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OUR VIEW

The economic engine that needs the keys

The most important developable land in Eastern Oregon — the former home of the Umatilla Chemical Depot — sits just off Interstate 84 and the Columbia River.

These 17,000-or-so acres had been used for decades to stockpile chemical weapons. But since the closure of the military base in 2012 (and the loss of more than 1,500 jobs that went along with it) the land has been promised for private enterprise. Large corporations and major projects have drooled over the property, which is not only along two interstates and a river, but also near the railroad and good labor markets in Hermiston and Tri-Cities.

Yet, here we are, more than five years after closure, and the land remains unchanged. It is still in the hands of the U.S. government, despite multiple deadlines and promises for handovers that have come and gone. With each missed deadline, some major projects — with jobs and taxes in tow — have come and gone, too.

The Columbia Development Authority was put in charge of facilitating the handover, and shepherding its transition into productive industrial lands. But the CDA still doesn't have its hands on the land. They've spent much of the last five years working to secure water rights, environmental cleanup and a no-strings-attached deed. Now, after relics of religious significance to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation were discovered on the site, additional cultural studies are needed.

As the clocks ticks on, those major investors remain on the sidelines. While the CDA works to corral their own cats, the organization has also been working to get a myriad of far-flung government factions (from the Pentagon to the EPA) on the same page. It hasn't been easy. Little problem after little problem, ground even slower by the inefficiencies of bureaucracy, has stifled progress.

Now a new deadline approaches: Dec. 1, 2017. Greg Smith, hired to direct the CDA, said he and his board will be there on site for a ceremonial securing of the deed that day, even if the other side doesn't show.

He's requesting some congressional muscle to get that done. U.S. Rep Greg Walden, who stopped by our editorial board Wednesday, said he has offered assistance multiple times throughout the last years, and remains dedicated to helping when he can. But he says the CDA must have all of its internal issues settled by Dec. 1 as well. No one needs a reminder of the Coyote Island Terminal near Arlington, where work started before all the Ts had been crossed — an expensive lesson learned for everyone.

> The former Umatilla Chemical Depot lands are the best chance for major economic development in Eastern Oregon.

Deadlines are critical. In newspapering, we have one every night, and the paper goes out the next morning no matter what. Has been that way for more than 140 years here at the *East Oregonian.*

Clearly, the future of the depot land is a more complicated arrangement, with lots of different responsibilities in lots of different hands. And those hands are in D.C., in Mission, in Hermiston, in Portland and the Pentagon, and they're all operating with different amounts of urgency.

But now is the time to break out all the clichés: we need all those hands on deck, we need many of them making light work, and we need all those ducks to line up in their pretty little rows.

There is little that will bring a more clear, quick economic benefit to Eastern Oregon than having these lands in local control. This editorial board will help as it can, and we expect everyone else to do their part, too.

See you Dec. 1.

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

Oregon's prisons shouldn't be nursing homes

In Oregon we are holding geriatric seniors — ages 75 and older — in our prisons. They are being denied their earned Social Security benefits, causing hardships to families. This cost per family is a minimum of $200 per month, just to maintain contact.

The access to adequate medical care is compromised by the shortage of medical staff and inmate overcrowding, due to excessive sentences handed down by prosecutors. The overwhelming cost to taxpayers to facilitate the medical needs is astronomical: $40,000 per inmate annually.

More and more aging people are becoming seriously ill and dying in prison. These prisons are not equipped to be nursing homes.

There is a zero to 0.1 percent recidivism rate in these older, first-time alleged offenders; much lower than that of the younger population of those there for the first time.

An immediate first step would be for legislators to work with parole boards to give more weight to prison transformation. The longtime lockup of those who pose no security risk is an excusable waste of money, human potential and loss of life.

