

EAST OREGONIAN

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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to the transportation bill, which Governor Kate Brown has been showing from Malheur County to the heart of Portland all week.



It's hard in this era of urban/rural divide and political polarization for a statewide bill-signing tour to be cheered both in Oregon's farthest eastern expanse and its northwesterly metropolis.

But the bill itself— while not perfect — is a good reminder that Oregon's legislative chambers can work together, in a bipartisan fashion, to achieve something that benefits a majority of Oregonians.

Every Oregonian has a gripe about the bill, which isn't always a bad sign. That means everyone gave a little and got a little, too.

Kudos to Gov. Brown for doing what her predecessors could not, and members of both parties in the Oregon Legislature for doing their part, too. Residents from the coast to Wallowa Lake will benefit from it.

A tip of the hat to Heppner, the family of Robert Kilkenny and shoe giant Nike, who have worked to outfit Heppner High School athletes with the coolest, most-cutting edge jerseys on the planet.



The customized jerseys are based on Nike's Vapor Untouchable template, which you'll see on most NFL and college football fields this year and, oh yeah, on a small one in Morrow County.

As we reported in the sports section earlier this week, it's not just the powerful, successful football team who gets to show off their new duds. Volleyball, girls basketball and cross country are among the

sports that received new jerseys, shoes and equipment.

Much of the credit for the initiative goes to the Robert Kilkenny, who passed away last year. Robert was a massive Heppner fan and a community staple. The Nike jerseys include a three-leafed clover with the letters "BB" inside of it — honoring "Bad Bob," as he was known.

A tip of the hat to the city of Pendleton for taking a proactive approach to its housing problems by hosting a summit on the issue.



Earlier this week, the city brought together buyers and sellers, insiders and outsiders, bankers and Realtors, and the all-important developers. It's a smart idea to try to light a fire under people with a stake in the game, as Pendleton suffers with population stagnation and decades lacking economic growth.

A lack of housing is hampering that growth, and action is needed to help stimulate the economy and the local population.

Time will tell if developers plunk down money and/or landowners decide now is the time to sell. But the city did what it could do to get that process going and get people in the private sector thinking about Pendleton housing.

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

Move the railroad south if you're blowing that horn

What is going on with this stupid railroad? I was always told that the city of Pendleton had an agreement with Union Pacific not to blow their horns in town unless somebody or something was on the tracks.

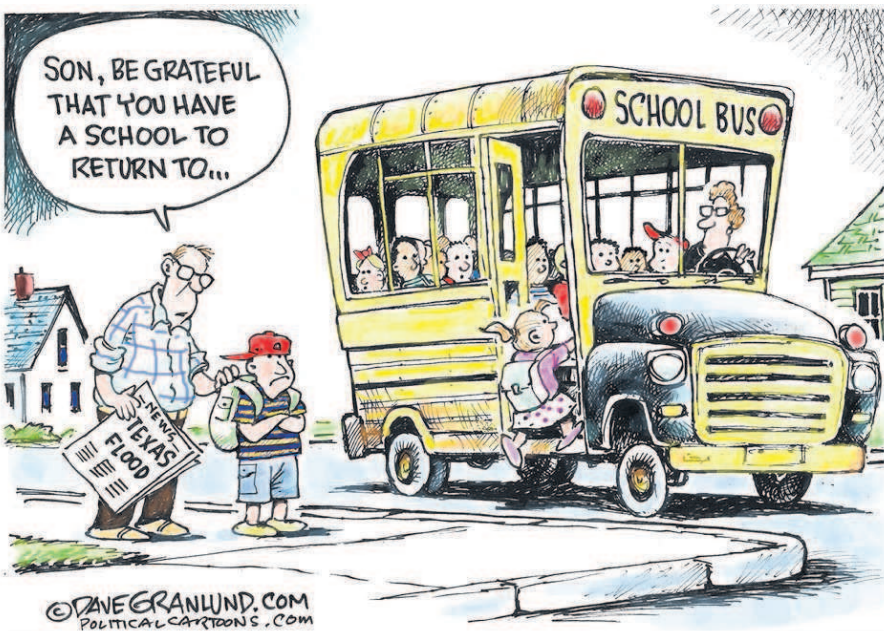
But at one or two o'clock in the morning that's bull, because there is nobody on the track.

