

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

What gives us the right?

Over the next week, this newspaper will turn over much of its space to endorsements of candidates, its determination on ballot measures of local importance, and to make our recommendation in political races from the U.S. House to local city councils.

We'd like to take the opportunity, before you read those endorsements, to explain why we do it.

In this day and age — when everyone has an opinion and everyone else is going to hear about it — many newspapers are rethinking the endorsement. They can be contentious. Almost every election season we hear from someone who so heartily disagrees with our recommendation that they cancel their subscription.

And they are especially fraught in local races, when we're not arguing about dense economic policy or the far-away concerns of peace in the Middle East. We're talking about people who we see on a regular basis in our jobs and on our sidewalks. And who we will likely have to work with if they win, whether we endorse them or not.

Yet we feel that as an editorial board, we can offer some helpful insight to voters. We have the opportunity to discuss issues and ask questions to all of the candidates running in local

elections. We sat down with both local judge candidates, more than a dozen candidates for city councils in Hermiston and Pendleton, all county commissioner candidates, most candidates for governor and U.S. Representative, both candidates for the Labor Commissioner, proponents and opponents of the OSU Extension District and more. Perhaps no one else in Umatilla County has been able to sit down with all those people for a frank and fruitful discussion.

We believe that has some value. And we'd like to tell you what we heard, thought and learned. You are certainly welcome to disregard our advice. But we do our best to present nonpartisan, unbiased, independent summation of our meetings, as well as our thoughts about who we think will make the best use of the tax dollars we entrust them with, and will do the best work for all of their constituents.

It is possible to do that. Sit down with enough people running with political office (especially in a primary), and political distinctions seem to fade away. We look for people who are experienced. We look for people who have new, interesting ideas. We look for people who answer our questions honestly. We look for them to be knowledgeable about the position they are running for and



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Umatilla County commissioner candidates participate in a forum recently in Hermiston.

committed to learning more if elected. We look for people willing to work hard. We look for people with a record of accomplishments, and time spent as a partner and leader in our communities.

Federal and state representatives, county commissioners and judges receive a healthy salary from taxpayers, so we ought to hold them to high standards. City councilors and mayors receive a pittance in return for the thankless tasks they take on. Yet we know those jobs are important, too. And those running for them require a critical eye to their qualifications and their

proposals.

Our endorsements will run over the next two weeks. This page will be peppered with our thoughts about candidates in the May elections — a primary election for some partisan races, and a binding general election for most local questions.

But you have the final say. And your vote is powerful in local elections. With our endorsements, we're not trying to influence your vote as much as we're trying to empower it. We'll tell you what we know because we want you to know it, too.

OTHER VIEWS

James Comey's debasement

James Comey's book is titled "A Higher Loyalty," but it surrenders the higher ground, at least partly. To watch him promote it is to see him descend.

Not to President Donald Trump's level — that's a long way down. But Comey is playing Trump's game, on Trump's terms. And in that sense, he has let the president get the better of him.

Trump has sought, by accident and by design, to define leadership downward and establish new norms of behavior for political candidates and government officials.

Everyone is out for himself or herself.

No gambit is too tawdry and no accusation too speculative, not if the television cameras approve. The only thing better than a whole lot of attention is a whole lot more.

And here we have the former head of a supposedly scrupulous, detached federal agency reaching for Mafia metaphors, indulging talk of the so-called pee tape and taking cosmetic digs at the president in the service of a book tour as exhaustive and elaborate as they come. There's apparently room in Comey's primness for a measure of Michael Wolff.

His demeanor may not be fiery or furious. Talking with George Stephanopoulos for an hourlong ABC News special on Sunday night, he maintained a subdued, steady voice and communicated sadness more than anything else over Trump's conduct in the White House.

But other aspects of that special told a more complicated story. For starters, Comey didn't just agree to a single, straightforward sit-down with Stephanopoulos. He granted a level of access akin to a pajama party.

Meet the wife. Here are some great shots of the kids. And here are the long fingers of Comey's normally sized hands on the very keyboard that he used to type the memos that documented his interactions with Trump. Comey was game to provide footage of that — and to follow up with interviews on Tuesday on "Good Morning America" and on Wednesday on "The View," which is not a place where I would have expected to see a former FBI director anytime soon.

I mention hands because Comey does. That was one of the first bits of his book that leaked out last week. Flashing back to his initial up-close encounter with Trump, he recalls how orange Trump's skin looked, how improbably his hair glistened and how inferior his hands were. "Smaller than mine," Comey writes, but not "unusually so."

I chalked that up to a fleeting passage overplayed by the media, and I was heartened by other advance material from

FRANK BRUNI
Comment

the book. Comey, for example, mentions his experience in two administrations before Trump's and has judicious complaints about members of each. He thus makes clear his broad frame of reference and ability to find flaw on both sides of the aisle.

But he revisited Trump's physical peculiarities with Stephanopoulos on Sunday night. Didn't Comey always tell us that he was better than this?

He could have set the record straight and settled any scores that need settling without a tour this extended or details this catty. His choice of a different tack suggests some

unflattering motives in the mix. It gives Trump's allies plenty to attack him with, and it has goaded Trump — predictably — into his most infantile epithets.

There's obviously no contest of character or credibility between

Comey and Trump. I believe most and maybe all of what Comey has to say, and much of it needs saying, as an answer to the president's lies and an exposure — affirmation might be the better word — of who and what Trump is.

But in succumbing to this showboating and spite, hasn't Comey joined Trump almost as much as he's defying him? Comey says that he means to shine a spotlight on what leadership should and shouldn't be, and I hope that's the long-term takeaway of the "Higher Loyalty" rollout and all the hours and miles being devoted to it.

