

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Trading an event center

After successfully hosting its first fair and rodeo, EOTEC has been plagued by too many people expecting too many contradictory things from the property south of Hermiston.

On Monday, the city of Hermiston and Umatilla County — currently co-owners of the multi-million dollar project — came up with a plan to take at least one cook out of a too-crowded kitchen.

The deal is complicated, but it revolves around one surety: The county would relinquish all ownership and liability of EOTEC and Hermiston would take on full ownership and full responsibility. To get out of the partnership, county commissioner George Murdock proposed that the county pay more than \$1.4 million through 2022, and increase its annual fair lease payment to \$100,000 per year in perpetuity.

We think it's a smart move at this point, though we know it is sure to ruffle some feathers. Many people donated big bucks with the understanding that the former arrangement would continue. State and county taxpayers threw in

many millions, too.

And the Umatilla County Fair — in many people's eyes the whole reason for this project — will cede their ownership stake. Sure, promises have been made to the fair board and there are reasons to be optimistic. But someone else will be making the decisions from here on out, and dollars are bound to be hard to come by. The fair has a right to be nervous about the county backing away.

Underlying this proposal is the fact of a changing of the guard on EOTEC. Many members of the EOTEC board, who have been volunteering for this project for near a decade, will give way to a new generation that will now manage EOTEC day to day.

Things will be lost in the transition, priorities rearranged. There is no way to please everyone and something is always lost between the planning and the execution.

But the last year has made clear that changes are needed in how EOTEC is managed and operated. Hard truths need to be reckoned with, and that's easier —



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock reads a proposal to dissolve the agreement between Umatilla County and the city of Hermiston on Monday.

and better — done when a single set of priorities are in place.

The city, the county and EOTEC are dealing with reality now. Mayor Dave Drotzmann described EOTEC as “another pool” — meaning a city asset that takes a lot of maintenance, money and management without bringing in enough revenue to cover costs.

But, like the pool, it makes

Hermiston a more desirable place to be, and has the potential to make a real difference to local businesses, especially hotels and restaurants.

The city of Hermiston is going to make some difficult decisions in the coming months. After those decisions are made, we'll have a better understanding of what EOTEC is and what its future will be.



YOUR VIEWS

Transparency needed about how county divvies SIP tax

On Jan. 2 I attended a regular Port Commission meeting at the Port of Umatilla. I was there as a representative of the Umatilla Hospital District #1 hoping to gain an understanding of how the strategic investment program (SIP) money would be allocated.

The funds will be paid by Vadata Inc. as part of a 15-year tax abatement program for the three Vadata projects. Two of the projects, the McNary and the Bonney property located west of Lind Road, are in city limits.

The hospital board received a letter dated Dec. 7 from Umatilla County Counsel Doug Olsen, along with an agreement he expected the district to sign. The letter indicated that the district would receive a portion of the community service fee. However, the letter did not explain how the county will calculate the fees or how the fees will be shared among the districts in the two code areas. (The letter also did not accurately explain how much tax revenue the district would lose as a result of the SIP agreement.)

Many public service districts are impacted by the SIP agreement. The county is responsible by law to administer the funds. Umatilla County, the city of Umatilla, Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District and Umatilla Fire District #1, the Hermiston Cemetery District, Umatilla Special Library District, West Umatilla Mosquito District Control District, Umatilla Morrow Radio & Data District and the Port of Umatilla will all receive funds.

My reason for writing this letter is to question why the city and the districts were not included in negotiating how the funds are to be distributed and how the county commissioners arrived at the formula that was used.

Darla Huxel, board chair of the Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District, asked this question at the Port meeting and was told by Olsen and County Assessor Paul Chalmers that county could not answer the question since she is a city employee and the city had retained an attorney to negotiate with the county. That opened up more questions as to why attorneys are involved and why the county is not being transparent.

In my opinion all stake holders

should have been involved. The lack of transparency is disturbing. Let's call a meeting to get answers to these questions and hold the county commissioners accountable.

Danice McBee
Umatilla

What you don't know about the federal payroll

I encourage readers to check into openethebooks.com. This is a nonprofit private agency that takes no federal funding or grants. They expose some surprising — and sad — statistics on how tax dollars are spent. Here are some things they have uncovered:

- The federal government pays its “disclosed” workforce \$1 million per minute — \$66 million per hour — \$524 million per day. In 2016 the federal government had 1.97 million employees whose compensation was \$136.3 billion.

- Over a six-year period the number of federal employees making over \$200,000 increased 165 percent. Those making over \$150,000 increased 60 percent. Over \$100,000 increased 37 percent.

- On average federal employees get 10 federal holidays, 13 sick days and 20 vacation days. If each one took 13 sick days and 20 vacation days (added to the 10 federal holidays) that would cost taxpayers \$22.6 billion.

- In 2015, 406,960 federal employees made a six-figure income (1 in 5). Of those, 29,852 made more than each of the 50 state governors.

- A federal agency in San Francisco, Presidio Trust, gets the prize for the highest paid bonus — the HR manager received a bonus of \$141,525.

