

EAST OREGONIAN OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Legislature is no longer a safe space for harassers

State Sen. Jeff Kruse had to go. His flouting of Oregon Senate rules against sexual harassment was egregious. His repentance, if any, was short-lived. His resignation is a relief.

When it came to changing his behavior, including his routinely breaking state law by smoking in his Oregon Capitol office, Kruse was known for promising one thing and doing another. That is why Senate leaders initially were careful to say little about his resignation, not wanting to irritate him into rescinding it.

But Tuesday's deadline passed and Kruse's Feb. 8 resignation now is irrevocable.

It is unfortunate that the Roseburg Republican set March 15 for his departure, which enables him to still draw his legislative pay until then while leaving his constituents unrepresented for the rest of the 2018 Legislature.

An immediate departure might have enabled his successor, who will be a Republican, to be selected and sworn into office before the legislative session ends. March 11 is the constitutional deadline for the Legislature's adjournment.

At least Kruse is out the Capitol door. His victims won't be forced to recount his shameful behavior and their painful experiences before a special Senate Committee on Conduct, which

would have included Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena among its four members. And the Senate won't face a potentially divisive vote on expelling him.

This ordeal demonstrates that Kruse is not the only person with much to learn.

An outside investigator found a repeated pattern of sexual harassment by Kruse toward female legislators and female staff, including members of the Senate Republican caucus staff. Yet the caucus' statement about that detailed investigation report said, "The behavior alleged in the report, if true, is obviously not acceptable to the Senate Republican caucus."

... If true ...

Those two words underscore why victims of harassment are reluctant to speak up. Even when supported by compelling evidence — like the Kruse investigation report — they fear not being believed.

A power imbalance exists in our nation's capitols and many other institutions. Staff members, and sometimes lawmakers, owe their jobs and their political careers to the people in power — people to whom they are expected to be deferential.

When allegations arise, these powerful people often close ranks. They say the unwanted behavior was simply misunderstood. They



Timothy J. Gonzalez/Statesman-Journal via AP, File

In this 2012 file photo, Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, speaks at the Capitol in Salem. Kruse not only subjected two female senators to unwanted touching, he groped or gave lingering hugs to many other women working at the Oregon Capitol, according to a report released Feb. 6 by an independent investigator.

question how "supposed victims" can remember incidents from long ago, not comprehending that traumatic memories can last a lifetime. They cast the complainants as attention-seeking whiners.

Some of that occurred among Kruse's defenders. They did not grasp the gravity of his misconduct and its searing impact on his victims.

But other senators did. On the morning after the investigation report was released, Senate President Peter Courtney asked Kruse to keep out of the Capitol. That afternoon, Sen. Tim Knopp broke with his fellow

Republicans, said he believed the women and called for Kruse to resign.

"For too long, there has been a culture in the Oregon Capitol and some places of public and private employment that women need to put up with harassing behavior to keep their jobs," Knopp said. "That culture must end now."

That is a moral imperative. For the Oregon Legislature. For our state and nation. For the world.

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect. Harassment, even if unintentional, is morally and ethically wrong.

YOUR VIEWS

Enough study: Let's start building

The city of Hermiston, by default, has been the beneficiary of the Umatilla Chemical Weapons Depot while having to manage the risk to public health and safety. Fortunately, that time has come and gone. Now it is time to return the property to the region and allow the community to re-purpose the property.

In 1941, the U.S. Department of War commissioned the establishment of Umatilla Ordnance Depot in preparation for World War II, on 20,000 acres in a seemingly barren area of ground near a railroad in northeast Oregon. The total population around the site in 1940 was approximately 2,000. Today, that number is closer to 44,000.

Initially, conventional munitions and supplies were stored on the depot in 1,001 igloos, until 1962 when the Army decided to store chemical weapons there and changed its name to Umatilla Army Depot and then finally the Umatilla Chemical Weapons Depot.

In 1988, it was added to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) list. During the years of 1990-1994, conventional munitions were removed in plans for its eventual closure. From 2004-2011, the chemical weapons were destroyed by incineration according to the Chemical Weapons Convention and monitored by OPCW.

In 2012, the depot closed and the return of the property to local control and re-use was scheduled to happen immediately and seamlessly.