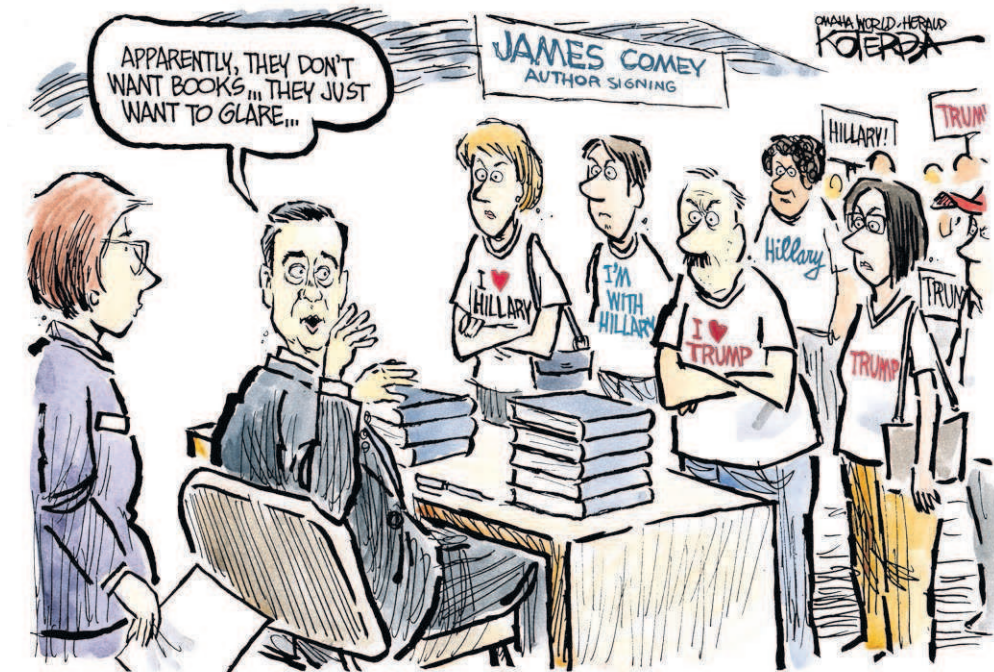
But right now I'm cringing at a food fight. In fact, "Good Morning America" displayed a snazzy graphic of Trump's various Twitter tirades against Comey — "Slippery," "Slimeball," "Leaker & Liar" — as Comey was asked to respond.

Trump personalizes everything. Ideas don't joust. People do. And it's vanity, not verities, at stake. With the way that Comey has written his book, which charts every last tremor of his conscience, and the staging of his appearances in promotion of it, he has abetted his own transformation from a crucial witness to a character in the serial melodrama of Trump's life.

That spectacle only serves Trump. If he can convince American voters that what they're beholding has as much to do with the egos of the actors as with the egregiousness of his acts, he has inoculated himself against Robert Mueller, and he shapes the movie that's made of this.

Its title? "Honey, I Shrunk the FBI."

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times since 2011, joined the newspaper in 1995. Over his years, he has worn a wide variety of hats, including chief restaurant critic and Rome bureau chief.



YOUR VIEWS

Murdock is dedicated

I met George Murdock shortly after coming to Pendleton. We have become close friends with a mutual interest in the future and well-being of our community.

I continue to be amazed by his energy and personal commitment to making a difference for the world in which he lives. He lives his job as a county commissioner seven days a week. It's not surprising to see his car outside the courthouse on Saturday or Sunday — let alone during the rest of the week.

But it isn't just his commitment that makes a difference. It's his remarkable experience as a successful leader of both public and private enterprises. He understands what it takes to make a government entity viable over the long term.

Al Plute, Pendleton

Slanderous to insult teenage mass murder victims

Stuart Dick cannot be serious with his latest diatribe. The students from Parkland "paraded" around by anti-Second Amendment people and given prescription meds as if they weren't in control of their own actions? It's ludicrous at best to think these obviously very intelligent young people couldn't see the dishonesty coming from the pro-NRA, anti-do anything about mass murder crowd.

You cannot see your own bad logic in condemning video games in the same manner people condemn gun ownership. There are many young people playing video games without going out and committing violent crimes, just as there are many gun owners not acting irresponsibly with their guns. All these young people are saying is that if the adults in this country can't or won't do anything about it, they will when it's their turn. Standing pat is not an option.

As far as saying they are medicated and being used as the height of irresponsibility

on your part, Mr. Dick. It's slanderous and demeaning to people that you don't even personally know. You and people like you could learn a lot from the fine examples these young people have set

David Gracia, Hermiston

Collins for Circuit Court

Candidate Rob Collins would be an excellent choice for Umatilla County Circuit Court judge.

I was a lawyer in Pendleton for almost 40 years. My family law practice took me to almost every courthouse in Eastern Oregon, where I appeared before many different judges. I handled many, many cases in which Rob Collins was the opposing attorney. During my career, without exception, I found Mr. Collins to be hard working, honest, ethical and very smart. He was a worthy opponent.

Mr. Collins has all of the qualities necessary to be an excellent judge, including the most important one — impartiality.

Michele Grable, Pendleton

We have known and admired Rob Collins for over 36 years since his return to his hometown to practice law. He has been a leader by example in both his professional and community endeavors. He is first and foremost personable and kind as well as a good listener, informed on local issues and has the temperament to serve as a judge. He has, in fact, served as pro-tem municipal court judge for five years.

His pro bono legal contributions have helped multiple regional nonprofits. He has served as a Pendleton Round-Up volunteer and is currently in his eighth and final year as a Round-Up director.

We heartily endorse Rob Collins in his quest to apply his character, experience, knowledge and fairness as a circuit court judge.

Jake and Cathy Cambier
Pendleton

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