

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OTHER VIEWS

## Bridging the rural technology divide

High-speed broadband access, both wired and wireless, is critical for participating in the 21st century economy. This is as true in Pendleton as it is in Portland. Eastern Oregonians need online access to start businesses, shop online, educate their kids, stay healthier through telemedicine, and make their farms and ranches more productive.

But not all Americans are fully benefiting from the internet revolution, especially in Eastern Oregon. We can't allow rural communities here and across the country to fall behind due to lack of broadband infrastructure. We call that disparity the digital divide, and we are both committed to closing it.

To better understand how we can improve connectivity throughout Eastern Oregon, we recently visited Hermiston, Pendleton and Weston. We heard from folks who experience the divide every day. Local officials told us how the lack of high-speed broadband access is hurting the economy and even makes some residents less optimistic about the future. Rural health care providers told us how important telemedicine was in rural towns, and demonstrated how they use broadband to connect patients with doctors online, without patients needing to drive long distances to an office or hospital.

Local law enforcement, first responders, and 911 dispatchers told us that next-generation networks, not the legacy

infrastructure of today's public safety system, will help them carry out vital emergency service operations, helping them save lives. Year after year, Oregon experiences catastrophic wildfires, reminding us all too well of the importance of a strong 911 system.

All of these constituencies need better internet access. Getting there requires internet service providers (ISPs) — small ones in particular, since they tend to serve rural communities — to have a stronger business case for creating and improving that access. Several small ISPs told us about the substantial challenges they face in serving their communities, from sparse populations to regulatory burdens.

Closing the digital divide won't be easy, but the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Federal Communications Commission have made important progress.

First, Congress passed and the President signed Ray Baum's Act. This law reauthorizes the FCC for the first time in over 25 years, giving the agency additional tools to support broadband expansion. It has strong ties to Eastern Oregon, not least being named for our dear friend, policy advisor, and La Grande native Ray Baum. We lost Ray to cancer earlier this

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year, but his passion and commitment to his home community live on in this legislation.

Ray Baum's Act includes bipartisan provisions to make it easier to deploy broadband infrastructure on federal property. It improves broadband mapping, which helps pinpoint underserved

and unserved communities and ensures resources go to the areas that need it most. The bill also supports installing broadband conduits during highway construction, a commonsense step that expands broadband while saving time and money.

The FCC has done its part to revise and remove burdensome regulations, like updating rules governing access to utility poles and conduits, and modernizing rules that delay service providers from replacing 1970s facilities with modern technologies like fiber. The commission has also allocated funding to support rural broadband deployment. For instance, this month it kicks off a nearly \$2 billion program to promote high-speed home internet access in unserved parts of the country.

Additionally, our efforts have helped secure \$115 million in federal funds to transition to Next Generation 911 systems, which bring internet-based technology to our Public Safety Answering Points. We

also boosted the FCC's rural health program budget by \$171 million a year to enable more rural patients to access telemedicine.

Bridging the digital divide bridges political differences. We're proud that much of our work has been accomplished in a bipartisan manner, and there's even more we can and should do.

The Energy and Commerce Committee continues to consider additional bipartisan legislation, including bills to coordinate and track federal broadband funding across all government agencies, as well as meet the broadband needs for precision agriculture in farming communities. Since the beginning of the year, the committee has gathered over two dozen legislative proposals from members on both sides of the aisle regarding broadband infrastructure. And you can learn more about all that the FCC is doing here: [fcc.gov/digital-divide](http://fcc.gov/digital-divide).

All Americans should be able to participate in today's digital economy, regardless of where they live. The committee and the FCC will continue working to make this a reality for Eastern Oregon and all of rural America. We're committed to closing the digital divide and making a difference in the lives of Oregonians.

*Ajit Pai is chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. Greg Walden represents Oregon's Second District in the U.S. House.*

## OTHER VIEWS

## Democratic socialism is Dem doom

A political novice who calls herself a "democratic socialist" wins an unexpected Democratic Party primary victory, and now political taxonomists are racing to explain just what the term means. Here's my definition: political hemlock for the Democratic Party.

I write, of course, of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She's the onetime Bernie Sanders organizer whose victory over long-term New York congressman Joe Crowley is being compared to Tea Partyer Dave Brat's 2014 primary defeat of the Republican House majority leader, Eric Cantor — a sign of what's to come for the Democratic Party and the country at large.

Well, maybe. It wasn't long ago — March — that Marine reservist and former federal prosecutor Conor Lamb was feted as the Democratic future for winning a House seat in a Pennsylvania district that Donald Trump had carried by 20 points. The shared secret of Lamb's and Ocasio-Cortez's success is that they ran energetic campaigns, reflected the values of the people they sought to represent, and faced lackluster or entitled opponents. Not every political contest is a battle of ideas. Sometimes it's just a matter of showing up.