The Army was to turn over the 20,000 acres to the local community who went through a public process to distribute the land

DAVID DROTZMANN
Comment

equitably between the Oregon National Guard, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation via the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, and a local development authority for industrial development. Up to this point, the National Guard is the only user group to receive access and rights to the property.

Hermiston and the surrounding regional municipalities have been supportive, and provided aid when possible in the development, growth and closure of the depot with little to no adverse response. Our communities developed an emergency response system for potentially catastrophic events and individually had to learn to shelter in place.

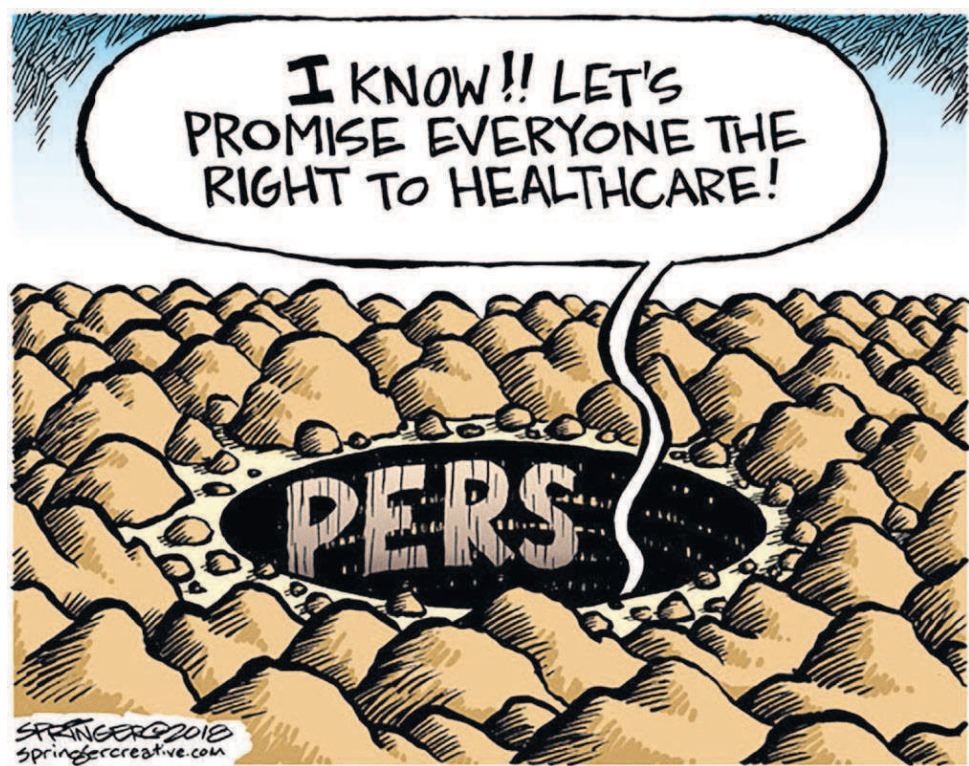
However, that ended in 2012 when the final remaining employees departed to other areas of the country. Now, the property sits idle with little to no development and the structures continue to age and become more dilapidated.

With each new government department head, there seems to be an additional hurdle to cross. This time, the Environmental Protection Agency is requiring a further study. With each new obstacle, a new delay and another community opportunity is lost.

As businesses look to locate, develop and invest in our local community, the unknowns related to timeline for transition continues to hinder the development of this community asset.

For 30 years, it's been on the BRAC list and programmed for closure. The time has come for the federal government to return the land to the local community for redevelopment.

David Drotzmann is mayor of Hermiston.



YOUR VIEWS

Doesn't our right to life outweigh right to bear arms?

Seriously? Is the right to own any kind of weapon is more important than the safety of our kids in schools across this nation? The politicians under the thumb of the National Rifle Association without a hint of a backbone or decency using the tired old "our hearts and prayers" line or "now is not the time" line when responding to these all too common atrocities is so discouraging. What are we doing?

We're always patting ourselves on the back about being the greatest country in the world and we refuse to directly confront this huge problem plaguing our society on a daily basis. Our gutless president and other members of Congress on the take from the NRA show their true colors. Their loyalty to this all-too-powerful organization and the money they receive from them is far more important to them than the safety of our society.

Please remember to vote accordingly the next time you have the opportunity. Let's get our priorities in order and try to truly deserve the label as the greatest country in the world.

