

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Tip of the Hat, kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to Debbie Pedro who has served Hermiston well as the chamber of commerce director for the past decade. She's on to her next adventure and we wish her the best of luck.

Pedro has been not only a champion of the business community but also a proponent of all things Hermiston since her arrival in 2001. Her passion for the city and energy on the job won't be easy to replicate.

Hermiston has been in many ways a chamber director's dream, with new business clamoring to find a place to set up shop and take advantage of the expanding population. Pedro has made the most of the moment, growing the chamber's enrollment and bolstering Hermiston's reputation across Oregon through her chairmanship of the state chamber board.

To top it all off she's been an excellent ambassador for the city, quick

with a smile and a welcoming attitude.

The good news for Hermiston is, she's not going far. We're glad that someone with such a deep base of knowledge about the Eastern Oregon economy will help direct the Columbia Development Authority as it brings in new industry and jobs to the former Umatilla Army Depot.

A tip of hat to all of you who have made resolutions to make 2019 better than 2018.

We know, it's only a small step. But it's a first step, and without it the journey would never begin.

Whether you're planning a healthier year for yourself, a happier year for your family or a more productive year in your community, we're rooting for you.

Through the month of January we'll look at some of the ways people resolve to be better, how they succeed and where they fail. It starts today



EO file photo

Debbie Pedro speaks after being named the Woman of the Year during the Hermiston Distinguished Citizens Awards Banquet in 2016 in Hermiston.

with one of the most common resolutions — and easiest to skip out on: the workout regimen.

Some may consider January 1 an arbitrary marker on the calendar, but we say any day you decide to improve things is significant.

Go for it.

A tip of the hat to the city of Hermiston for hosting a family-friendly community New Year's Eve celebration.

The event wasn't perfect — tem-

peratures in the low 20s gave The Shades trouble keeping their guitars tuned and prevented a giant papier-mâché watermelon from exploding into a shower of confetti. But by midnight the fledgling event had drawn a few hundred people downtown, where they enjoyed a quality band and an impressive fireworks show.

Not bad for a first try.

We will look forward to ringing in 2020 with a giant exploding watermelon.

OTHER VIEWS

The year of the wolves

In Willa Cather's novel "My Antonia," there are two kind Russian farmers named Peter and Pavel who have settled on the Nebraska prairie. On his deathbed, Pavel tells the story of how they came to emigrate there.

Many years before, back in Russia, the two young men had been the groomsmen at a friend's wedding. The party went on well after midnight and eventually a caravan of seven sledges carried the families through the snow, back to where they were staying. As they rode, faint streaks of shadow — hundreds of them — could be seen dashing through the trees along the trail. Suddenly, the howling of wolves erupted from all directions.

The horses took off and the wolves attacked. The rear sledge hit a clump and overturned. The shrieks were horrific as the wolves pounced on their human prey. Another sledge tipped and then another, and the swarms of wolves descended on the families.

Pavel and Peter were in the lead sledge, carrying the bride and groom. They were careening at top speed, but one of their horses was now near death with exhaustion. Pavel turned to the groom. They would have to lighten their load. He pointed to the bride. The groom refused to let her be tossed over. Pavel fought with him and tried to rip her away. In the scuffle he threw them both out and to the wolves.

Peter and Pavel survived — but lived in infamy. They were the monsters who had thrown a bride to the wolves. They were forced to flee to the New World.

The story reminds us how thin the crust of civilization really is. It reminds us of what otherwise good people are capable at moments of severe stress and crisis, when fear is up and when conflict — red in tooth and claw — takes control.

It's an especially good story to tell as we enter 2019, because this looks to be the year of the wolves — the year when savage and previously unimaginable things might happen.

It will be a year of divided government and unprecedented partisan conflict. It will be a year in which Donald Trump is isolated and unrestrained as never before. And it will be in this atmosphere that indictments will fall, provoking not just a political crisis but a constitutional one.

There are now over a dozen investigations into Trump's various scandals. If we lived in a healthy society, the ensuing indictments would be handled in a serious way — somber congressional hearings, dispassionate court proceedings. Everybody would step back and be sobered by the fact that our very system of law is at stake.

But we don't live in a healthy society and we don't have a healthy president.

Trump doesn't recognize, understand or respect institutional authority. He only understands personal power. He sees every conflict as a personal conflict in which he destroys or gets destroyed.

When the indictments come down, Trump won't play by the rules. He'll seek to delegitimize those rules. He'll seek to delegitimize our legal institutions. He'll personalize every indictment, slander every prosecutor. He'll seek to destroy the edifice of law in order to save himself.

We know the language he'll use. It will be the anti-establishment, anti-institutional language that has been coursing through the left and right for the past few decades: The establishment is corrupt, the game is rigged, the elites are out to get you.

At that point congressional leaders will face the defining choice of their careers: Where does their ultimate loyalty lie, to the Constitution or to their party?

