### **OPINION**

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# **OUR VIEW** When the sky goes dark, you take notice

As you surely noticed on today's front page, the East Oregonian listed our top stories of 2017. They run the gamut, from interstellar oddities to a new home for the county fair.

In past years, the list has unfortunately been well-populated with tragedies — from vehicle accidents to fatal fires, murders and destruction. A loss of life understandably increases the long-lasting impact of any event. Thankfully, Eastern Oregon was spared from much of that in 2017.

Sure, we noted some difficulties

- ice storms that shut down roads and schools for an extended period of time last winter, and another summer of fires and wolf kills. But a majority of our top 10 (for a change) was about change. It was about development, as well as local reaction to a dramatic shift in our federal government.

Yet we can't help but think that the many of the Top 10 stories (which were

chosen by newsroom votes) miss some of the deep, underlying issues that will eventually be seen as critically important to the region.

Take for example the massive investment in data centers in Morrow County and west Umatilla County. Amazon alone has spent \$2 billion on building data centers in Morrow County, though not all of that took place in 2017. But this past year, the company built another center at the McNary Industrial Park east of Umatilla, and a fifth

Data centers, the radar, be seen as

amount of jobs associated with the investment is low, there will still be dozens of high-paying employment opportunities coming into our region.

**TIM TRAINOR** 

It's easy to see 5, 10, or 20 years from now, how that will be one of the most important local stories of this decade, and the action of certainly 2017 played a big part in that

Other developments did make the final list: Marijuana legally sold in Pendleton is something that we believe would have shocked

> readers just a decade ago. A controversial mega-dairy built outside Boardman was statewide news, and carries with it massive production possibilities as well as environmental dangers. Drone developments at the airport in Pendleton have brought some investment and scientific advances, and helped the airport go from a moneyloser to at least sustainable.

And underneath it all was a local response to Donald Trump's election. A majority of voters supported the president in Umatilla County, but he has undoubtedly widened the gulf in political disagreements. A relatively quiet, conservative area has seen more political marches and protest in the past year than any time in recent memory. It goes to show just how much Trump's election has spurred many around the country into action.

Still, political movements and



## **OTHER VIEWS** Flying saucers and other fairy tales

I am completely in favor of federal spending on UFO research, an outlay whose existence was revealed to surprisingly little paranoid excitement by The New York Times earlier this month. It is a sign of civilizational health to devote excess dollars to the scientific fringe, and to hope that bizarre secrets still await discovery even in our satellite-surveilled world. So good for Harry Reid and his little-green-men-obsessed billionaire pal for keeping the flame of weird curiosity alive.

But I also doubt that such research will ever prove that the strange lights and vessels filmed by human pilots actually belong to a starfaring species that's come to our planet to study, experiment and eventually offer us a hand up or else ruthlessly

invade. Other sapient species may indeed be out there, but the most parsimonious explanation for all the UFO encounters since Roswell is not that our nuclear testing or space program finally inspired the galaxy to come see what humanity is all about.

Rather, it's that our alien encounters, whether real or imaginary, are the same kind of thing as the fairy encounters of the human past — part of an enduring phenomenon whose interpretations shift but

whose essentials are consistent, featuring the same abductions and flying crafts and lights and tricks with crops and animals and time and space, the same shape-shifting humanoids and sexual experiments and dangerous gifts and mysterious intentions.

This was the argument of Jacques Vallée, French-born scientist and a wonderful character in the annals of ufology, who wrote a wild book in the heady year of 1969 called "Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers," which The Times' UFO scoop gave me an excuse to read. Vallée's conclusion is basically the reverse of Erich von Däniken's thesis in "Chariots of the Gods," published to better sales the prior year. Where von Däniken argued that old myths and biblical tales alike contain evidence of ancient alien visitations (an idea picked up, most recently, by Ridley Scott's "Alien" prequels), Vallée suggested that contemporary UFO narratives are of piece with stories about Northern European fairies and their worldwide kith and kin — and that it's more reasonable to think that we're reading our Space Age preoccupations into a persistent phenomenon that might be much weirder than a simple visitation from the stars. This quasi-magical thesis made Vallée, as he put it, a "heretic among heretics" — the UFO believer who rejected the UFO community's hope that their efforts could one day be incorporated into the normal sciences and lead us to some Spielbergian first



Comment

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contact. But his arguments for the basic continuity between folklore and flying saucers are quite compelling, and I suspect he's correct about the commonality of these experiences ...

Which is not, of course, to say that they reflect the genuine existence of some fifth-dimensional fairyland, from whence morally ambiguous beings emerge to play tricks upon our race. Certainly for most sensible secular scientific-minded people, to say that our era's close encounters

are of the same type as encounters with the unseelie court of faerie is to say that they are all equally imaginary, proceeding from internalized fancies and hallucinatory substances and late-night wrong turns, plus some common evolved subconscious that

fears shape-shifting tricksters in modern Nevada no less than in the mists around Ben Bulben.

But if this rationalist assumption seems natural these days, it is not necessarily permanent. The educated class of Victorian England went wild for fairies and spirits in the heyday of scientistic optimism, and both Vallée and von Däniken offered up their books amid the Age of Aquarius' similar craze. (Just read Sally Quinn's tales of murderous

hexes in her recent memoir to recall how old-fashioned in their magical thinking the New Age's devotees could become.)

