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OUR VIEW

Afghanistan forever

Everyone knows the mighty militaries that have fallen in Afghanistan: Alexander the Great, the British during their “sun never sets” era, the Soviets when they were gobbling up every other country in the vicinity to join the USSR.

None of those have warred in the country as long as the Americans, however, who have now been battling in Afghanistan for 16 years. More than 2,300 American soldiers have died in the fight. And the monetary cost is approaching \$1 trillion — an estimate by the Center for Strategic and International Studies pegs it at \$841 billion and climbing. It is our country’s longest war.

Donald Trump is the third president to oversee operations there. This was America’s War after 9/11. Then it was George W. Bush’s War, then Obama’s War and now it is Trump’s War.

President Trump made his Afghanistan policy the center of his first primetime address to the American people. Though the man campaigned against Bush’s ill-fated foreign policy decisions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Obama’s own mistakes in Libya and Afghanistan, Trump’s plan in the latter country

is eerily similar to his predecessors. It’s the Obama plan really, with an additional 4,000 troops. Few on the ground expect that to make any difference.

So the takeaway from Trump’s speech is that this country will have troops in Afghanistan long into the future. Remember, America has troops not just in Iraq, but in Germany, Japan and The Philippines. It has for decades and

has no plans to change the status quo.

Perhaps this perpetual overseas deployment is in America’s best interest, and perhaps it is in the world’s best interest, too. Perhaps it is just a modern form of colonialism. (And there’s no reason it can’t be both.)

Our worldwide police role is an expensive endeavor, though. It’s something Trump’s “America First” campaign targeted, though in his first major policy pronouncement has made little change. Afghanistan remains a quagmire.

At the same time, the U.S. does not currently employ an Afghanistan ambassador. John Bass was nominated by Trump in July but has yet to be confirmed. Quagmires on all sides.

No country has warred as long in Afghanistan as America has.

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

Great to be able to host fair, but some problems

What a great job getting the new fair facility ready on time! A lot of blood, sweat and tears, I’m sure. Beautiful!

Only two major issues occurred this year that I wanted to share. The first being the hate expressed to one of the new booths this year inside the hall. Things were said intentionally, threats were given and display items were stolen. You know who you are and who you were representing. The sad part was using your children and young adults to do your hatred.

The second issue was even worse! We had our young high school students work the parking lot in extreme heat. How were they treated by quite a few angry adults? These kids were yelled at, called names, hand gestures expressing these adults’ attitudes and immaturity! No matter how unorganized the parking seemed this year, there was absolutely no excuse for this behavior from adults!

If you don’t think hate isn’t alive in our small county of Umatilla then open your eyes. This happened to our children and grandchildren of all races and sexes and ages. Children treat others by the way they are taught by adults. What we say, how we act, what we teach — these children experienced what it’s like on the

other side of the fence.

It’s a good time to have a family talk. The responsibility is on your shoulders. Try to lead by example. I am okay with admitting when I am wrong and I can change my mind.