When the train is going east out to Mission, he tones the horn down so you barely hear it, but when he

goes through town he raises the dead. Maybe we should call our senators and congressmen and have the tracks moved 40 or 50 miles to the south of town and allow no railroad tracks go through any town.

Wake up, folks, somebody's blowing smoke up somebody. But not me. There is no reason for those horns to be blowing constantly. The engineers are just being jerks about this and when it wakes up little children at 11 p.m. or midnight it's time that things change.

Joe Dunagan
Pendleton



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.



OTHER VIEWS

Many shades of the U.S. at war

I'm just back from visiting all of our key air bases in Iraq, Afghanistan and along the Persian Gulf, and I find myself wrestling with two stark contrasts: the contrast between what is happening there in the air and what is happening on the ground, and the contrast between the decency of the U.S. military personnel fighting this war and how unworthy Donald Trump — who has become our divider in chief — is to be their commander in chief.

The first contrast was summed up in two wall-size digital maps at our Kuwait-based command center for the war on ISIS. One map displays every military aircraft the U.S. has in the skies over Syria and Iraq (as well as Russian, Syrian and Iranian aircraft) pounding ISIS targets. There are little symbols for B-52s, U-2s, F-16s, F-22s, F-15s, MQ-9 Reapers and jet refuelers. It is a giant aerial armada, a flying killer symphony orchestrated by the U.S. Air Force.

The other map uses different colors to depict the disposition of forces on the ground.

It looks like a broken kaleidoscope. Our U.S. military briefer explained: Purple is for Syrian regime forces and their Russian, Hezbollah and Iranian allies; light green shows Syrian Kurds and dark green Iraqi Kurds; light blue represents "disciplined" Iraqi Shiite militias, while the "undisciplined" ones are another shade. Pro-Turkish Sunni militias have their own color, as do the pro-American Syrian Sunni militias. ISIS fighters are another color, and the official Iraqi security forces are a different one still.

As our briefer noted dryly: "Not everyone here has exactly the same endgame in mind."

This is our war in the Middle East today in two maps: "Star Wars" meets "Game of Thrones."

You can't look at these two screens without thinking about the power that comes from our ability to make one out of many — or the power that is lost to a society like Syria or Iraq that needs an iron fist to make its many into one, and when that fist is removed, how the society fractures into small shards.

So you can't help but get upset seeing our own president deliberately dividing our country between his tribe and the rest of us — undermining what truly makes America great.

Fortunately, though, you also can't help but be buoyed by the young men and women you meet visiting our key air bases in the war effort. They remind you what America is on its best days — still resistant to Trump's divisive dog whistles.

You're standing on the tarmac at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar and the heat index is 140 degrees and the only thing the maintenance crew members of a B-52 want to tell you is how they've kept this plane running for 573 straight missions, without missing one for service repairs.

You're standing outside the mess hall at Bagram Air Field in Afghanistan, and the Lutheran Air Force chaplain is telling you about his preparations to make sure the dozen or so Jewish service members at the base will have everything they need for the High Holy Days.

You're sitting in the cockpit of a C-130 as the woman pilot from the Minnesota Air National Guard does a complex corkscrew — aptly known as a "pucker landing" — into Baghdad, while her all-male crew carefully executes her orders.

You're talking to the young man piloting an F-22 stealth fighter who is describing how careful he has to be when he engages Russian or Syrian fighter jets. The stealth technology of his plane is so good he is basically invisible to the Syrians and Russians until he pops up right on their tail.

His rules of engagement, he says, dictate that if they are not threatening him, he warn them by radio that he's behind them. "They just can't see us," he told me, "and you don't want to spook the herd."

