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OUR VIEW

A Round-Up uprising

The Pendleton Round-Up had a remarkably non-traditional stockholders meeting last week that uncovered a fissure that has been bubbling beneath the surface for at least a few years.

A notoriously insular organization, the Round-Up's lack of openness throughout those years is part of the reason why the geyser erupted in such a powerful and public way, nearly toppling the board's pick for president of the 2018 rodeo.

Many readers are interested in the machinations of the board and the root of the disagreement, and this newspaper has tried mightily to get differing viewpoints to talk on the record about reasons for the division. Many have decided not to do so, and that leaves those not in the room — or not in the know — confused. That, we would argue, helps cement the feeling that the Round-Up is a world apart, and not interested in communicating with those outside their club.

But as best as we can understand it, here are few of the disagreements that have divided stockholders:

- Most critical is the lack of financial documents being presented at the last couple stockholder meetings.

It's a legitimate grievance. Interested parties of any organization should demand financial reports in a timely manner, so they can be well-informed on the health of the organization and adjust to changing conditions if necessary.

It did give us a few shivers of remembrance to hear past president Tim Hawkins tell stockholders to "trust the board," and promise that the Round-Up's accounting issues were behind them. We (and many area farmers) were told those exact lines just before another prestigious local institution — Pendleton Grain Growers — descended into bankruptcy and oblivion.

There may also be a deeper division in philosophy. Some on the board believe their job is to fill the stands. They see the rodeo as a cultural event with the same goal it has had from the very beginning — put Pendleton on the map, and bring in visitors and dollars by the wagon load.

Others think the Round-Up board's job is to organize a rodeo that puts the cowboys first. All the other stuff — the vendors and the memorabilia and the parades and the party on Main Street — to some extent distracts from the action in the

arena. Many in that faction are not interested in buying property, or in upgrades or expansion. These are not mutually exclusive philosophies. Cowboys love to perform at rodeos that pay well, as well as rodeos that have full stands and cultural cachet. Currently the Round-Up has both, and that shows no sign of declining.

Another issue is how the Round-Up appreciates and celebrates long-term volunteers. In the past, it seemed many who put in decades of volunteer work shoveling manure, pushing on calves or replacing fences were eventually saluted with a position on the board, allowing them to be feted and have their name remembered in an organization that reveres its history.

But these days, director positions are not figureheads. They are doing important, complex work that often requires complex skills and specific experience. Many directors are business owners or people who manage large events or big organizations in their day jobs.

As the Round-Up professionalizes, it is critical that its board find new ways to thank volunteers who have put in years and years of sweat equity, and not overlook those who may bring a different set of skills to the board.

In general, we think the Round-Up is on the right track. It has been celebrated with national awards, and its grip on the Oregon imagination continues to be strong. We also believe the board is prescient to purchase under-utilized and reasonably-priced property surrounding their own. That's something any business would do if given the opportunity, as much to protect their current investment as open new revenue streams.

The fissures we mention above are all fixable, but they will require clear communication, as well as a listening ear and an open mind.

We know the board always has a tough task. It is required to marry an important traditional event to changing norms, while considering critical future planning.

To stay on task and move forward, instead of being beset by infighting, the board should move magnanimously into the next year. They should put financial transparency at the forefront, and look for new ways to keep up the old traditions of putting on a great show, celebrating the cowboys who give their all and the volunteers who make it all possible.

The Round-Up is moving in the right direction. Transparency and communication are key to moving forward and past infighting.

OTHER VIEWS

Will these senators live up to their own principles?

A small number of Republicans — fewer than 10 — will probably determine the fate of the Trump tax plan. The group includes five senators who have been independent enough in recent months to defy their party leaders, not just with words but actions, as well as a couple who may be newly willing to do so.

John McCain helped defeat the Republican health care bill, in protest of its secretive, rushed process. Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski voted against the same bill because they believed that middle-class and poor families had a right to health care access. Jeff Flake and Bob Corker ended their Senate careers rather than fully submitting to Trumpism. Then there are the two showing new signs of independence: James Lankford of Oklahoma and Jerry Moran of Kansas.

