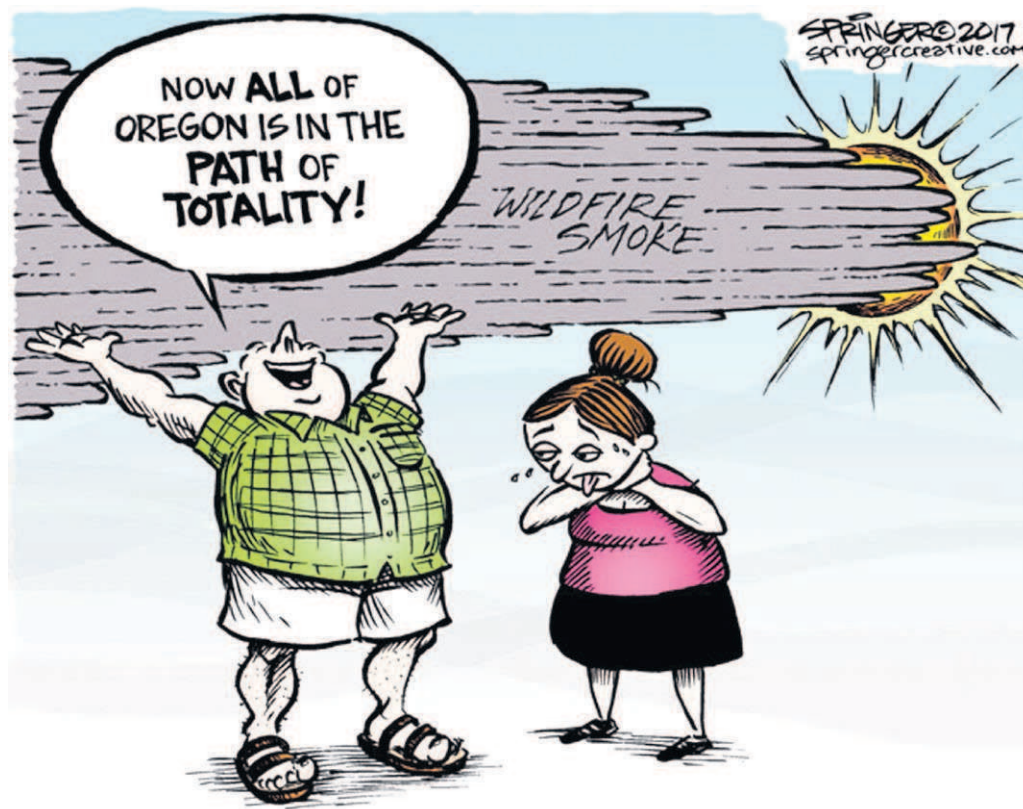
The Hermiston/Pendleton divide has been a point of contention since the 1950s when the paper began covering the west end in earnest. Our answer since that time has been roughly the same: We feel there is great value in both towns learning about and studying the other. There is much to learn from a nearby town of approximately the same size. We aim to choose newsworthy topics with lessons that can be considered and translated 30 miles away.

From a service perspective, we heard your delivery complaints loud and clear. Our circulation manager, Marcy Rosenberg, and her team are going through your specific complaints and working with our contracted carriers to improve delivery service on every route. Going forward, we hope those who have had poor service will see significant improvement. If not, we want to hear from you. Marcy can be reached at rosenberg@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0828.

We have recently converted some routes from carrier delivery to mail delivery, which many subscribers greatly appreciate, though some do not. We made this decision due to the challenges of finding consistently reliable carriers who can deliver to our more rural routes in a cost-effective manner. If mail delivery problems arise, we will work with our local post offices so neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night will keep you from your *EO*.

As a final thought, we know the only way for a community newspaper to thrive in the 21st century is to engage with readers and the community every day. We do hope you will visit our booth at the Umatilla County Fair next week and talk about ways we can better meet your needs. Our reader base is diverse and wants different things from the daily paper, but the best way we can meet all those needs is by bringing the most important issues to the forefront and being a conduit for the regional conversation. We want to be a newspaper for everyone.

So thank you for responding. The fact that our readers care enough to take a few minutes to fill out the survey means a lot.



OTHER VIEWS

Discipline in the White House

Usually it takes a lot of boring three-yard runs and a thick cloud of dust to drive any important piece of legislation across the goal line in Washington.

But at this late stage of the game QB Donald Trump and his Republican teammates are going to need a Hail Mary.

During the seven months they've been in control of the political football in D.C. they've brought no significant legislation before Congress.

Republicans in the Senate deserve most of the blame for the failure of health care reform.

But the president — the owner, head coach, chief publicist and star quarterback of Team Trump — remains the biggest problem.

Like a reckless rookie unable to learn from his mistakes, QB Trump is repeatedly scrambling out of the pocket, throwing incompletions in every direction — and then blaming his blockers, receivers and cheerleaders on Twitter for his team's negative yardage.