You're on the tarmac at Al Dhafra air base in the United Arab Emirates going 90 mph in a Dodge Charger, following right behind a U-2 spy plane as it lands, helping to "catch" it. The U-2 pilot is in a spacesuit — he flies above 70,000 feet — and has little peripheral vision or ability to look downward. So a chase car carries another pilot, who tells the U-2 pilot by radio how many feet he is off the ground so he knows exactly when to stall the engines and hit the runway gently, balancing delicately on his plane's two tiny wheels.



THOMAS FRIEDMAN
Comment

The skill involved to get the landing right — all in about five seconds — is stunning. "It's like a wrestling match" in the cockpit to get the plane down, explained the pilot driving our chase car. Such skill comes only from hours of practice, study and trust building, which comes only from being committed to a cause larger than yourself.

One of the things you learn when you travel with the Air Force is how

reliant we have become on RPAs — remotely piloted aircraft, like MQ-9 Reapers — for killing enemies and for surveillance. I stayed up late one night to watch two pilots at their controls in a small computer-packed shed at Kandahar air base, remotely bringing Reapers in for a landing.

The cliché is that this has turned the war into an impersonal video game, often conducted by people 8,000 miles from the battle. Indeed, many of the Reapers operating here are flown by airmen at Creech Air Force Base outside of Las Vegas. But in some ways they're actually emotionally closer to the fight.

Gen. James B. Hecker, who used to command the RPA pilots at Creech and is now the senior air war commander in Afghanistan, explained to me that when you are flying an F-15 over a target, you drop your bombs from miles above using laser-guided coordinates and then fly off. Often you never see the actual blast, let alone any human casualties.

If you are an RPA pilot sitting outside Las Vegas and operating a Reaper over Afghanistan or ISIS-controlled Syria, said Hecker, "you will sometimes do circles around someone's family compound for three weeks at a time. During that time you'll try to establish the patterns of life of the target individual or group: When do they wake up? When do they go to bed? When do they go to the bathroom outside? During that time you get emotionally involved with their whole life — whether it is the dad playing soccer with the kids or flying kites with his daughter or kissing his wife."

But then one day you'll see Dad get on a motor scooter and place a roadside bomb aimed at killing U.S. soldiers. "So you take out Dad" using a precision-guided missile fired from a Reaper, said Hecker. And then, if you're back at Creech, "you get in your car, go home, kiss your wife and maybe play soccer with your son, knowing that the guy you were watching for three weeks, and just took out, will never do that again with his wife and kids. But if you didn't do it, some American mom would not be welcoming her husband home."

So, "it's not a video game," concluded Hecker, shaking his head. Indeed, he said, there has been enough post-traumatic stress among Reaper pilots that the Air Force instituted a rule that anytime one shoots someone remotely "they have to see either a therapist, an operational psychologist or a chaplain to be sure they're OK."

This is real war, and its effect on people — hunter and hunted — is profound.

Finally, you're sitting at breakfast in the mess hall at Al Udeid and watching a raven-haired Air Force servicewoman at the next table quietly saying grace over her tray of cereal and fruit. Her colleagues around her are as diverse as the colors on that Syrian map. But they're all on the same team, bound not by race, religion, tribe or sect, but by a simple Air Force credo: "Integrity first; service before self; excellence in all we do."

For a moment you wonder, How crazy is it that you have to come to Qatar, Kuwait, Kabul and Kandahar to see the best of America and America at its best?

But then you remember: America produced these people. Their ethos is both latent and present throughout our society. We just need to inspire more of it. And now more than ever, because other forces are latent, too, and ominously surfacing — by permission of our president — like white supremacy.

Precisely because we have a president with no moral authority, we need parents and principals, mayors and teachers, to be our "commanders in chief" — for the next 3 1/2 years — to inspire and scale the best of what is in our society, what's so clearly on display in these far-flung military outposts. Indeed, we need it now as much as the Middle Easterners do.

Thomas Friedman, a New York Times columnist, was awarded two Pulitzer Prizes for international reporting in Beirut and Israel and one for commentary.