Bernie Sanderson
Hermiston

Repeating charges of racism dull their effect

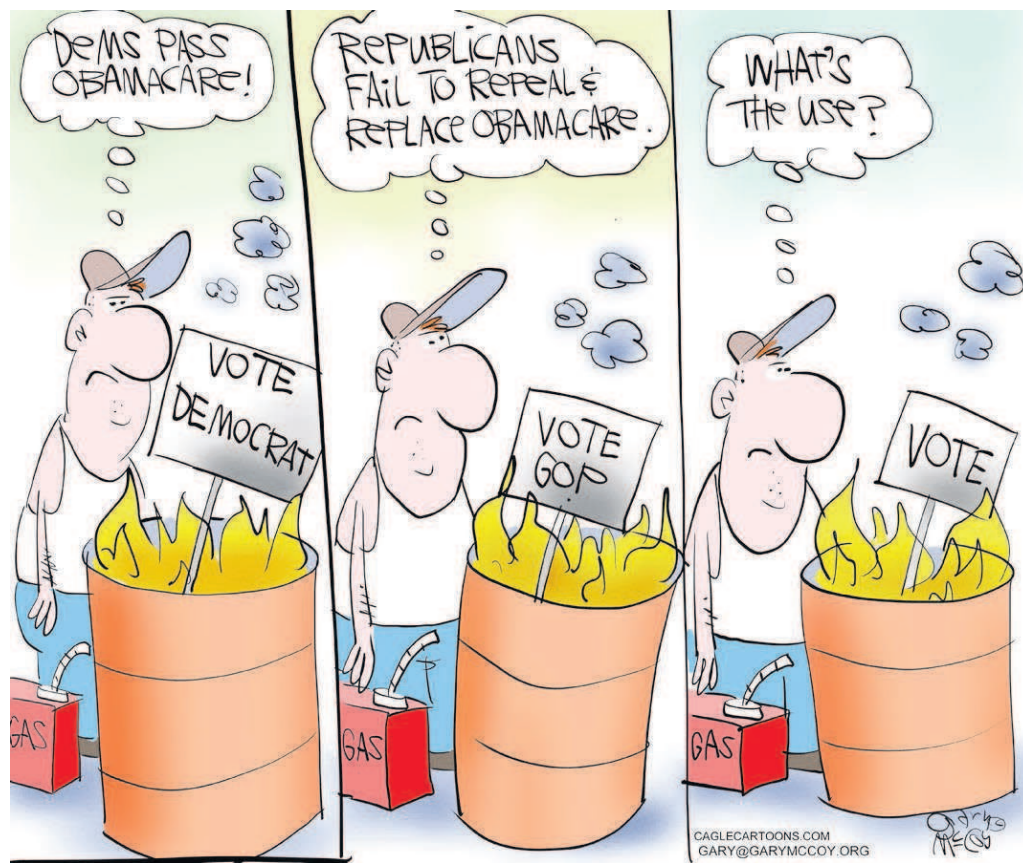
Some thoughts on the “March Against Racism:”

People, it’s time to realize that we ordinary citizens do not hate our fellow humans. Time to realize that we do indeed try to judge by content of character rather than by color of skin. Time to realize that the constant drumbeat of “Racist!” “Hater!” “Sexist!” “Xenophobe!” “Homophobe!” “Islamophobe!” “Transphobe!” “Bigot!” “Nazi!” “Fascist!” “Trump voter!” is of no help whatsoever.

Time to realize that after about the billionth repetition, such terms lose their sting and are greeted with the raucous, contemptuous laughter they so richly deserve.

Time to realize that disagreement is not hatred.

John Kaufman
Pendleton



OTHER VIEWS

Measuring, and mismeasuring, the Trump conundrum

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about Donald Trump’s victory last November was that, according to exit polls, 60 percent of the voters had an unfavorable impression of Trump on the day he was elected president of the United States.

Now, it’s remarkable that after all that has happened, Trump’s favorable and unfavorable rating — not his job approval, but whether people hold a favorable or unfavorable view of him — is virtually the same as it was on election day.

A new Marist poll found that 60 percent of those surveyed have an unfavorable view of the president, versus 34 percent who have a favorable view and six percent who don’t know.

In the RealClearPolitics average of all polls on the favorable/unfavorable question, Trump is now at 55.2 percent unfavorable versus 39.6 percent favorable. That is little changed from his average on November 8: 58.5 percent unfavorable, versus 37.5 percent favorable.

Considering all that has gone on in the Trump presidency — it’s too much to recount in a sentence or two — the stability of the Trump favorable/unfavorable rating is notable.

The other measure, Trump’s job approval rating, has fallen since he took office; it was 43.8 percent in the RCP average in his first week in office and is 38.6 percent now. Pollsters and strategists believe the job approval rating — which Trump of course didn’t have before January 20 — is much more important than personal approval.

“In every model I am familiar with over the past 40 years, job approval has been a more influential predictor than a personal favorable rating and I believe that will be true for President Trump as well,” said Bill McInturff, the Republican pollster who, along with Democrat Peter Hart, conducts the *Wall Street Journal*-NBC poll, in an email exchange.

“Long ago, presidents could have some gap between how we perceived them personally, with Carter and Reagan, for example, having stronger personal ratings than job approval at various points. An exception was President Clinton in 1998, who had terrible personal ratings, but high job approval.”

Right now, Trump’s job approval rating and personal favorability rating are very close, as are the job disapproval rating and personal unfavorable rating. But is that disastrous for the president, or not? There’s still what happened last election day to consider.

In another email exchange, David Winston, a pollster who has done extensive work for House Republicans, agreed that job approval is a more important measure than personal approval, but also noted that Trump’s polls are hard to interpret.