Still, it should be said: "Democratic socialism" is awful as a slogan and catastrophic as a policy. And "social democracy" — a term that better fits the belief of more ordinary liberals who want, say, Medicare for all — is a politically dying force. Democrats who aren't yet sick of all their losing should feel free to embrace them both.

Start with democratic socialism. The Democratic Socialists of America, of which Ocasio-Cortez is a member, believe in economies defined by state-owned enterprises and worker-owned cooperatives. Versions of this have been tried to varying degrees before: Israel in its first decades; post-independence India; Sweden in the 1960s and '70s.

It always led to crisis: hyperinflation for Israel in 1980s; an International Monetary Fund bailout for India in 1991; a banking meltdown for Sweden in 1992. It's usually a recipe for corruption: State-owned enterprises such as Pemex in Mexico or Eskom in South Africa are local bywords for graft and mismanagement. It frequently leads to dictatorship. Hugo Chávez was also a democratic socialist.

People used to know this stuff. That someone like Ocasio-Cortez apparently doesn't is a fresh reminder that, in politics as in life, the most obvious lessons are the ones you can least afford to stop teaching.

What about social democracy? Isn't it the norm in Europe, and isn't it working

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pretty well? You wouldn't know it by the way Europeans are voting. France's Socialists ran a left-wing candidate in last year's presidential election, and crawled away with barely 6 percent of the vote. Germany's Social Democrats had their worst electoral result since 1933. Italy's center-left was trounced by a combination of populists and right-wingers.

You can argue that the major goals of social democracy — universal health care and other social provisions — were achieved long ago in Europe. But they aren't so fully realized, and are thus potentially popular, in America, never mind our own robust welfare state.

But that misses the deeper point. Today's social democracy falls apart on the contradiction between advocating nearly unlimited government largess and nearly unlimited immigration. "Abolish ICE" is a proper rallying cry for hardcore libertarians and Davos globalists, not democratic socialists or social democrats. A job guarantee is an intriguing idea — assuming the jobs are for some defined "us" that doesn't include every immigrant, asylum-seeker or unauthorized worker.

Trump gets this, as does the far right in Europe, which is why they attract such powerful working-class support. Want to preserve the welfare state? Build a wall — or, in Europe's case, reinstate border controls. Want more immigrants and amnesty? Lower the minimum wage and abolish the closed shop.

But please choose. It's one or the other.

It's possible Democrats will surrender to the illusion that they can have both, puffing the sails of Ocasio-Cortez and her fellow travelers. But a Democratic Party seriously interested in defeating congressional Republicans in the fall and Trump in 2020 isn't going to win by turning itself into a right-wing caricature of the left. If Trump is the new Nixon, the right way to oppose him isn't to summon the ghost of George McGovern. Try some version of Bill Clinton (minus the grossness) for a change: working-class affect, middle-class politics, upper-class aspirations.

I've written elsewhere that a chief danger to democracy is a politics in which the center bends toward the fringe instead of the fringe bending toward the center. It's the way Trump became president. But the antidote to one extreme isn't another, and Democrats will only win once they reclaim the vital center of American politics.

The center is Dayton and Denver, not Berkeley and Burlington. Democrats who want to win should know this.

*Bret Stephens, The New York Times*



## YOUR VIEWS

### City of Umatilla violating its own policy in choosing interim city manager

Dear fellow citizens of the city of Umatilla, it's time to wake up. Our city council is taking us for a ride through its violation of established personnel policy, and by not upholding its fiduciary responsibilities to taxpayers.

Most of us are now aware that the current city manager has submitted his resignation. The council is taking action to search for his replacement. In the interim, the council has chosen a temporary replacement for the city manager — but not the person already in the position of deputy city manager and who has been trained, who has tenure, and was ready to assume responsibility.

In March 2016, when the outgoing city manager was first named to his position, the council also took action to create a deputy city manager position. The deputy city manager and the finance director positions were combined. Creating the position helped solve some administrative issues.

Based on the council's actions and approvals made in 2016, upon receipt of resignation by the current city manager, the responsibilities for that position should have gone directly to the current deputy city manager/finance director. The person

currently in the deputy city manager position is both highly capable and experienced with the operation of the city, and would have afforded a totally seamless transition.

Instead of following its own policy and personnel procedure established in 2016, the council chose a more recent addition to city staff, with far less experience with the city, to fill the interim city manager vacancy.

In addition, now the city taxpayers will have to pay an additional salary to this city staffer. That cost equates to about \$5,000 annually. Had the council followed the city's own plan, the transition would have been seamless and there would have been no additional costs to taxpayers because those responsibilities were already included in the salary of the current deputy city manager/finance director.

Not all of the council voted for this interim personnel choice and they should be acknowledged and thanked for following the rules of the city. However, the decision to not advance the deputy city manager/finance director into the temporary position means that the council has reneged on promises they made to you and me in 2016, and in so doing they have proven reckless in their fiduciary responsibilities to taxpayers.

Your voices should be heard.

David Trott  
Former mayor, Umatilla

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