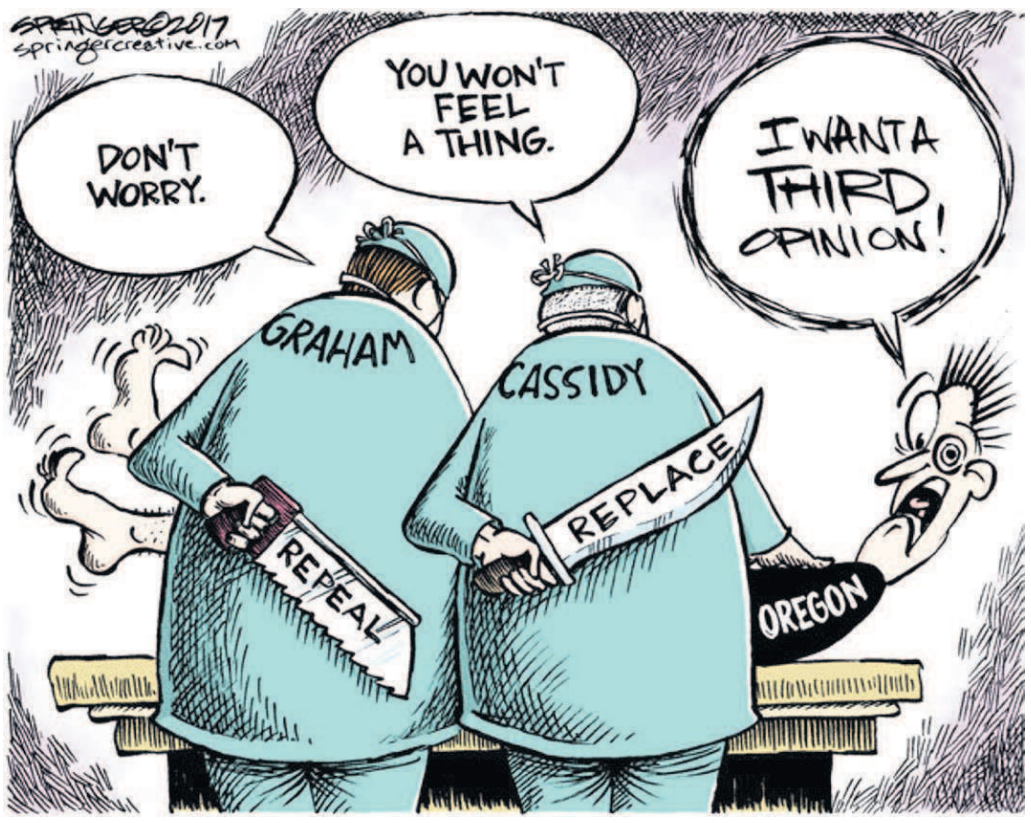
Early release of these geriatric seniors is the sensible and humane way to relieve the expense, overcrowding and inadequate medical staffing.

It is unfortunate that financial and occupational gain is more important than human life.

Merrie Lee Cummings Engstrom
Portland

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. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

In Rome, a visit with the Anti-Trump



Timothy Egan
Comment

ROME — Walking to the Eternal City, over stones worn down by the sandals of centurions, on a pilgrim's path nearly forgotten in all the layers of Italian time, the mind focuses as the muscles stiffen.

The Vatican is 62 miles away, according to a Via Francigena sign, and after another two-dozen gut-busting hills, past too much litter in too many lovely places, now only 50 kilometers distant. At last you come out sweaty and sunburned from an urban forest to see a distant St. Peter's Basilica — the Oz of global Christianity.

What awaits is — for now — the moral center of the universe, and a very politically adept pope. The collapse of honor and principle at a White House led by a man with a pebble for a soul has allowed an enlightened octogenarian to flourish. As President Donald Trump degrades his office by insults, lies and threats to world peace and global health, Pope Francis throws ecclesiastical shade his way.

"The more powerful you are," the pope said earlier this year, "the more responsible you are to act humbly." Quick, Mr. President, to the dictionary. Humble, humbly, humility.

> Behold the Francis doctrine: An expansion of "pro-life" to include help for refugees, the poor, the powerless.

The pope waves from a window at his Sunday appearance. He still projects that lightness of being, wearing his soul on his sleeve. At almost the same time, Trump forwards a tweet of the president of the United States hitting a woman, his political opponent from last year, in the back with a golf ball and knocking her down. Some very funny stuff, believe me.

The pope tells the crowd assembled in the square to forgive, even if the person you cannot force yourself to forgive is, say, a Trumpian monster, though he doesn't name names. Those who cannot let things go, he says, "close our hearts to love for others."