Sometimes our own elite opinion seems to be shopping for a new religion: I have read books in the last year pitching versions of Buddhism, pantheism and paganism to the post-Christian educated set. For such shoppers, the striking overlap between UFOs and fairy stories might eventually become an advertisement for an updated spiritualist cosmology, not a strike against it — especially if woven together with multiverse and universe-as-simulation hypotheses that imply a kind of metaphysics of caprice. Meanwhile those of us who remain Christian can be agnostic about all these strange stories, not reflexively dismissive, since Christianity does not require that all paranormal experiences be either divinely sent or demonic or imaginary. Rather the Christian idea is that whatever capricious powers may exist, when the true God enters his creation, he does so honestly, straightforwardly, in a vulnerable and fully human form - and exposes himself publicly, whether in a crowded stable or on an execution hill. So the glamour of UFOs, like the glamour of faerie, is an understandable object of curiosity but a dangerous object for any kind of faith. The only kind of God worth trusting is the kind who does not play tricks.

while under may someday the biggest development in the area this year – maybe this decade.

is currently under construction. Amazon this year also released plans to build four new data centers at a site west of Hermiston.

The total market values of these centers is likely to approach \$1 billion — which once enterprise zone tax breaks age out, will be a massive infusion of resources to Hermiston and county governments in Morrow and Umatilla. Though the economic development cannot hold a candle to our top pick.

The sun doesn't get blotted out by the moon in Eastern Oregon every day, nor every year, nor every century. It's understandable why that celestial event will stick with Eastern Oregonians long into the future.

We hope every year that uplifting, remarkable, fantastic events lead the top stories of the year.

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** Votes of no confidence against Veterans Affairs Medical Center

The (Roseburg) News-Review

hree weeks ago, the Douglas County Veterans Forum issued a vote of no confidence against Dinesh Ranjan, the A unanimous chief of surgery at the call for a Roseburg Veterans Affairs Medical Center. resignation.

We couldn't agree more with how that vote ended up.

The vote, which ended up becoming a unanimous call for Ranjan's resignation, removal or reassignment, was the result of an overwhelming number of complaints filed by VA employees, issues with colonoscopies a pretty routine practice — and a steady stream of retaliation complaints by current and former VA employees.

The vote isn't unprecedented. In 2014, the forum called for the resignation of three top VA officials, including director Carol Bogedain. About a month later, she stepped down. But the vote is a powerful expression of how the county's veterans feel about the current situation. The forum represents 21 veteran groups and about 5,000 local veterans.

Over the past few months, The News-Review has featured several gut-wrenching, confusing and downright strange situations involving alleged mismanagement. The forum, it seems,

has been hearing the same stories. In a statement, representatives of the forum said, "We believe permitting the Chief of Surgery to continue in his

position will continue to degrade VA employees' morale and

thus affect their merciful and diligent care giving." That's about as strong

and as clear as a call for removal can be. We do, however, have one disagreement with

the forum.

Representatives said the forum remains confident in the work Director Doug Paxton is doing to bring about positive change at the VA. In a statement, the forum's representatives said, "Paxton has fostered open and honest communications with the veteran community which is admired and appreciated.'

While it may be true that Paxton himself is capable of having healthy conversations, his ability to hold other managers accountable isn't anything to brag about.

Holding other managers accountable is what directors are supposed to do.

Simply ask Laura Follett, a 15-year Navy veteran, who alleged she was fired from the VA for refusing to bend the rules

"Mr. Paxton is the captain of his ship, and ultimately he is responsible for what's going on," she said.

### Medicaid a federal program that everyone pays into

I'm writing in regards to the front page of the Dec. 27 edition of the East Oregonian regarding upcoming state ballot measure 101 on funding for Oregon's Medicaid program.

The reporter referenced Medicare which is a healthcare plan for those aged 65 and over. The article stated that Medicare is funded "solely by the federal government." I beg to differ with that statement.

Medicare Part A is funded solely by deductions from the paychecks of working American citizens. Review your paycheck stub — there is a line item showing a dollar amount deducted for the employee Medicare. This is not a program gifted by the federal government, but rather it is (prepaid) healthcare, paid for by every working American citizen via payroll tax deductions.

Furthermore, while Medicare Part A begins at age 65, Medicare Part B is paid for by the individual, as is Medigap Plan (which covers the 20 percent not paid by either Medicare A or B) as well as a Medicare Part D plan for prescription drug coverage. There is no funding for any part of Medicare coming form the federal government in any way, shape or form. It is all paid for by the individual Medicare recipient in one manner or another.

Medicare is not an entitlement benefit any more than Social Security or unemployment benefits. Our dollars paid out of our paychecks

Ross Douthat joined The New York Times as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009.

#### YOUR VIEWS

or personal funds - no federal dollars. Plus, where do any federal dollars for anything come from? None other than us by way of our tax contributions.

Pamela Johnson Duso, Pendleton

#### **Approve Measure 101**

Measure 101 is important to rural Oregon. Where you live should not determine the level of care you receive, or if you are able to receive care. Families living in rural communities deserve consistent access to quality health care. In some rural counties, more than a third of families rely on Medicaid.

This January, voters will be asked to vote on Measure 101, which will provide direct funding for Medicaid in Oregon, protecting coverage for nearly 400,000 Oregonians and reducing premiums. It will also allow Oregon to receive nearly \$5 billion in federal funding.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, Oregon's rural uninsured rate fell by 51 percent between 2013 and 2015. We need to build on that success to keep all of us healthy and stabilize costs. We can't go back to a time when many people waited too long to go the doctor and ended up in the emergency room, or never even made it to the hospital. Families should not be put in that position.

**Robert Duehmig Oregon Rural Health Association President** Astoria