

Cemeteries remind us of our heritage

The recent passing of Halloween and its related imagery pertaining to graveyards in particular set me to pondering the subject of cemeteries and how we deal with the remains of our family and friends.

For more than 20 years, I have served on the board of the Helix Cemetery District. My wife is the clerk (and treasurer) for our group and, because of my proximity to her, I am officially designated as the secretary. One of my farmer neighbors also serves as an investment guru in town and looks great in a suit; it is therefore logical that he serves as president or chairman of the board (putting him in elite company with Frank Sinatra and Whitey Ford). Another farmer neighbor who stands 6 feet 6 inches tall and has been on the board for nearly 30 years anchors our crew as the member at large.

Being it such that our community’s population is sparse and our budget sometimes limited, we are a very “active” board. We do not only take our fiduciary responsibility seriously, we also dig graves. The job can be downright sorrowful at times — as in the case of neighbors who have departed this realm in their forties or fifties and will never have the opportunity to

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finish all they have started. Other times, there has been occasion for happy reminiscences of the deceased, especially those reaching octogenarian or nonagenarian status who have, in theory, lived a full life.

Within the confines of our district, we have four cemeteries: Helix, Holdman, Myrick and Greasewood. The Helix location was established in 1882 on land donated by the William Scott family and is very well-maintained and even irrigated. Holdman was officially designated in 1906 as the Cold Springs Cemetery; my maternal great-great-grandfather was a signatory on the charter document. It served a once-thriving little village that included a school, a church (but no tavern), a post office, a hotel, a store and several homes. Myrick (formerly called Warren) was established by pioneer German farmers adjacent to their Evangelical Lutheran house of worship, which was built in 1892. I am still a member of that congregation, which moved to town in 1924 and just celebrated their 125th anniversary. The Greasewood (or Finn) cemetery is located a half-mile north of the Greasewood Apostolic Lutheran Church, which dates from 1884. It was established by Finn farmers who immigrated to the New World in search of new opportunity.

All cemeteries, especially those that are old, provide information about a community and its denizens and I rarely pass up a chance for informal historical research. I have walked hallowed ground at Arlington National Cemetery, where I paid respects to Audie Murphy, and Paha Cemetery (west of Ritzville), where I discovered evidence of another enclave of German immigrant agrarians from the 1880s.

On the farm, we must sometimes fulfill the role of sexton, as well. Over the years, we have buried several dogs, two goats, and a few rabbits that were retired from kids’ 4-H projects. Daughter Annie possesses an artistic proclivity and has created numerous headstones, some in bright hues, to mark the final resting place of departed companions such as Gus, Frank and Larry.

A particular favorite recollection related to disposition of livestock remains was told to me recently by one of my well-experienced neighbors. Sometime in the 1940s, one of the family’s cows died.

My neighbor and his younger brother were charged with the task of burying the bovine. These two young guys were energetic and resourceful and, upon discovering dad’s stash of dynamite in the shed, they hatched a plan to quickly create a hole big enough to throw a cow in. The cow was drug to a safe location and the fuse was lit. The two boys leapt behind the carcass for protection from the anticipated blast — but nothing happened.

Apparently, the dynamite had gotten wet while in storage. It was probably a good thing, according to my neighbor, because