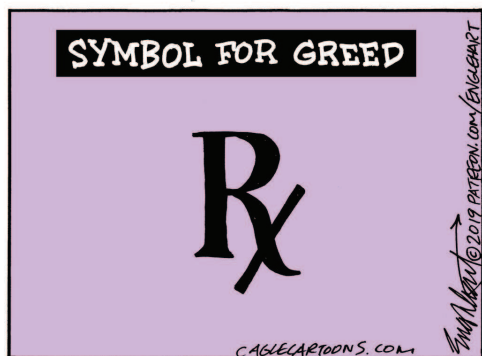
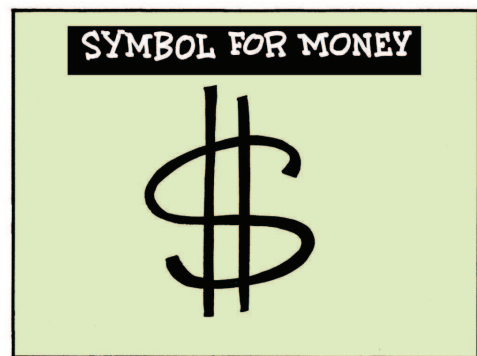
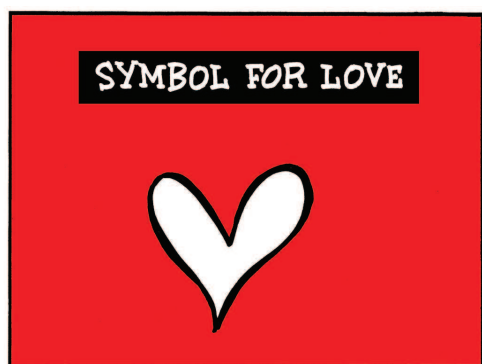
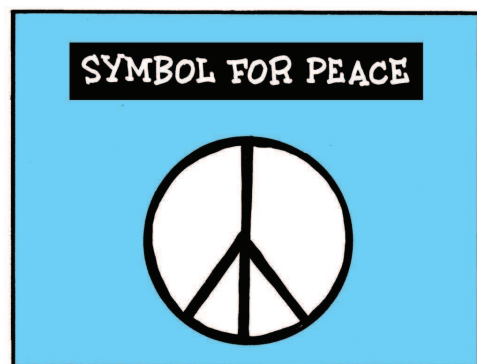
If their loyalty is to the Constitution, they will step back and figure out, in a bipartisan way, how to hold the sort of hearings that Congress held during the Watergate scandal — hearings that inspired trust in the system. They will step back and find men and women of integrity — the modern versions of Archibald Cox, Elliot Richardson and Judge John Sirica — who would work to restore decency amid the moral rot.

On the other hand, if they put party above nation, they will see this crisis as just another episode in our long-running political circus. They'll fall back in partisan lines. They'll hurl abuse. Their primary concern will be: How can this help me in 2020?

If that happens, then the roughly 40 percent of Americans who support Trump will see serious evidence that he committed felonies, but they won't care! They'll conclude that this is not about law or integrity. It's just a political show trial. They'll see there is no higher authority that all Americans are accountable to. It's just power and popularity straight through.

If that happens, we'll have to face the fact that our Constitution and system of law were not strong enough to withstand the partisan furies that now define our politics. We'll have to face the fact that America has become another fragile state — a kakistocracy, where laws are passed and broken without consequence, where good people lay low and where wolves are left free to prey on the weak.

David Brooks is a columnist for the New York Times.



District attorneys have mixed results on public records test

The Bend Bulletin

Oregonians like to pride themselves on being leaders in such things as protecting beaches and imposing deposit fees on a variety of bottles. When it comes to transparency of government, however, we have nothing to brag about. Just ask a group of journalism students at the University of Oregon.

Earlier this year the students asked district attorneys in all 36 Oregon counties for copies of public records appeals filed with their offices. The DAs are the first stop in an appeals process that includes the Oregon Attorney General and, ultimately, the courts. Students also wanted copies of the DAs' responses to those records and asked to have fees waived. That information, they argued, would give the public an insight into how well district attorneys carry out their duties under the state's public records laws.

The district attorneys' responses were surprising, though perhaps they shouldn't have been. While Deschutes County's John Hummel had no problem with accommodating the students, more than a few denied the requests, arguing they did not meet the public-interest test. Even more, while they agreed to send the records, failed to meet the deadline written into Oregon law in 2017: Agencies are supposed to acknowledge public records requests within five business days and, generally, respond to them within another 10.

As for what does and does not meet the standard of what's in the public interest, there is no "public-interest test" in Oregon beyond the DAs' own judgment on the matter. In these

cases, the DAs were being asked to judge their own refusal, a situation that seems odd, at best. At the same time, some DAs proposed charging students upwards of \$1,000 for the records, though some reduced or waived the charges as discussions progressed.

Moreover, your chances of getting a public record upon appeal can depend on where you live. District attorneys in Multnomah County, and now Deschutes County, post their orders regarding public records on their websites. Hummel said he did so because the students' request made him more sensitive to the notion of transparency in his office.

Things are different in Lane County. There, District Attorney Patty Perlow orders agencies to release records only about a quarter of the time, though that figure does not reflect cases that are resolved before a denial is issued.

Oregonians' ability to see how their government, no matter at what level, operates should not be limited by the county in which they live. Records in Lane County should be every bit as accessible as those in Multnomah or Deschutes, no matter what a district attorney's view of the law is.

Lawmakers should be able to fix most of these problems easily, if they're of a mind to. They can make it clear that Oregonians expect their district attorneys to understand and uphold the public records law, deadlines and all. They should recognize that some agencies set fees high as a way of discouraging requests, and deal with the problem.

Doing those things would not solve all the law's problems, but it would surely help.

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