

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OTHER VIEWS

## Better train brakes could avert disaster

Medford Mail Tribune

How much is a human life worth? That may sound like a cold calculation, but it is relevant to a dispute over safety standards for trains that carry highly flammable crude oil and ethanol across the United States, including down the Columbia Gorge.

In September, the Trump administration scrapped an Obama-era rule that would have required new-generation electronic brakes on trains carrying flammable fuels, saying the cost of complying with the new rule would be higher than the benefit.

Last week, the Associated Press determined that the government's analysis of the new rule left out \$117 million in estimated future damages from train derailments that could be prevented by installing the electronic braking systems.

Not to worry, Transportation Department officials said. They will publish a correction in the federal register, but the decision to scrap the rule stands.

Why? Because even with the additional savings, the cost of better brakes still

exceeds the benefit of fewer crashes.

This is just the latest example of train and oil industry resistance to safety improvements aimed at oil trains that pose the risk of catastrophic explosions and fires. In 2015, the Obama administration adopted a package of new safety requirements after dozens of accidents involving trains carrying hundreds of tank cars full of volatile crude oil from tar sands in Canada. The worst such accident happened in 2013 in Quebec, when an unattended oil train derailed in Lac-Mégantic, killing 47 people and obliterating much of the town in a huge fireball.

In 2016, a Union Pacific train derailed near Mosier in the Columbia Gorge. No one was killed, and the resulting fire did no major damage, but the accident could have been much worse.

The new braking systems apply brakes simultaneously on all cars in a train rather than sequentially, as conventional air brake systems do. This allows trains to stop faster and reduces the number of cars that derail.

Safety advocates are calling for reconsidering the rule and recalculating the benefits of the new brakes.



Bill Castle via AP

In this Nov. 8, 2013, file photo, a tanker train carrying crude oil burns after derailling in western Alabama outside Aliceville, Ala.

The modern technology is not cheap; the Obama Transportation Department estimated upgrading braking systems would cost \$664 million over 20 years, but would save \$470 million to \$1.1 billion from avoiding accidents. The Trump administration reduced that benefit to between \$131 million and \$374 million, based largely on a

drop in the number of oil train shipments to 200,000 carloads.

While fewer shipments might mean statistically fewer accidents, all it takes is one to destroy property and claim lives. Transportation officials should recalculate the benefit of preventing those deaths before they happen, not after.

## OTHER VIEWS

## Withdrawal from Syria is the right move

The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Much of official Washington, members of Congress, and members of the press who regard themselves as wise heads on foreign policy are in a state of apoplexy over President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria. They make two points: The way he did it was wrong, and the decision itself was wrong — the U.S. needs to stay in Syria.

One can certainly argue about any president's means and methods. And this president relies, to an alarming degree, on his own gut instinct over eminent advice and empirical evidence. But in this case Mr. Trump's instinct was right. It is time to get out of Syria.

One must start with why we got in. We deployed land forces in Syria to neutralize ISIS and, let's be honest, topple a bloody regime there. We have largely succeeded at the first goal and failed abysmally at the second.

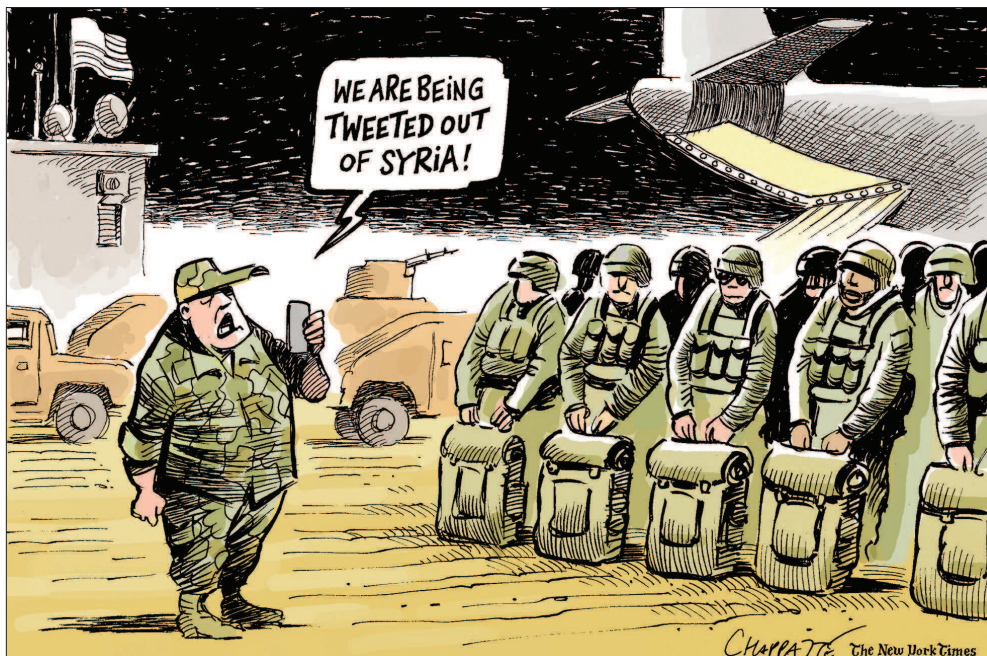
So, why would we stay on at this point?

Although the political establishment, left and right, Democratic and Republican, and most of the top military leaders say this is not the time to withdraw, none, none, can tell us when the right time to withdraw is.

