

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

## First big issues of 2018

The year is 2018, which has a science fiction kind of ring to it until you realize 2018 is *now*. It's not the future anymore, it's the present.

So before this year gets away from us and we're staring down the barrel at 2019 (which is almost 2020!) we'll take the opportunity to address two of the big issues that will affect our area.

Dealing pro-actively and positively with these will benefit the region down the road.

### Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center

The city of Hermiston and Umatilla County, co-owners of the new event center, will be at the forefront of plenty of discussion this year. Now that the building has been constructed, long-delayed decisions about planning and cost must be addressed in 2018.

Things have gotten off to a rocky start. In the last month, the EOTEC board has been getting guff from all sides — from the fair and rodeo, from Hermiston and Umatilla County, from the city planning commission and growing number of private citizens, especially neighbors.

The realization has dawned on many — specifically on Hermiston City Council and the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners — that EOTEC is not a problem that will fix itself. And possible fixes to strengthen the event center's financial footing will take millions of dollars, protracted oversight and longterm support.

"This is starting to be real money," Hermiston city councilor Jackie Myers commented last week, when another round of bills rolled in.

To keep those bills from snowballing, the city of Hermiston and Umatilla County must take a more active role in managing EOTEC, and push the board to agree with outside management on a longterm plan for the facility. Perhaps a professional mediator will be useful as competing interests try to find a way to compromise.

But however progress is made, we can't go into 2019 with as many unknowns about the future of the property as there are now.

### Taxes

You could probably put taxes on this list each and every year. But in 2018, they will become more important thanks to local, state and federal changes swirling around pocketbooks and business ledgers.

The feedback on taxes will come quickly. The federal tax cut pushed by Congressional Republicans and the Trump White House went into effect Jan. 1, though many will not see any changes until they do their 2018 taxes (in April 2019). Some will see changes in their paychecks come February.

This month voters have their say on Measure 101, a state issue that will decide the fate of a health services tax. The controversial tax, which raises health care costs to help insure low-income Oregonians, will be decided Jan. 23. If it falters, legislators will be sent back to



Staff photo by E.J. Harris, file

### Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center

Salem with plenty more work to do to balance the budget — and that may take the form of new taxes along with cuts.

And on a local level, municipalities will try to balance budgets and keep up with aging infrastructure.

Milton-Freewater voters will decide on a local option levy to support its Parks and Recreation department, everything from repairing the pool to help run the golf course. Pendleton and Hermiston residents are seeing recently passed bonds and levies on their tax bills now, including from the Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, Blue Mountain Community College, Pendleton School District and more.

On the heels of a failed bid for a bond,

the Hermiston School District must revisit the issue and put a question before voters that they can stomach.

And voters in both Umatilla and Morrow counties will have the choice of whether to create an Oregon State University Service District, which would collect 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value to help support OSU Extension programs. Because of compression, taxpayers and municipalities will feel this differently.

How many dollars voters are willing to part with — and how higher taxes impact citizens barely getting by as is — will be at the heart of nearly all significant issues facing Eastern Oregon and its residents this year.

## OTHER VIEWS

## The Wolff eats its own

Guess what? Donald Trump is a raving idiot. Every sentient person knows this, and if Michael Wolff is to be believed, so does most everyone in the White House. So why are we talking about Wolff's book "Fire and Fury" as if it's the news sensation of the decade?

The answer lies in that timeless definition of the word "gossip": Hearing something you like about someone you don't. "Fire and Fury" is catnip for everyone who detests this president. Trump gorges on burgers in a bed he doesn't share with his wife! He barely reads and constantly repeats himself! He has mastered the fine print in the Bill of Rights — all the way from the First to the Third Amendment!

But gossip isn't journalism. And Wolff's book is Exhibit A in how not to damage Trump's presidency, much less his chances of re-election.

So much was apparent in Tuesday's televised meeting of the president with congressional leaders to discuss immigration. This was not a good performance by past presidential standards: Trump seemed unable to grasp what a "clean" bill meant, or where Republicans stood on it. Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., acknowledged as much when he said the meeting got "confusing."