“Trying to compare Trump numbers with prior presidents at this point is very difficult, particularly given that he started with 60 percent unfavorable on election night,” said Winston. “He also had a significant amount of support coming from people who had an unfavorable view of him. Of the people that voted for him, 20 percent had an unfavorable view, according to the exit polls.”

Winston’s comments suggest that the old

way of viewing job approval as the pre-eminent measure of a president’s performance might be lacking when it comes to Trump. But if that is true, nobody has come up with a better measure, at least not at the moment.

Even though much of the political reporting and commentary at the moment focuses on Trump’s excesses, Bill McInturff also sees something bigger than Trump at work.

“We are at the logical end of a generation of change in American politics,” McInturff said. “Political scientists measure polarization by the gap between how

the president’s party rates a president versus the opposition party. President Clinton was the most polarizing president in polling history, followed by Bush 43, who took over the mantle of ‘most polarizing’ until replaced by President Obama, with the largest gap now being held by President Trump.”

McInturff’s conclusion: “President Trump did not begin this trend, but he has become its logical end point. Hence, it’s hard to change numbers when 85 percent of your own party likes you and functionally no one does in the other party.”

A Trump re-election campaign, if there is one, seems light years away; who knows what will happen between now and then? What is more pressing is what effect Trump’s standing will have on the 2018 midterms, where Republican prospects seem very strong in the Senate and far less so in the House. Brad Todd, a Republican strategist who has worked with many congressional candidates, believes there should be a new way of measuring the political climate.

“I think two polarizing presidencies in a row have broken this measuring stick,” Todd wrote in an email. “Job approval is more important than personal favorability, but neither is as important as what we call the gas pedal/brake pedal question.”

By “gas pedal/brake pedal,” Todd referred to whether voters believe Congress should serve as a brake on a president’s policy choices or whether lawmakers should offer more help and support to the president.

“In 2010, Obama had high personal favorables, softening job approval, and a really high brake pedal number,” Todd wrote. “That led to a landslide against his party in the mid-term. His personal favorability eventually dropped, before rising again in 2018 just as voters were rebuking his chosen successor.”

“The question to watch is not what voters think of a president personally, but whether or not they think he needs supervision or not,” Todd added.

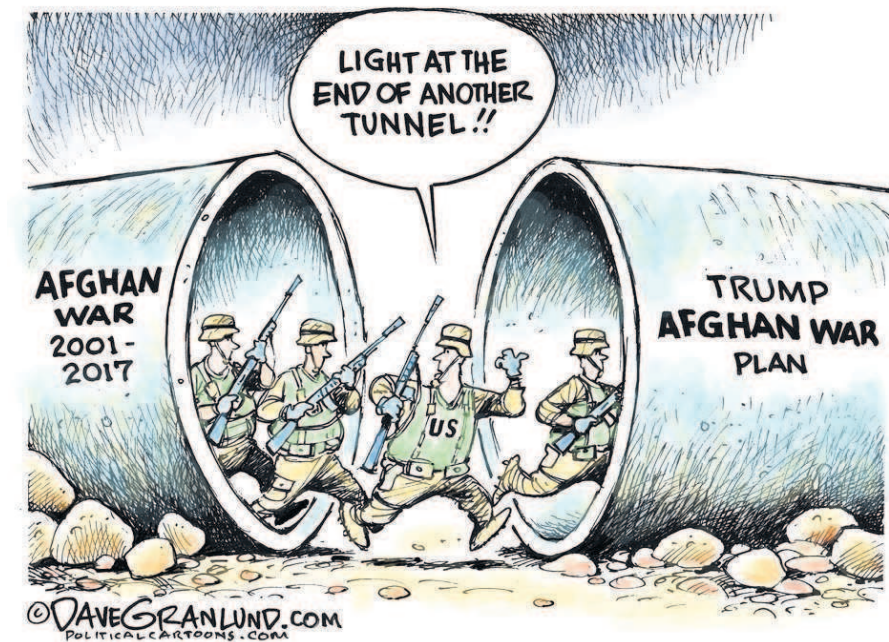
Trump is a “conundrum,” Todd concluded, “because voters see him as a brake pedal on both parties. So it is unclear whether they will put a brake pedal on the brake pedal in the next midterm.”

The bottom line is that evaluating Trump’s standing is probably more complicated than simply citing a falling job approval number. This is a presidency like no other, and it should be no surprise that measuring it presents new problems.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

BYRON YORK
Comment

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