David Gracia
Hermiston

U.S. is now getting beat at the 'soft power' game

There used to be a lot of talk, during the long years of the Cold War, about how U.S. "soft power" attractiveness managed in many ways to outshine and outweigh the communist side's prowess in the fields of rocketry, missiles and tanks. Justifiable indeed was America's studied efforts to

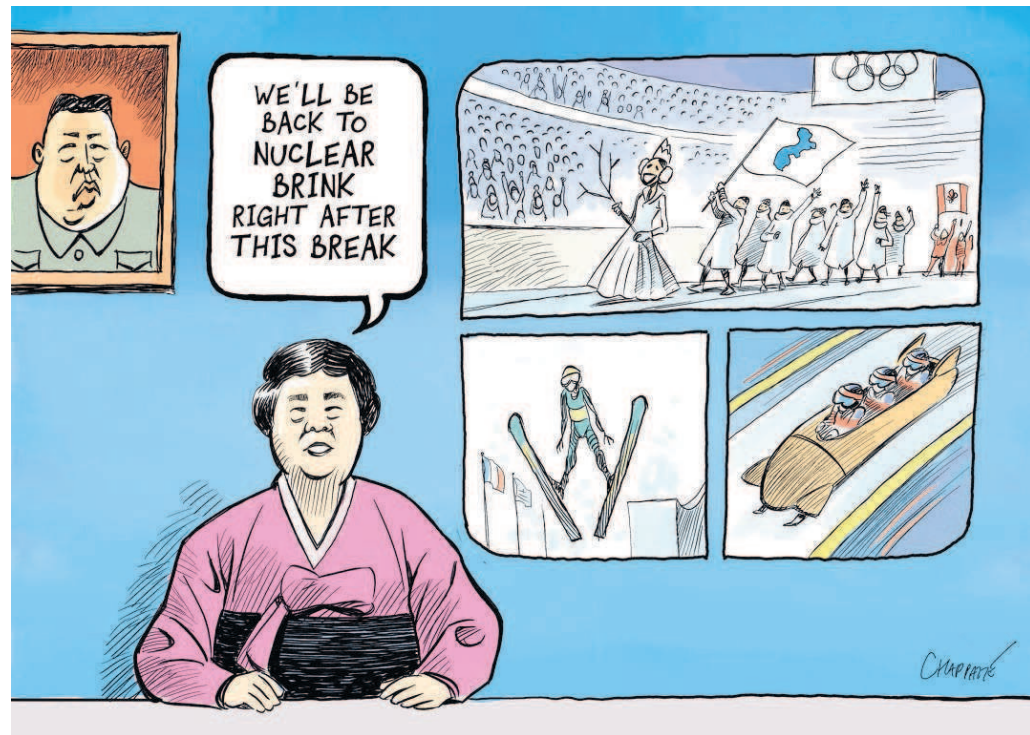
"put its best feet forward" at this time by regaling the populations of communist bloc countries with the best in U.S. popular and high culture. These "people-to-people" performances certainly did their thing in helping the Western world to win the Cold War.

Now, in a reversal, we're being treated to a bravura performance in the area of soft power by the Democratic Republic of Korea, or North Korea. Audiences in South Korea have beheld a dance group, a bunch of cheerleaders and even the younger sister of Kim Jong-Un in a huge example of North Korea "putting its best feet forward." This appears to have scared Seoul's U.S. and Japanese patrons. Official Washington, D.C., and Tokyo cautioned South Korea not to be taken in by Pyongyang's "charm offensive."

Much talk is being tossed around about Seoul's "appeasement" and "naiveté." When the North's "Sister Number One" placed a blue folder on South Korean President Moon Jae-In's desk, there was much speculating about what sort of message it contained from the North's absolute ruler. It turns out that Sister Number One invited Moon to visit the North "at a time of his choosing."

North Korea, it's clear, knows a thing or two about soft power public relations. Kim Jong-Un's sister truly did "steal the show" at the PyeongChang Olympics — she, plus the so-called "Army of Beauties" that Kim Jong-Un sent south of the 38th Parallel.

Underestimate Kim Jong-Un's propaganda and PR skills? That will probably happen a lot less frequently as we go forward.

Frank W. Goheen
Vancouver, Wash.

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