The tax bill is a test of all of them. For progressives, the bill is an easy call. It's a huge tax cut for the wealthy, partly paid for with middle-class tax increases. For the same reason, the bill is deeply unpopular with voters.

But the Republican senators are in a tough spot. They are philosophically conservative. They believe in low taxes and small government. They share this belief with their Republican colleagues, their political base back home and, yes, their donors.

Yet all of the potential swing senators have a problem: This tax bill also contains provisions that betray their stated principles.

For McCain, the principle is the Senate itself. His current term is probably his last, given his cancer diagnosis, and he has been making a righteous stand on the behalf of the Senate — that it should aspire to greatness rather than operating as a banana-republic legislature that rams through bills.

The tax bill violates that stand. Almost as an afterthought, it includes a major change to the health care system — the repeal of the individual mandate. The Senate has not held hearings where experts weighed the pros and cons, talked about unintended consequences and looked for (to quote a recent McCain speech) "compromises that each side criticize but also accept."

For that matter, neither the House nor Senate has held serious hearings on any part of the tax plan. No other modern piece of major legislation has ever been so rushed — except for the health care bill that McCain doomed. Congressional leaders are rushing this bill because they know it's unpopular, and their haste is making a mockery of the institution that McCain holds dear.

For Collins and Murkowski, the principle

is health care. More specifically, it's decent health care for the working-class families who dominate their home states of Maine and Alaska. The two of them were the most consistent Senate opponents of the bills this year that would have taken insurance away from millions.

Now the tax bill threatens to undo some of their good work.

The repeal of the mandate would create turmoil in insurance markets, because fewer healthy people would sign up for coverage, raising prices for everyone else. Collins opposes the measure for that reason, while Murkowski supports it if it's paired with other measures to stabilize health markets. But those measures would need to be sweeping to make up for the damage.

Then there are Corker, Flake, Lankford and Moran. Their principle is the deficit. "We don't want to increase the debt and deficit as a result of tax cuts," Moran said. If the bill adds "one penny to the deficit," Corker said he wouldn't support it.

The current Senate plan adds more than 100 trillion pennies to the deficit in the first decade, according to the official estimate. And that estimate is probably low, because the plan depends on a budgetary gimmick. The bill's authors set the most popular tax cuts to expire, knowing that a future Congress may extend them. Corker and Flake have correctly called out this ruse. They and their colleagues would undermine any claim to fiscal conservatism if they voted for any bill that resembles the current one.

No what are the senators going to do? I hope that they do not fold because doing so — doing what President Donald Trump and Sen. Mitch McConnell want — is the easier political path. I dearly hope they do not follow the cynical tactics of a few of their colleagues who have made a show of opposing a Trump-backed bill only to change positions after being offered a fig leaf of change. Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin and Rep. Tom MacArthur of New Jersey have each done so more than once this year, and now it's hard to take either seriously.

None of us should expect senators to vote only for bills that we personally support. They have their own beliefs and principles. But I do think it's fair to expect them to vote only for bills that are consistent with those principles. This tax bill is not — not even close.

David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for The New York Times.



DAVID LEONHARDT
Comment

This tax bill contains provisions that betray each of the independent GOP senators' stated principles.



"IT WAS A KILLER BLACK FRIDAY DEAL! ... PLUS, WE HADN'T BOUGHT FOR GRANDMA YET."

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

Embarrassments galore from President Trump

In the age of Trump and the unbelievable after unbelievable acts, statements and daily proof of total incompetence by the "leader" of the free world, we now hear of his questioning of the authenticity of the Hollywood Access tapes.

So he actually apologized last year for something he claims he might not have said?

His inability to honor the Navajo code talkers without insulting them and all Indians in general just so he could try and get one over on Elizabeth Warren

by calling her a childish name? His total embrace of a pedophile in Alabama? His calling for a thanks from the UCLA basketball players before he did them the favor?

Who raised this fool? Trump would have to improve greatly just to reach the level of despicable.

We who know him for what he is can certainly forgive those who supported him for ignoring the same. Once.

You have a chance to make it right. Write your representatives. Admit you made a mistake and call for his removal. Own up to your mistake. Yeah, right.

David Gracia
Hermiston

LETTERS POLICY

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