EAST OREGONIAN
OPINION

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Tip of the hat, kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to last weekend's really fun Pendleton Whisky Music Fest, which went off without a hitch despite hot weather and a packed Round-Up Grounds.

Pitbull brought the ruckus as the first act, and was appreciative of the opportunity and the fawning crowd. The came Shelton, who caused middle-aged women across the county to swoon before he even took the stage.

And speaking of Blake on stage, we've heard people wonder if Pendleton Whisky paid Shelton to take a little oopsy-daisy fall and blame it on some serious drinking. If not, how could it work out better than having your star tip over and appear in magazines and top websites and blame it (by name) on the alcohol company that sponsored the show? We hope it was a smooth viral marketing trick by Pendleton Whisky, and if so we tip our hat to them.

And the fun doesn't stop during these Eastern Oregon summers. We welcome Pendleton Bike Week to town, which brings its own revving engines, loud music and party atmosphere.

A tip of the hat to the final sentencing of the two men accused of shooting — one fatally — at partygoers on the reservation in 2016.

The shooting tore a hole in the CTUIR community, and finally seeing these cases come to an end can provide the gift of closure.

In today's paper, you can read that Victor Contreras will serve more than 12 years in prison. He pleaded guilty last year. Julian Simpson, who fired the fatal shot, will serve up to 25 years in prison.

It's not a good feeling to see such lengthy sentences, and realize more lives are being lost because of a few dumb decisions. Murder and violence destroy more than just the people who die by their hand. Those who cause it eventfully have to pay for their actions, and family and friends of everyone involved suffer the rest of their days as well.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell

Blake Shelton points at a fan during a song at the Pendleton Whisky Music Fest.

Some local groups have sprung up in the wake of this terrible incident, and we hope they find a way to find some silver lining out of senseless violence. A renewed focus on community and care is called for.

YOUR VIEWS

Thanks to firefighters for stopping Weston fire

On behalf of the residents of Weston, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all of the responders during the fire on July 12. While it is said that no one fights like family, it is also true that no one defends like family.

Every corner of Umatilla County came to Weston to protect our community. Private citizens came with water trucks and hoses, and local, state, and federal agencies converged; all hands were on deck. Like true family, you defended us and we thank you.

Jennifer McClure Spurgeon
Mayor of Weston

Pendleton Development Commission misconceptions

Having read Mr. Platek's letter in the July 7 *East Oregonian*, it was apparent that he had a slight misconception of how the Pendleton Development Commission functions.

He is correct in that the PDC and city council are one and the same — the same people with different agendas that sometimes overlap. He may, however, not be aware that the PDC gives both loans and grants. The loans are basically startup money for new businesses, a very risky endeavor.

The large amount as such recently approved for Mr. Plute for remodeling is not a loan. It's a grant, and here's where the PDC differs from a bank: Banks turn a profit from their loans on the interest they receive as the loan is repaid.

The PDC, on the other hand, simply gives the money away in the form of a grant with no repayment required. They act as the middleman, borrowing their money from a bank, handing it out as grants, and then repaying those loans, including interest, with property taxes. The bank still makes a profit. It's basically the city's welfare program for commercial property owners in the downtown area. They want cash for renovations and the city is eager to provide it.

Although they claim this approach will attract new customers to Main Street, a trip to the Walmart/Safeway/ Melanie Square area of town proves otherwise. These businesses more than likely do as much in sales in an hour as those downtown do in a month simply by catering to the majority.

Main Street, on the other hand, caters to tourists and mostly high-end shoppers with the exception of a couple of well established businesses that have been there for years. Our city administrators still haven't figured out that things like variety, sensible prices, shopping carts, and convenient parking draw more customers than a few flower pots and Christmas lights.

Ask Al Plute. As a former PDC/city council member, he knows exactly which buttons to push. After all, there's nothing better than free money, and he'd be foolish to turn it down. It's just smart business.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

No need to spend money redesigning Pendleton interchange

I am unsure why the city of Pendleton is so keen on spending millions of dollars to reconstruct the Interstate 84/Exit 209 interchange.

According to the I84/U.S. 395 Management Plan, the current configuration of exit 209 "makes it very difficult for motorists exiting the freeway to access downtown."

This is absurd. It takes almost no time to access downtown Pendleton from exit 209.

The management plan also claims exit 209 operates at "over capacity." This is also laughable. There are rarely more than a few vehicles on the interchange at any given time.

The roads in Pendleton are in terrible condition. The Pendleton City Council needs to explain why it cannot manage to repair its own city roads, but can manage to spend millions of dollars to repair an interchange that functions quite well.