Yet to a normal person casually tuning in, the president appeared reasonably affable and businesslike. He listened. He cracked an appropriate joke. He said he was prepared to defer to the wishes of Congress. Where was the drooling man-child we had been led to expect from Wolff's book and the nonstop coverage of it?

The net result is that "Fire and Fury" has so thoroughly succeeded in lowering public expectations for Trump that it makes it that much easier for him to exceed them. If the White House were smart it would tweet photos of Trump reading Dean Acheson's "Present at the Creation" looking deeply engrossed. That should inspire a half-dozen *Washington Times* columns on how the press used to think Reagan and Eisenhower were boobs, too.

That's not all the damage Wolff has done. The president often misuses the term "fake news," typically by treating every media mistake as evidence of willful and systematic mendacity. This may be enough to bamboozle his ardent supporters, even if the rest of us understand the distinction.

In "Fire and Fury," however, Trump really does have something resembling fake news. The book is replete with casual errors of fact. Invidious stories are unsourced or unverifiable or, on close inspection, simply nonsensical. It was written with white-hot venom. The book's only truly credible voice, if credible is the right word, is the peerlessly

self-serving Steve Bannon.

The book also comes from a writer already accused of playing it fast and loose with the facts. Wolff may fancy that he stands alongside Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein by exposing the hidden intrigues of power. In truth, his book is like a movie "based on real events," an exercise in the art of pleasingly plausible storytelling.

Wolff's book does more than just lend substance to the administration's corrosive fake-news allegations. It brings out the worst in Trump's critics, admittedly including me. Isn't it vindicating to know that White House insiders take the same appalled view of the dim bulb in the Oval Office? Isn't it just delicious to hear those words — "moron," "dope," "idiot" — whispered about the president by the grown-ups in the room?

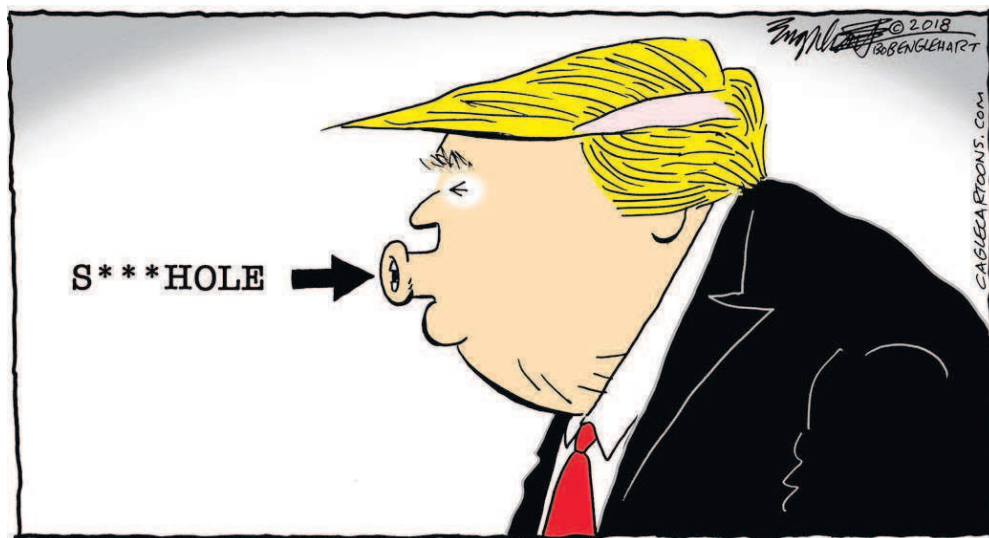
But if the anti-Trump movement has a crippling defect, it's smugness, and Wolff's book reflects and richly feeds it. We're the moral scolds who struggle to acknowledge the skeletons in our own closet, the smart people whose forecasts keep proving wrong. We said Trump couldn't win. That the stock market would never recover from his election. That he would blow up NATO. That the Middle East would erupt in violence when Jerusalem was recognized as Israel's capital.

