

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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Tip of the hat, kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to Hermiston School District and the city of Hermiston for their new water safety initiative.

This week all of the district’s second-graders are getting a two-hour water safety course that covers everything from proper use of life jackets to staying afloat without one.

Those are important skills for anyone to have, particularly for children who live so close to multiple rivers. We have reported on too many drownings that might have been prevented if someone were wearing a life jacket or knew how to swim.

The opportunity for the safety week came about because the city agreed to keep its aquatic center open for longer than usual so that the Hermiston girls’ swim team can practice there. Kudos to those who recognized the chance for the facility to serve even more students, in a way that could save lives.

A kick in the pants to the Hermiston School Board for its lack of decisiveness in how to replace former superintendent Fred Maiocco.

Tricia Mooney has been the interim superintendent since Maiocco’s military deployment more than a year ago. The board last month approved a \$280,000

payout to end his contract years early because of the toll his absence was taking on the district, especially after learning his 18-month deployment was extended to 30 months.

With those facts in mind, the choice is clear. Either give the job to Mooney or do a full-on search for the position.

Instead of making that decision, the board straddled the fence by asking Mooney to present her vision for the district in a community forum.

We’re all for engagement. But the community has had years now to see her in action, including the last year in the top job, and has had full opportunity to let the board know of any concerns.

If the board thinks she’s right person for the job, she should share her vision as the new superintendent.

If the board doesn’t think she’s the right person, it should start a search (though not a show search, with every intention of hiring Mooney after paying thousands of dollars and wasting other applicants’ time.)

It’s not fair to leave Mooney in limbo. School is in session and she’s got work to do.

A tip of the hat to Farmers Ending Hunger and everyone who



Staff photo by Jayati Ramakrishnan

West Park Elementary School P.E. teacher Bret Favorite teaches students some basic arm strokes before they practice them in the water.

has supported its mission, including the Pendleton Round-Up.

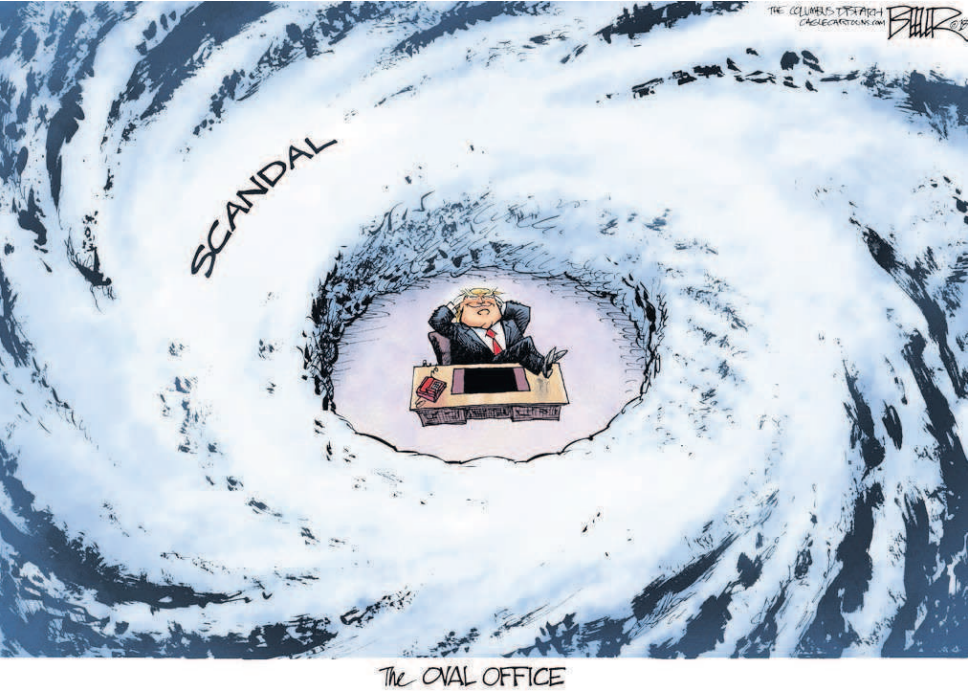
The nonprofit was started in Umatilla County 2006 by Fred Ziari of Hermiston, and local farmers quickly jumped on board, donating millions of pounds of fresh food each year to be distributed to families in need through food banks around the state. Last year Farmers Ending Hunger was able to donate 6 million pounds of food. Eighty-five percent came from Umatilla and Morrow counties.

That’s something this region should be proud of.

Wednesday was Farmers Ending Hunger day at the Round-Up, raising visitors’ awareness of the nonprofit and giving attendees an opportunity

to donate. The Pendleton Round-Up adopted 20 acres of farmland and joined with NW Farm Credit Services and River Point Farms to match all donations by Round-Up fans. As of Thursday morning Farmers Ending Hunger had raised \$13,850, with \$5,000 each from NW Farm Credit Services and River Point Farm.

