

EAST OREGONIAN
Founded October 16, 1875

KATHRYN B. BROWN Publisher
DANIEL WATTENBURGER Managing Editor
TIM TRAINOR Opinion Page Editor
MARISSA WILLIAMS Regional Advertising Director
MARCY ROSENBERG Circulation Manager
JANNA HEIMGARTNER Business Office Manager
MIKE JENSEN Production Manager

OUR VIEW



Members of the 2017 Hermiston High School graduating class celebrate at the end of last year's graduation ceremony in the high school gym. Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Graduation without a home

The Hermiston School Board has found itself wedged between a rock and hard place in regards to the 2018 graduation ceremony.

The rock is the terribly undersized school gym, which is no longer suitable to host a graduation for Hermiston's senior class. That is a widely held opinion — the district has made it clear it's time to move and a majority of respondents in an online survey said they were "very dissatisfied" with the venue.

The hard place is the lack of consensus about where to go instead. The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center arena, the most popular venue in the survey, doesn't have the infrastructure to host such an event in 2018, according to the center's interim manager Nate Rivera.

The Toyota Center in Kennewick, the district's preferred venue, was the most polarizing in the survey, with 36 percent strongly in favor and 37 percent strongly opposed. And Kennison Field, the crown jewel of Hermiston athletic facilities, may be viable but isn't particularly popular with anyone because of its relatively few additional seats and potential damage to the field and track.

While the public survey has made the decision messier, we commend the district for asking the question.

On Monday the board decided to delay its vote until October. As board chair Karen Sherman said, no decision is going to please everyone. But we know it's more than that: Any decision is going to anger a lot of people.

In the coming month, the board must decide which criteria is most important and communicate that. Arguments have been made based on expense, weather, nostalgia, local economic impact, logistics and even the best interest of the graduates themselves.

If expense or weather are most important, the district must be able

to answer why a full \$10,000 toward gym prep is added to the cost of the local outdoor venues. A quick survey of graduation days (June 10, for ease of comparison), shows an average high temperature of 80 degrees, .03 inches of rain and winds blowing at about 10 miles per hour. The nastiest June 10 in the past decade was in 2008, with temperatures topping out at 55 degrees, with .14 inches of rain and 16 mph winds. The hottest was in 2015, when the mercury reached 93 degrees in the afternoon. It has only sprinkled four times in the past decade, and surpassed a tenth of an inch just once.

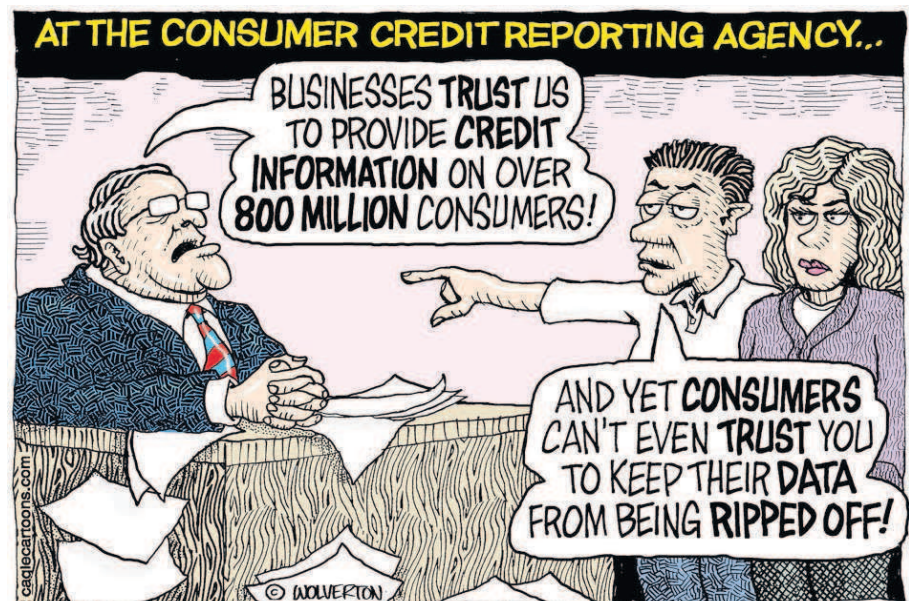
Whatever decision the school board makes, some people will be upset.

If the district decides to move outdoors, as Pendleton did a few years back, only at its very worst should the weather push graduation back inside. Family and friends brave the Eastern Oregon elements all school year to watch football games, marching band performances, track and field meets and more. Spending \$10,000 each year on the off chance a thunderstorm or truly sweltering morning hits is an expensive insurance policy.