The catastrophes haven't happened, and maybe that's just a matter of luck. But by constantly predicting doom and painting the White House in the darkest colors, anti-Trumpers have only helped the president. We have set an almost impossibly high bar for Trumpian failure. We have increased the country's tolerance for the president's venial sins. And we have turned the "Resistance" into a byword for the hysterical and condescending ninnyes of American politics.

This is not a winning strategy. One of Trump's underappreciated strengths is his sly command of irony, on display again last week when he tweeted that his two great assets in life were "mental stability and being, like, really smart." Note the superfluous "like," which is stupid when spoken but intended as humor when written.

Misunderestimation has already been the political stock in trade of one two-term Republican president. I believe that Trump is ignorant, incurious, vain, gauche, bigoted, intemperate, bullying, suggestible, reckless and morally unfit for his office. But he's not deficient in cunning, and that cunning deserves healthy respect from his political opponents. That Michael Wolff fails to appreciate it only shows who's the biggest dope in "Fire and Fury."

■  
Bret Stephens won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2013.



## YOUR VIEWS

### CTUIR tribal members have hiring preference

The letter and spirit of tribal self-governance, self-determination, and self-sufficiency are synonymous and easy to understand: Tribes and tribal people assume the responsibility for the management of all tribal affairs. In the context of tribal government, filling employment positions with qualified tribal members is probably the most visible demonstration of tribal self-determination. Our Umatilla tribal government has duly adopted employment policies and procedures that implements tribal self-determination and self-sufficiency.

It is the role and responsibility of the tribal administration to comply with these policies. With much fanfare, Chuck Sams was recently appointed by the Board of Trustees to the position of interim executive director, the top administrative position in our tribal government.

One of Sams' first actions as interim executive director was to make a non-Indian employee (Jane Hill) the publisher of the *Confederated Umatilla Journal*, our tribal newspaper. Thus, non-Indians now have complete control of one of our important tribal institutions as the long-time editor of the CUJ is also non-Indian. This clearly contradicts and undermines our tribal self-governance and self-determination goals and policies.

Our tribal hiring preference policy states that qualified Umatilla tribal members shall be hired, and promoted, before non-members. The courts have consistently ruled that such policies are not based on race, but are based on political affiliation, i.e., enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe. Therefore, such policies are not racially discriminatory.

The BOT, as a whole, are the supervisors of Sams and it is their responsibility to hold him accountable for compliance with applicable policies, including tribal preference policies. The BOT must also ensure that Sams supports our tribal goals of self-determination. However, by their silent consent in this situation, the BOT is giving the green light

for Sams to ignore applicable tribal policies, and our self-determination goals as well. I see this situation as setting a precedent for future similar actions by our new interim executive director.

Bob Shippentower, Pendleton

### Marijuana money for pot holes not private business

The Pendleton Downtown Association is now asking for permanent funding. I suspect eyeballing that unexpected windfall pot tax revenue. We already spend a considerable amount funding the Chamber of Commerce, nearly \$300,000 annually. According to the PDA, the chamber is just not getting the job done, a pretty serious assertion. Despite the claims of the PDA administrator, it's the associate director of the Pendleton Development Commission, a part-time city employee, that has been calling the shots downtown these days with high praise from the mayor, city council, and of course the city manager, awarding him an increase in both his salary and budget. There is now a major concern that funding his many projects will continue to limit our ability to maintain those approved by previous administrations.

Take a close look at the Riverfront Plaza Park, for instance. Nearly half the trees have died and the banners on two of three light poles are missing, with the lone survivor hanging upside down. Many of the wall lights have been burned out for some time. Park maintenance is labor-intensive, much like that in the intersection in front of the Dairy Queen, a hands and knees weeding job. The River Walkway asphalt is cracking and crumbling, and though funding was appropriated two years ago the repairs, directed at the highest level of city government, were never done.

Hopefully the pot tax revenue will be used to fix public streets and buildings rather than fund private businesses. It sounds like the "movers and shakers" are going to get their committee to study the issue, and remind city officials of their responsibility to fund that moving and shaking.

Rick Rohde, Pendleton