No child should go to bed hungry in a state where food is so abundant. Making sure families have access to fresh produce and other healthy foods when they are struggling to pay the bills is a worthy endeavor. If the Pendleton Round-Up can shine a spotlight on a few good causes while so many eyes are on Pendleton this week, Farmers Ending Hunger is an excellent choice.



OTHER VIEWS

Age before beauty, but not politics

And now, the politics of age. Hey, this is important. Grow up and pay attention.

Young, left-leaning candidates are revolting against older, traditional Democrats in primary elections around the country. Meanwhile, the best-known, most talked-about potential presidential candidates are Bernie Sanders, 77; Joe Biden, 75; and Elizabeth Warren, 69.

And in the House, where the top three Democratic leaders are in hailing range of 80, there’s a certain, um, restlessness on the part of the young folks.

“I don’t care how good you are — there is a generational gap,” said Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut. Himes, 52, is the head of the New Democrat Coalition, a caucus of moderate party members. There are a trillion of these groups in the House, but I feel safe in saying that the New Democrat Coalition is more important than, say, the Cement Caucus or the Auto Care Caucus.

We have had political generation gaps before. Back in the day, student protesters yelled “Never trust anybody over 30!” The people who did the yelling are now in their 70s, and I dare say have a more expansive view. The current gap is much more polite. (The millennials are coming!) In the House, it seems pretty much confined to



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the Democratic side of the aisle.

Yet over in the Senate, only one of the six members over 80 is a Democrat. Dianne Feinstein, 85, is currently running for re-election against a 51-year-old state legislator who’s tried to claim Feinstein is out of touch without exactly mentioning her age. She’s expected to win another six-year term easily. However that won’t bring her close to the Senate longevity record. That belongs to Strom Thurmond, who retired in 2003 at age 100, and is mainly remembered as a horrible racist. Being old does not necessarily make you mellow.

We saw a lot of the generational divide last week in the Senate Judiciary Committee. Critics from the left howled when Feinstein — the top-ranking Democrat — apologized to Brett Kavanaugh when the hearing on his Supreme Court nomination was disrupted by protesters. Feinstein is a centrist from the old school, which generally means more politeness and less twittering.

Meanwhile her fellow Californian, Kamala Harris (53) was lacing into Kavanaugh with as much fire as possible, as was New Jersey’s Cory Booker (49). Both are regarded as possible presidential contenders — the Democratic field may look rather advanced in years now, but

once we get to 2019 we will have 10,000 candidates of every conceivable age. Honestly, if you didn’t have to be 35 to run, there would be 12-year-olds raising money this very minute.

At the hearing, Booker demonstrated that it was possible to go too far in being fearsome when he made some allegedly confidential Kavanaugh records public and compared himself to Spartacus for his daring.

OK, Booker did not actually compare himself to Spartacus. He compared himself to Spartacus’ heroic followers in the movie, who jumped up and yelled “I am Spartacus!” so the Romans wouldn’t be able to find Kirk Douglas. They all got crucified for their trouble.

Excuse me. We were talking about age and politics. The age situation in the House is a definite problem. Nancy Pelosi, the minority leader, is 78. She’s a fundraiser of manic capacity and energy, and a truly formidable leader. However, the Republicans have made her the symbol of All That Is Evil In Washington, and a lot of the Democrats running in swing districts are vowing to vote against her if they’re elected. Part of this is pure, scaredy-cat ambition. If you want to get points for being Not A Liberal, what’s easier than disavowing Pelosi?

But part of the uprising is Pelosi’s own

fault. She has been the top Democrat in the House for 16 years. Her two deputy leaders are 78 and 79, and the party is captive of a seniority system that would make a 52-year-old like Himes, with a mere nine years in the House, despair.

“I think I’ll be 184 before I’m in range of being Financial Services chairman,” said Himes in a phone interview. If the Democrats take control in 2019, the head of the Financial Services Committee would presumably be the current ranking member, Maxine Waters, 80.

The Republican system is to rotate chairmen out after six years. That seems a tad excessive — six years does not seem like quite enough time to become superskilled at the job. In a rational world you could surely come up with a plan somewhere between revolving chairs and the Democratic theory that no virtue counts unless it involves seniority.

The average age of members of Congress has been slowly rising for years. And as long as there’s a mixture of young and old leaders, that’s fine — even natural. People just live longer. And whether they’re 40 or 90 (go for it, Ruth Bader Ginsburg) they can still be great at their jobs.

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Gail Collins is a columnist for the New York Times.

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