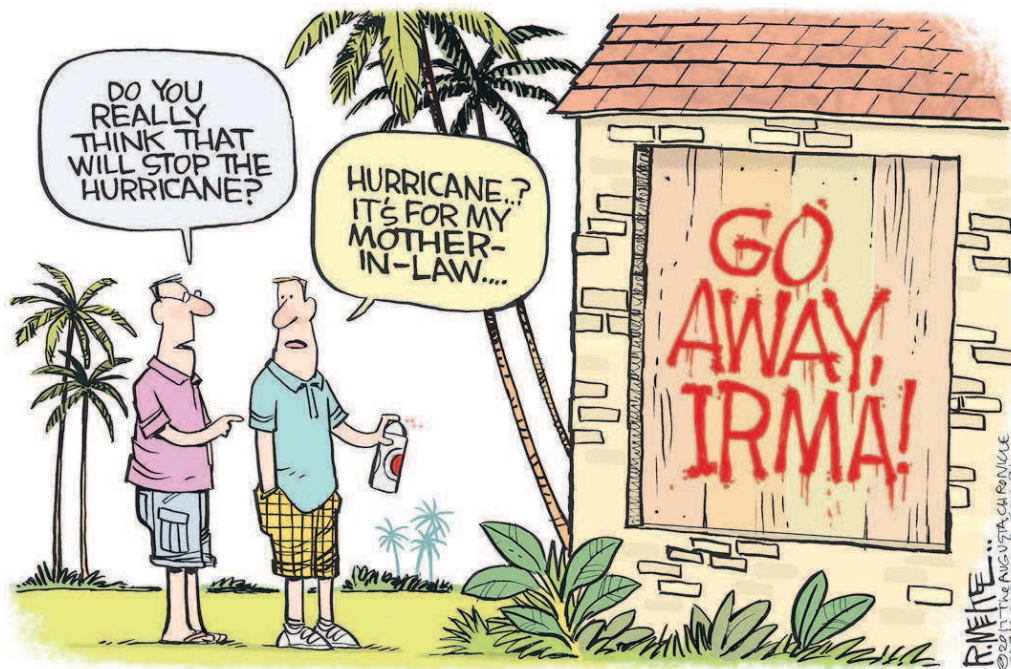
Nostalgia and the best interest of the seniors are less tangible, but can't be ignored. And local economic impact, while cited, hasn't been explored. Each year the school district puts out a release about the positive impact of local sporting events being hosted in school district facilities, but it hasn't included graduation week. Restaurants and hotels are a big part of the Hermiston community, and if they expect to take a hit if the ceremony moves out of state that should be considered.

The school board will meet in October, and must be ready to make a decision for 2018. It's a one-year decision with room to change for 2019, and after all this due diligence all we can ask for is clarity on why the final decision was made.

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.



OTHER VIEWS



Harvey, Irma, Jose ... and Noah

Is there anything we can learn from hurricanes, storms and floods?

People have been asking that question for thousands of years, and telling stories that try to make sense of natural disasters. These flood myths are remarkably similar to one another.

A researcher named John D. Morris collected more than 200 of them, from ancient China, India, Native American cultures and beyond. He calculates that in 88 percent of the tales there is a favored family. In 70 percent, they survive the flood in a boat. In 67 percent, the animals are also saved in the boat. In 66 percent, the flood is due to the wickedness of man, and in 57 percent the boat comes to rest on a mountain top.

The authors of these myths are trying to make sense of vast and powerful forces. They are trying to figure out what sort of world they live in. Is it a capricious world, where cities are destroyed for no reason? Or perhaps it's a just but merciless world, where civilizations are wiped out for their iniquity?

The most famous story, of course, is the biblical story of Noah. As the story begins, the human race is living without law, and as a result is living violently and badly. But there was one righteous man, Noah. God tells Noah to build an ark because He is going to wipe out the rest of humanity with a great deluge.

What does Noah say when he hears this? Nothing. Abraham protested to God when the city of Sodom was under threat of destruction. Moses protested when God was going to harm the Israelites. But Noah is silent. He doesn't try to save his neighbors or argue with his God.

Rabbis and scholars have often judged Noah harshly for this. "He is incurious, he does not know and does not care what happens to others," Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg writes. "He suffers from the incapacity to speak meaningfully to God or to his fellow human beings."