There is no right time. Look at Afghanistan.

And, of greater significance, no one can explain the current strategic advantage of U.S. ground troops in Syria. They are not stabilizing the country and they are not leading us to a negotiated peace, which is the only possible way to end the war. The war is at a stalemate and no one can win it militarily.

The rationale for staying is that, with-



out a continuing U.S. military presence, ISIS will reconstitute itself, Assad will dig in and the Russians will gain an advantage. All of this is possible, if not probable with U.S. troops on the ground.

Why not negotiate with the Russians and Assad? Evil though their regimes may be, they are an inherent part of the equation, and dealing with evil regimes (Saudi Arabia and China are examples) is the task of U.S. diplomacy.

Outgoing Defense Secretary James Mattis is fond of saying that the military is only the first line of defense. It makes way for diplomacy. We have done, militarily, what we can do in Syria.

ISIS will surely rise again, in all kinds of places. We are not without options — intel-

ligence, special forces, air power — when that happens. They are the same options we would have if we kept troops in Syria.

While national interest (and there is little pure national interest in Syria) should not be the only calculus of U.S. foreign policy, American military involvement has not advanced the cause of human rights in Syria. To the contrary, arguably.

Our initial involvement in Syria, by the Obama administration, was naive and ignored history. We not only underestimated Assad and the complexity of the situation, but we ignored our own past failures. We said we would bring freedom and democracy to Iraq and Afghanistan, as we said, two generations ago, we would bring them to Vietnam. We failed because we did not

understand those places or what it would take to accomplish those ends. Only in Japan, after World War II, did we succeed in establishing a new political order and culture of liberty. That had to do not only with the particulars of that society and the preface of total military victory, but a willingness by Japan to tolerate prolonged occupation and governance, and a willingness by the U.S. to sustain it.

Donald Trump ran for president on a promise to end U.S. military adventurism, world policing and nation-building. He meant it. Many Americans who did not agree with Mr. Trump on much else agreed with that. Mr. Trump made this pledge part of his "America First" foreign policy. And whatever else one might think of the president or that policy, he holds fast to the unique notion that the promises he makes as a candidate, he must keep.

Finally, there is the not insignificant matter of the U.S. Constitution. It says that a president must have a declaration of war from the Congress to go to war. But Presidents Bush (II) and Obama ignored this basic norm, which is not only a primary constitutional one, but a sound political one. (Congress passed resolutions approving action in Afghanistan and Iraq, but this fell short of the constitutional standard for a declaration of war.)

If we are to send our young people into harm's way and ask them to risk their lives for us, the case for war must be made and won with the American people. That was not done for Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria, just as the Vietnam-era presidents did not do it. Mr. Trump felt that no good case could now be made for a young American to die in Syria. This time his gut was right.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Big dairies can play by the rules

Your editorial on large dairies was "spot on." For several years I was the citizen's representative to the Confined Animal Feeding Operations advisory committee for the state of Oregon.

Threemile Canyon Farms were always in the forefront of innovative procedures in the dairying industry. They located where they are in part because of environmental concerns. If potential problems were perceived they would immediately do what was necessary to solve the problem. An example involved asking the state Department of Agriculture to assist them in testing their herd for Mad Cow Disease. When I left the committee they were asking for assistance in innovative procedures for composting their waste.

My only concern at that time was, would all of these innovations, environmental stew-

ardship and efficiency create hardships for smaller marginal operations?

Carlisle Harrison  
Hermiston

### The good, the bad, and the other

Good news: After stifling new development for nearly a decade, the Pendleton City Council has voted to repeal the plan known as the River Quarter Overlay. Although described as "a good plan" by one council member, its failure confirmed that it really wasn't good for anyone except the consultants that drew up all the plans.

More good news: The cost overruns on the Eighth Street Bridge replacement project, caused by the Pendleton Enhancement Project (PEP), should be a thing of the past now that its director has resigned and the reloca-

tion of the old bridge to Main Street has been abandoned. Hopefully, donations for the project will be used to cover those cost increases, and hopefully the Pendleton Development Commission (PDC)/City Council will step up, dispose of the old bridge, and put this rather bad idea to rest once and for all. After all, with 22 city parks to maintain, facilities like the Round-Up and Happy Canyon stadiums, the Convention Center, Recreation Center, and the Vert Auditorium all at our disposal, do we really need more?

Not so good news: With the formation of the North Bank Umatilla Advisory Committee, city officials will be shifting their focus away from the River Walkway over to the north side of the Umatilla River, attempting again to limit any new economic development and instead turning the area into a wildlife refuge. Other Oregon cities are seeking authority to limit deer populations within their borders because of the problems they create. Our city officials are taking the oppo-

site approach putting any problems created on future generations.

The bad news: The Feds have given the thumbs down on the city's request for \$26 million to redo Exit 209. Perhaps they are aware of the way the Eighth Street Bridge project has been mishandled, or maybe they felt the proposed redesign of the exit offered little in a long-term solution to the congestion problem. Who knows? It looks like we'll be relying on our "consulting agency" to sort it all out.

Other news: On the economic development front, city financial support beyond that for the downtown association's pub crawl is being proposed for a Wild West Brew Fest. Rumors persist that a "pot" festival is coming. It may be time for Chief Roberts and AA to consider staffing up for an increase in business.

Rick Rohde  
Pendleton

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