- The post office and Dept. of Veterans Affairs employ over half of the federal workforce.

- Only one third of the 35,000 federal lawyers actually work in the Dept. of Justice. The entire staff of federal lawyers were paid \$4.8 billion in 2015.

- The Dept. of Veterans Affairs employs 4,498 police officers at a cost of \$172 million in 2016.

There is a whole lot more of this that needs to be exposed.

David Burns
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

Nevertrumpers face vexing question: What to make of Trump successes?

The start of President Trump's second year in office has given Republicans and conservatives an opportunity to review a solid list of achievements: corporate and individual tax cuts; economic growth; wage growth; a conservative Supreme Court justice; a record number of circuit court confirmations; deregulation; the defeat of ISIS and more. Each is a development worth celebrating, either by the standards of conservatism, or the general welfare, or both.

But for NeverTrump conservatives, the list presents a challenge. Many support the actions, like cutting taxes and reducing regulation, on Trump's list. Yet some have also staked their credibility and prestige on declaring Trump's election an unmitigated, historic disaster that will lead to an autocratic, dystopian future. Many want to force Trump out of office, either by impeachment, the 25th Amendment, or, at latest, defeat in 2020.

So how to deal with the current good news?

The most extreme NeverTrumpers, like *The Washington Post's* Jennifer Rubin, simply rail against everything the president does. But more sophisticated NeverTrumpers are looking for nuanced ways to recognize the president's accomplishments while maintaining that he is a menace — and that they have been right about him all along.

One strategy is to concede some of Trump's successes while insisting that the sum total of NeverTrump objections outweighs those gains.

At the *Weekly Standard*, for example, the editors recently cited some of Trump's accomplishments and asked: “Isn't it time for Trump's conservative critics to acknowledge his election was worth it?” Their answer: No.

While citing a few of Trump's accomplishments, the publication argued that the president's endorsement of Roy Moore in Alabama, his firing of FBI Director James Comey, his bombastic tweets about North Korea, loose-lipped meeting with Russian diplomats, response to Charlottesville, and “shithole” nations remark, along with other things, more than offset goods like wage growth, job creation and a victory against terrorism.

The magazine's founder and editor-at-large, Bill Kristol, remains committed to Trump's defeat. Asked recently what Americans should do if Trump's four years in office turn out well for the country, Kristol answered, “We should pocket those gains (and) heave an unbelievable sigh of relief. “I am still very much for constraining Trump to four years,” Kristol added. “And nothing that could happen, honestly, at this point could tell me Donald Trump should be re-elected.”

To that end, Kristol — who in 2016 led a quixotic effort to find a third-party candidate to run against Trump and last year said “disposing of Trump ... can't be done in a day” — said he is “quietly” working on efforts to mount a 2020 challenge should the president run for re-election.

Other NeverTrumpers keep hope alive



BYRON
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Comment

for impeachment. Max Boot, of the Council on Foreign Relations, worries that Republicans might maintain control of the House in November's elections, which would lower the chances of impeachment to nearly zero. So Boot, a lifelong Republican, is pulling for Democrats.

“I worked as an adviser on three Republican presidential campaigns,” Boot said recently, “but now I'm actively rooting for Republicans to lose the congressional elections ... because the Republicans have shown they are unwilling to uphold their oaths of office.”

At *The New York Times*, conservative columnist Bret Stephens, author of the recent piece, “Why I'm Still a NeverTrump,” argues that reflexive NeverTrumpism actually harms the effort to resist the president. Stephens recently took on Trump critics who denounce the president even when news is good — as when Apple announced that it will bring back most of the \$274 billion it has parked overseas, pay a \$38 billion tax bill, and create another 20,000 jobs in the U.S. Slamming Trump over a development like that, Stephens wrote, does “damage ... to the anti-Trump cause.”

Stephens did not spell it out, but a reasonable inference for those in NeverTrump world is that giving the president his due on good developments — rather than entering the la-la-land of the Resistance — will give NeverTrumpers credibility as they pursue the goal of getting rid of him.

Also at the *Times*, NeverTrump conservative columnist Ross Douthat — all of the *Times's* conservative columnists are NeverTrumpers, which assures the paper a diversity of anti-Trump opinion — recently debated NeverTrump David Frum of *The Atlantic* on whether Trump's presidency has so far been a tragedy or a farce.

Frum, author of the new book “Trumpocracy,” voted for tragedy, while Douthat said farce. Douthat, who once hoped Trump might be removed from office via the 25th Amendment, now seems resigned to the president finishing his term; Frum, who helped get the 25th Amendment talk going the day after the election, is still hoping for an early Trump exit.

Within the range of implacable opposition to Trump, there is a lot of variation in the NeverTrump world — “9,000 cross-currents,” as Kristol remarked recently.

Before the election, NeverTrumpers were united by simple opposition to the Republican candidate. But Trump's presence in the White House has made things more difficult.

Trump will surely run into a major reversal someday; that's what happens to presidents. When it does, NeverTrumpers can say they called it long ago. But as long as Trump is piling up conservative achievements, life will remain complicated for the nation's NeverTrumpers.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.