"Noah was righteous but not a leader," Rabbi Jonathan Sacks observes. A leader takes responsibility for those around him and at least tries to save the world, even if people are too wicked to actually listen. Moral integrity demands positive action against evil. Noah, by contrast, opts to withdraw from the corrupt world, in order to remain untainted.

Noah and his family get on the ark and Noah gently cares for the animals. Then the rain stops and it is time to go out and remake the earth.

What does Noah do now? Once again, Noah is silent. He does nothing. He sits in the ark for another seven days twiddling his thumbs. He is waiting for God's permission to disembark.

Once again, the rabbis are critical of Noah's passivity. One doesn't need permission to go



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

build the world. You just do it. "If I had been there I would have smashed down [the doors of] the ark and taken myself out," said the second-century scholar Rabbi Judah bar Ilai.

Now God gives Noah a covenant. Moral laws are handed down, and Noah is told to go off and re-create. Noah seems to flee from this responsibility. Perhaps he has survivor's guilt. He gets drunk. His sons find him lying naked and passed out.

Noah is a good man, but his story is a lesson in the dangers of blind obedience. The God of the Hebrew Bible wants respect for authority and deference to law. But He doesn't want passive surrender.

Sacks writes, "One of the strangest features of biblical Hebrew is that —

Floods are invitations to re-create the world.

despite the fact that the Torah contains 613 commands — there is no word for 'obey.' Instead the verb the Torah uses is shema/lishmoa, 'to listen, hear, attend, understand, internalize, respond.' So distinctive is this word that, in effect, the King James Bible had to invent an English equivalent, the word, 'hearken.'"

Today we live amid many floods. Some, like Harvey or Irma, are natural. Others are man-made.

People are still good at acting individually to tackle problems. Look at how many Houstonians leapt forth to care for their neighbors. But we have trouble with collective action, with building new institutions, or reviving old ones, that are big enough to deal with the biggest challenges.

That's because we have trouble thinking about authority. Everybody seems to have an outsider mentality. Social distrust is at record highs. Many seem to swerve between cheap, anti-establishment cynicism, on the one hand, and a lemming-like partisan obedience on the other.

The answer is the "hearken" mentality that Sacks describes. This is where Abraham succeeds and Noah fails. Abraham listens deeply to God and derives everything from his identity on down from Him, but pushes out ahead of the shepherd.

To hearken is to be faithful but also responsible, to defer to just authority but also to answer the call of individual conscience, to work within the system but as a courageous, creative force.

Floods are invitations to re-create the world. That only happens successfully when strong individuals are willing to yoke themselves to collective institutions.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at The Weekly Standard, a contributing editor at Newsweek and the Atlantic Monthly, and is currently a commentator on PBS.

YOUR VIEWS

Kudos to decision to keep Confederate flag off Main

I've never written a letter to the editor before, and there's been no shortage of opinions offered about the Main Street Cowboys' decision to deny vendor space on Main Street to Liberty Flags & Gifts.

But after reading Donald Lien Jr.'s letter in the Sept. 6 edition of the East Oregonian (Confederate Flag is not racist, should be welcome), I could not remain silent. Mr. Lien presented a series of half-truths in an attempt to distort the whole truth, and I thought his effort to rewrite history shouldn't go unchallenged.

Although the flag in question may have originated as the battle flag of Northern Virginia, it was adopted by several Confederate armies during the Civil War, and later became so completely identified with the Southern cause that it became popularly known as the Confederate Battle Flag, and has long been recognized by almost everyone, including Southerners, as the primary symbol of the Confederacy.

Mr. Lien's assertion that the flag's design was only meant to convey the message that

the southern states wanted to be "crossed out of your union" completely ignores the reason for that message in the first place, the reason they undertook a "secession movement" to begin with — namely, the right to buy, sell, own and treat other human beings as property.

Despite revisionist attempts to frame the Civil War as a battle over states' rights, it was always about the "right" of the Confederate States to own slaves. Without the issue of slavery, there would have been no secession movement and no Civil War.

To insist, as Mr. Lien did, that this flag did not "actually represent slavery, hatred, white supremacy or something worse" should cause one to wonder just who the "biased and uneducated people" really are.

To insist, as Mr. Lien did, that "This flag is not racist. Never has been. Never will be" is to be either dishonest or ignorant about both history and the truth. Again, in his own words, "All that people need to have to be able to see and understand this truth is a basic knowledge of history and an ounce of common sense."

For what it's worth, I think the Main Street Cowboys made the right decision.

Scott Little 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.