Justin Morton
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

Resign, Mike Pompeo. Resign, John Bolton.

BRET STEPHENS
Comment

Before the word "resignation" became a euphemism for being fired, it connoted a sense of public integrity and personal honor. Attorney General Elliot Richardson and his deputy,William Ruckelshaus, showed both qualities when they resigned from the Nixon administration during the Saturday Night Massacre in 1973. Jimmy Carter's secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, did likewise when he resigned during the Iran hostage crisis in 1980.

Assuming Mike Pompeo and John Bolton still have their own senses intact, they too should resign following the epic disgrace of the U.S.-Russia summit in Helsinki on Monday. So should their senior staff.

I don't suggest this lightly. I've known both men for years, respect them, and wrote friendly columns when they took their current jobs. I share many of their hawkish views, and have applauded some of the administration's controversial foreign policy decisions, particularly the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal.

I'm also cognizant of two factors weighing against resignation. First, Cabinet members and other senior White House officials owe a president deep loyalty whatever their policy differences — the sort of loyalty George Marshall showed when he declined to resign as secretary of state despite his fierce opposition to Harry Truman's decision to recognize Israel.

Second, whoever succeeds Pompeo or Bolton could very well be worse. Secretary of State Newt Gingrich? National Security Adviser Sebastian Gorka? Why not? For an administration whose core values are personal toadyism and ethical elasticity, they'd be perfect.

Yet those considerations do not relieve Pompeo, Bolton and their staff of three higher duties: the Constitution, to which they swore an oath; the country, to which they pledge allegiance; and their conscience, to which they ultimately must account. Let's take each in its turn.

The Constitution. No, Donald Trump is not guilty of "treason," a word that's been bandied about much too loosely this week. Treason is narrowly defined in the Constitution for a good reason, and its promiscuous misuse only helps the president's defenders paint opponents as hysterics and ignoramuses.

Trump's behavior in Helsinki is, however, another vivid reminder of his manifest unfitness for office. That's true whether the behavior is best explained as a matter of moral turpitude or mental incompetence — of his eagerness to accept the word of a trained liar like Vladimir Putin over the consensus assessment of U.S. intelligence agencies, or of his inability to speak coherently at a critical moment in his presidency. The president's pathetic suggestion on Tuesday that he misspoke by failing to use a double negative also reminds that, knave or fool, he's a congenital liar.

By continuing to serve the president, Pompeo and Bolton and their top aides are not — as they doubtlessly tell themselves in humiliating moments like this one — cleaning up after him. They are covering up for him.

The country. In 2016, Bolton denounced Trump's penny-wise approach to NATO for "encouraging Russian aggression." Last year, he wrote that Russian interference in the U.S. election was "a true act of war," and that Putin's denials were "insulting." This was in a newspaper op-ed titled, in part, "Negotiate with Russia at our peril."

Those views remain true. Russia is a hostile power seeking, as Pompeo told me last year in a public interview, "to stick it to America." Yet Trump has repeatedly gone out of his way to mollify and elevate Putin. To the extent that his administration has been tough on Russia — as with last week's Justice Department indictments of Russian intelligence officers or March's expulsion of 60 Russians — it has been over Trump's personal and often furious objections.

The GOP's pro-Russia caucus, channeling Trump's ideological id through such simpering mouthpieces as Fox News' Tucker Carlson, continues to gain ground, with the percentage of Republican voters with a favorable view of Putin more than doubling since 2015.

Bolton and Pompeo should be leading the conservative charge against the Putin appeasers. In office, they are effectively complicit with them.

Conscience. On Wednesday, I spoke by phone with Cy Vance's son, Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr., about his father's decision to resign. "If he could not in good conscience support the president's views publicly, he felt he had a duty to the president and the country to step away," Vance recalls. "He went out in a very painful personal way, but faithful to his views."

Vance adds that one of his takeaways from his father's experience is "how important it is, if you're going into government, to be a decision-maker for your own policies." No adviser to a president is going to get his way all of the time, but at a minimum that adviser should be able to defend the tilt of an administration's policy as if it were his own. If not, he should make room for those who can.

Right now, Bolton and Pompeo are parties to a Russia policy they would never otherwise advocate and cannot possibly defend in light of their public views. This means that they are either violating their principles, or had none to begin with.

If it's the latter, by all means they should stay put and enjoy the aphrodisiac of power for however long it may last. If the former, the only decent course is to resign. The sooner they do it, the more they can preserve of their honor.

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Bret Stephens won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2013. He is a columnist at The New York Times.

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