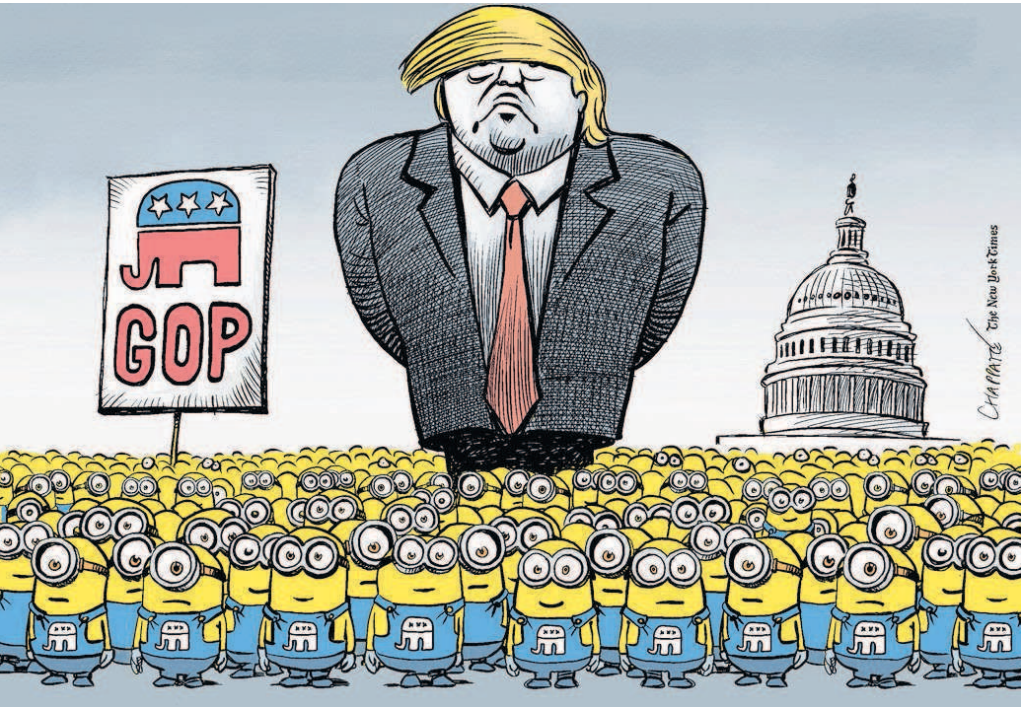


MATT WOOD FROM THE TRACTOR

the dirt scattered in the “excavation” process would have ultimately hindered efficiency. I long for the good old days when an honest kid still had access to dynamite.

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Matt Wood is his son’s hired man and his daughter’s biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.



Producing solar panels in Oregon: Will the sun rise again?

Solar World, a Portland-based maker of solar panels, may soon receive trade tariff protection. Suniva, an Atlanta panel maker, is in line to receive the same treatment. Global competition has pushed both companies into bankruptcy.

Solar World and Suniva sought protection under a safeguard provision (often referred to as a 201 case) that can be used in response to a surge in imports — even if they do not otherwise violate any trade agreements.



KENT HUGHES Comment

How did the U.S. lose its edge in the production of solar panels? After all, the United States has a several decade history in promoting solar power. In response to the energy crisis of the 1970s, the United States adopted a mix of tax incentives, loans and grants. Support returned periodically in response to the fluctuation in energy prices and, during the Obama administration, as part of a response to climate change.

Germany and Japan also created incentives for the use of solar panels and separate incentives for their home industry to make the panels. As for the United States, increased solar power offered a reduction in dependence on imported energy. In Germany, the focus on solar power also responded to the Green Party (a probable partner of Chancellor Merkel’s new government) and to Germany’s move away from nuclear power. Solar use received added emphasis in Japan after the nuclear accident at Fukushima led to a shutting down of nuclear power plants that had provided 30 percent of Japan’s electricity.

What happened? The short and long answer is China. China saw the potential of solar power and provided extensive support to encourage the growth of its panel manufacturers. The Chinese efforts led to a drop in prices of 80 percent between 2008 and 2013. The result has been devastating for domestic producers in Germany, Japan and the United States. For instance, Solar World’s German parent had already declared bankruptcy before its American affiliate sought legal protection.

By using the 201 approach, the tariffs or other trade protection would be applied across the board to all imports, thus avoiding a foreign company’s attempt to shift production to another country. The International Trade Commission, an independent federal agency, voted 4-0 in favor of a finding that injury from imports had occurred. The next step will be a recommendation by the ITC to President Trump that could come early in November. The President will then have 60 to 90 days

to make a decision to accept, reject, or modify the recommendation of the ITC.

The lobbying of the President is already underway. Leading the charge is the Solar Industry Association, representing the industry that installs the panels. The SIA argues that the lower cost imported panels help them compete against other forms of power, letting them keep and create thousands of jobs. Solar World and the other panel makers argue that slowing foreign competition will let them add thousands of manufacturing jobs, a priority for President Trump.

The battle between the panel makers and the installers is parallel to the battle over steel imports and other imported goods.

Steel producers point to competition from foreign subsidies, dumping or other factors to argue that U.S. industry is at risk. Users of imported steel note that applying tariffs on imported steel will add to the cost of domestic housing and potentially raise the cost or exports that depend on steel.

Both argue that thousands of jobs are at stake. The steel and aluminum industries also emphasize that they are critical for national security and should receive trade protection under the national security provision of the trade law.

On October 31, the ITC suggested a series of remedies for the domestic manufacturing industry ranging from tariff-rate quotas (tariffs rise after a certain volume of imports), higher tariffs that will decline over time, with some commissioners calling for negotiations especially with China. The remedies fell short of what the domestic manufacturers had requested, leading to predictions that job losses (for installers) and job gains (for manufacturers) would be reduced.