Yeah, well, what does he know? Much more than Trump has yet to figure out. One in four American voters is a Roman Catholic. And a third of those Catholics are Latino. They're watching Trump, but they're listening to Francis — on climate change, immigration, refugees, war and peace.

The pope's approval rating in the United States was at 70 percent in a Pew survey at the start of this year, while Trump has been at about half that for much of the last few months. Throughout the world, every country but Russia (and to a small degree, Israel) has a lesser view of the United States under Trump.

For years at a time — make that decades — the home of the successor to St. Peter was a house of nasty intrigue, deceit and power put to awful use. Popes fathered wars, and children, had heretics executed or chained to a cell in the belly of Castel Sant'Angelo, the fortress that fronts Vatican City. The Vicar of Christ cut deals with dictators, including a devil's bargain with Mussolini. With its institutional cover-up of pedophile clerics, the church showed the Mafia a thing or two about organized crime. In matters of sex, it was medieval and hypocritical. It was afraid of science.

Now the pope uses science to shame Trump, who stares down a parade of hurricanes and says, nothing to see there. "Whoever denies it has to go to scientists and ask them," said Francis last week. "They speak very clearly. Scientists are precise." Can a statue of Galileo in St. Peter's Square be far behind?

On Wednesday, a glorious Roman morning with a bite of fall in the air, the pope holds his general audience. The goofy smile is electric. He's buoyant. The day before, Trump spoke to the United Nations, a tweet dressed up as a speech. He made a very real threat to wipe out a nation of 25 million people. He would, if he has to, "totally destroy North Korea."

This has always been the implication of having more nukes than the other guy. But diplomacy — another word for Trump to look up — is the art of war by other means. Trump pushed America first, which sounded like "Me, me, me." He played the petulance card, the grievance card.

As Trump went low, the pope went high. A few days earlier, Francis was asked about a Trump decision that could break up the families of 800,000 Dreamers in the United States. "If he is a good pro-life believer, he must understand that family is the cradle of life and one must defend its unity," Francis answered.

People who are hung up on doctrinal changes — angels-on-the-head-of-a-pin arguments over whether divorced Catholics can receive communion or not — are missing the big picture. Behold the Francis doctrine: an expansion of "pro-life" to include help for refugees, the poor, the powerless.

Trump doesn't get it. His nominee to the Vatican is Callista Gingrich, wife of Newt Gingrich. Newt, you must remember, carried on a six-year extramarital affair with her while impeaching a president for having an affair. Her appointment was something the Vatican of old would do — a cynical ploy. The Vatican of today can marvel at how quickly history pivots on a single person.

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Timothy Egan worked for 18 years as a writer for The New York Times, first as the Pacific Northwest correspondent, then as a national enterprise reporter.

OTHER VIEWS

Lawmakers shouldn't lose ability to hire relatives

The Bend Bulletin

Oregon allows state lawmakers to hire their relatives, a practice called nepotism. The word itself has come to imply something shady is afoot, although that's clearly not always the case.

About a quarter of Oregon lawmakers, men and women in both chambers and from both parties, hire parents, children or spouses as office workers when they're in Salem, according to *The Oregonian.* The relatives are paid out of the lawmakers' budgets, as are unrelated staff members. No one, not the lawmakers or their family members, will get rich on what they earn serving the state of Oregon. Some also hire relatives for their campaigns.

Nor is the practice particularly rare. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, more than half of the states have the same restrictions that Oregon does: While lawmakers may hire relatives to work for them, there are general ethical guidelines that must be followed when doing so.

Oregon prides itself on its citizen Legislature. Sending the men and women who write our laws back to the communities where those laws will be enforced puts lawmakers in touch with their constituents in a way that would be difficult to duplicate with a full-time Legislature.

The Oregon reliance on part-time lawmakers does have its problems.

The vast majority of legislators come from someplace other than Salem, and because they're in the capital only part of the time, they tend not to have houses or fancy apartments at their disposal. Theirs can be a lonely existence, which can be improved by the presence of a spouse or child in the office. Moreover, as more than one lawmaker told *The Oregonian,* no one understands a legislator's constituents and issues as well as a close relative can.

Then there's this: Scandal as a result of nepotism has been something of a rarity.

Oregon's is not a broken system looking for a cure. Rather, it's a system that has worked well for years, and as such, there's no need to change it.