Meanwhile, for him and the GOP the 2017 congressional game clock is running down fast.

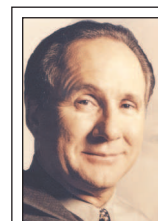
It's already August. Congress is going home for vacation. Then you get into September and before you know it, it's time for Congress to break for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Then comes 2018 and the mid-term elections. And then nothing important will happen in Congress, except that Republicans and Democrats will point fingers at each other and work hard overtime at getting reelected.

President Trump and the Republicans have to go into their hurry-up offense and pass something important on health care, tax reform or immigration and put their stamp on it, or they might be looking at a Democratic Senate in 2019.

On healthcare, it's clear that we can't completely repeal Obamacare, but we can still completely fix it.

Trump and Republicans, and maybe even some Democrats, now have to find areas where they agree, move forward and get some legislation passed. Then repeat and repeat and



MICHAEL REAGAN
Comment

repeat.

It's frustrating to see how Trump keeps hurting his own cause and the future of the Republican Party.

The stock market is soaring and the economy is showing signs of growth, but that good news is never heard in the media because it's drowned out by the coverage of the president's tweeting.

President Trump took a giant step in the right direction last week by making General John Kelly his chief of staff.

It was one of the best moves Trump has made and a sign of hope that he may finally be learning something on the job.

General Kelly will bring some long overdue order and discipline to the White House operations, as he quickly proved when he had the president fire Anthony Scaramucci as White House communications director.

We've written about how important it is for a president to have an adult like Kelly in the Oval Office, but the real issue is whether our president will listen to advice from the adult.

President Trump is never going to change his personality or stop thinking that he makes the sun come up every morning.

But if he wants to fulfill any of his campaign promises, or even if he wants to push his poll numbers back into the low 40 percent range, he has to become disciplined.

He has to learn that presidents never slam their generals in public or talk out loud about firing generals like John Nicholson in Afghanistan.

He has to learn to pat his people on the back, to uplift them, not stab them in the back.

He has to learn what my father knew — that when you have to attack your enemies your best weapons are a wink and a nod.

Most important, President Trump has to learn that he's now in the business of politics, not the business of business.

And in politics the bottom line is that in the end the blame — like the buck — stops at the president's desk.

Michael Reagan is the son of President Ronald Reagan, a political consultant, and the author of "The New Reagan Revolution."

Open records laws cast a public light

The Daily Astorian, August 1

When it comes to government transparency and accountability, open records laws provide a great check and balance for the public, and not just through the media.

That proved true once again as it played out recently in Mississippi, when a simple records request from an attorney representing a former University of Mississippi football coach led to the resignation of the Ole Miss coach, Hugh Freeze.

According to Yahoo Sports and other reports, the former coach, Houston Nutt, felt disparaged when Freeze and leaders at the taxpayer-supported university deflected NCAA accusations of program misdeeds to the prior coach and administration. According to the reports, the most serious of the violations — if proven true — would have occurred during Freeze's tenure, and Nutt wanted that publicly acknowledged. When the university balked, he sued.

Nutt's attorney, Tom Mars, in conjunction with a defamation lawsuit against the university, filed a records request seeking telephone logs of Freeze and the athletic director to try to show that Nutt had been thrown under the bus. In examining the records, a one-minute call from Freeze's state-issued phone turned out to be to an escort service. Freeze initially claimed it was a "misdial," but university officials, alerted by the attorney's findings, investigated further and found what they said was a "pattern."

Up to that point, the media wasn't involved in seeking the records. Freeze, who is married and religious, immediately resigned and headlines ensued.

Had Freeze been a private citizen rather

than a high-ranking state employee, calling an escort service would have been a private moral matter and the accountability would have been between him and his conscience. But as a public figure in a position of high visibility and trust — especially with parents, recruits and players — his phone records are public and he's subject to the same accountability as those in public office.

That level of accountability is important in all states, not just Mississippi.

In Oregon, legislators recently took strides to improve records access, but there's still room for reform.

Among legislatively approved changes are the implementation of specific deadlines for responses to records requests and the delivery of requested information that isn't covered by numerous legal exemptions. The goal of the change is to prevent bureaucratic officials from purposely stonewalling records requests.

The Attorney General's Office will also compile a full list of the state's more than 500 exemptions and make the list publicly available, while a "sunshine" committee within the Department of Justice will work with lawmakers and others to review the exemptions for potential reform.

Legislators also approved the creation of a post for an appointed public records advocate who will mediate records disputes. The advocate, appointed by the governor, will also chair a newly created Public Records Advisory Council and will engage in training public officials on records disclosure.

The changes here are meaningful, and as the Mississippi instance illustrates, the disclosure there wouldn't have come to light without a records request and the clout of the law behind it. Taxpayers benefit from laws that create that transparency and accountability.

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.