The President’s focus on manufacturing has led to debates over jobs. But laying behind many of the trade-related cases are two generic challenges: First, the manufacturing base also supports America’s national security and is part of America’s innovation system; Second, America is facing foreign economic systems that often give foreign producers an advantage.

How President Trump weights the balance of near-term jobs, innovation, national security, and responding to different economic systems will determine whether or not the sun rises again on Oregon’s solar panel industry.

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An assertive China we need to heed

Assessing China’s President Xi Jinping’s extraordinarily fast rise to power — and his philosophy — should bring little comfort to us Americans. Since 9/11, we have been too caught up in our own domestic and other foreign preoccupations to appreciate China’s goal, not just to be an equal superpower but to restore China as the historical “Middle Kingdom” dominant in the world. Xi’s disdain for Western democracy means he will be touting an entirely authoritarian model.

Party Congress: “Xi Dada,” or Big Daddy Xi as he is fondly called in China, emerged from the October Communist Party Congress as the most powerful leader since Mao Zedong. Xi’s thoughts on governing were enshrined in the Communist Party constitution. His command titles were multiplied. His allies now occupy key party seats. And no successor was named to the top Politburo Standing Committee, suggesting that he intends to rule for a long time.

Dream: Xi’s “dream for China” from the start of his presidency in 2012, is laced with hubris, nationalism and xenophobia. Xi sees a glorious revival for China in the 21st century after what he argues has been its 100 year “humiliation” by Western colonial powers. He wants strictly Chinese elements to be injected into international rules and to be considered the strongest country in the world — economically, politically, militarily and culturally.

Democracy: In Xi’s view, China’s history and social make-up render it unfit for multi-party democracy — or any other non-Communist system. Moreover, he thinks the U.S. and Europe are in decline.

Soviets: He is obsessed by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 and blames it on the steady infiltration of “subversive” Western political ideas, failure of Communist Party conviction and weak Soviet leaders. He admires Vladimir Putin and has met with him more than any other foreign leader.

Communist Party: The Chinese CP must in his view remain as Mao intended — absolutely in control. Xi has insisted on strict loyalty to party (and himself) and revived Mao’s policy of public confessions. Xi uses perhaps the largest security and secret policy establishment in the world for enforcement. By mining multiple data sources, the party is newly giving every citizen a “social credit” rating and a digital facial image. Offenders, easily tracked, are already being punished or suppressed. Even modest dissent has been crushed.

Anti-corruption: His anti-corruption campaign is how he is purging anyone in the party military or, most recently,



HARRIET ISOM Comment

business community who is a threat to him.

Economic Reform: Instead of privatizing or closing the bloated, debt- loaded state enterprises as expected, Xi is strengthening them. He presumably concluded that the CP has greater control over state enterprises than private companies.

Private Business: Indeed, China’s entrepreneurs, including 647 billionaires, have grown into a powerful constituency, many of whom have invested abroad and have ideas of their own. Technology giants such as Alibaba and Tencent are another powerful element. Xi is seeking to control them by demanding loyalty, restricting investment abroad and putting party people on company boards.

Foreign policy: Xi has been promoting China tirelessly on the world stage through, among other things, wide-ranging travels, new Chinese lending institutions, new trade associations, a robot moon landing, South Sea island creations, a robust military build-up and new overseas bases. He is happy to replace U.S. leadership of “globalization” and the most modern renewable energy projects. He has announced a huge Chinese infrastructure project to recreate the old Silk Trade Road.

Foreigners: Westerners in particular are finding themselves less welcome than before. Diplomats are getting a cold shoulder. Foreign NGO’s are being closed. Western journalists were excluded from the October Party Congress press conference.

Comment: We in the West seem amazingly blasé about the significance of China’s extraordinarily rapid development in just 40 years to already be the world’s second biggest economy — and still growing. It is the only world nation that can effectively challenge us. With Xi in power, China’s model will be a highly controlling, digitized style of authoritarian rule reaching out boldly to remake the world order in the 21st century. True, authoritarianism can develop its own chinks for self-destruction as it did in the Soviet Union. But we can’t be sanguine. China has, with its 5,000 years of history, a very long view, exceeding patience and, today, enormous determination and resources. We truly need our own long term strategy for protecting and enhancing our preferred model of Western democracy — and its values of rule of law, basic human rights, civil society, free trade and freedom of the seas, air and space.

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Ambassador Harriet Isom grew up in Pendleton. She was a career diplomat and retired to the family ranch.