EAST OREGONIAN
OPINION

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YOUR VIEWS

Trump's behavior a cause for concern

I can no longer avoid at least stating my thoughts and opinions regarding the existing chaos in our government due to Trump. The latest audacious, intolerable act by Trump left me in total disbelief — again — and still. It has become a chronic problem for me the past two years, wondering what actions or behavior Trump will use to further fuel his ego and harm our nation.

Now, Trump holds our nation of 325-plus million citizens hostage and in jeopardy by shutting down our national financial system until his demands are met. He is acting like a spoiled brat, a child that is having a tantrum because he is not getting his way. Ridiculous! He is using and abusing our nation. He is power-mad. His actions are not befitting a president of the U.S.A.

Our democracy has three branches of government. Trump ignores that fact and attempts to go around it, when it suits him. He is not a president. He is a dictator. A president leads. A dictator or despot rules. I don't believe Trump has the ability to lead. He is only able to dominate, have his way and serve his self-interests and those of his inner circle.

What is Trump's present approval rating? His concerns and actions have never been for the welfare of all the citizens of America. Instead, maybe 25 to 35 percent. It's even less for important issues like public safety, the environment, welfare of children, including immigrant children, our veterans, education, tax dollars, fair taxation, etc.

Trump's wall is the focus of his concern. Its importance is very questionable in regards to our nation's welfare. It certainly should not rank high in priority. Trump has created a financial disaster for our country. He is harming America. I believe that is an act of treason. I cannot see why or how he can do such a treacherous act.

I have much difficulty reducing my fears and concerns about what has been developing in our country for the past two and a half years into a few words. There are far too many, coming far too fast. I've often backed off because it appears impossible to turn the tide back to an acceptable status.

Darlene Abney
Pendleton

Malheur symphony will promote healing

Central Oregon is to have its own symphony, Kathy Aney tells us in her story about Jay Bowerman and Chris Thomas. The two men have joined together to produce music about the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, with Thomas writing the score, including the songs and sounds of birds.

For me, it will provide a healing process that has disturbed me since the occupation of the refuge, one of Oregon's most beautiful places. Besides the many varieties of birds that nest there and rest there, I hope it will provide a healing process for the communities affected: the wild horses, bears, coyotes, and the land itself, even the rattlesnakes.

This is a special place. The late Bill Hanley and his Bell A Ranch and Peter French and his Blitzen River lands make up a large portion of this refuge. I think they would be pleased.

I hope the symphony comes to Pendleton after it premieres in Burns in May.

Dr. Dorys C. Grover
Pendleton

OUR VIEWS

Walden back on tour

The world has changed since U.S. Rep. Greg Walden last held a public town hall in Oregon's 2nd District. His world in particular.

It was the spring of 2017 and President Donald Trump's inauguration was still sinking in. Walden, a seasoned representative who had faced no real pressure in his recent 10th campaign for the seat, was a high-ranking member of the Republican-led federal government, poised to fulfill campaign promises and policy goals as never before.

Town halls had been commonplace for Walden, who would knock out six or more in a stretch as he regularly checked in at each of the 20 counties in the expansive district. He would stand in front of school auditoriums and community centers, updating constituents on D.C. legislation and machinations, promising the good fight and taking questions from a generally congenial audience.

But as he returned to the district in 2017, he found a new tone among those audiences — open hostility, specifically regarding his support of the ill-fated American Health Care Act. In solidly conservative rural Oregon, opponents became vocal, pushing back loudly and persistently against attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Rightfully, they were concerned it would do serious damage to health coverage without offering a real solution.

Walden says his staff was verbally mistreated by protesters who were following an online playbook for disrupting the public gatherings. In response, with more than year before he was

EO File Photo
U.S. Rep. Greg Walden talks with attendees after a town hall meeting on May 8, 2017, in Baker City.

up for re-election, he stopped hosting them.

The AHCA failed to reach the president's desk despite a majority in both chambers, but Walden's support of it helped spark a vigorous campaign against him. Democrats began lining up for the right to challenge him, and voters selected Jamie McLeod-Skinner in the primary. As she toured the district, talking to whomever would listen, Walden did most of his campaigning on billboards and advertisements while meeting constituents behind closed doors.

He won in November with 56 percent of the vote — 16 points better than McLeod-Skinner, his narrowest win to date — but Republicans lost the House.

Now a new Democrat-controlled Congress has sworn in, the government has been shut down since before Christmas, and Walden has slated a series of town halls. Initially it included 16 counties, including Umatilla and Morrow, but he cut down the number of stops to make it back to to D.C. for House votes. He said in a release those town halls will be rescheduled.

As the federal shutdown has become the longest in history, with little prospect of resolution before his visit, Walden has said he intends to talk about his work on the opioid crisis, forest management and VA access.

While important, he should be prepared for other topics to rank higher in his constituents' minds, specifically around the southern border. On Tuesday he voted against a short-term funding bill because he said it had no chance of passing the Republican-controlled Senate or getting the signature of Trump. Earlier in the month he voted in favor of a bill to reopen parts of the government — citing closed offices and furloughed employees in his district — while voting against a separate bill to fund the Department of Homeland Security without money for a wall along the southern U.S. border.

The distinction may be important on the House floor, but it matters little among the federal workers unsure when they'll return to work or constituents asking — for decades now — for meaningful immigration reform.

It's a new world, and it's uncertain how the balance of power will teeter in D.C. We've consistently re-elected Walden to represent our interests in this diverse district, and it's about time he hands the microphone back to the voters and listens.

We're hopeful the audience will make the most of the opportunity in meaningful dialogue.

OTHER VIEWS

Democrats' 'technological wall' won't keep anybody out

BRYON YORK
COMMENT

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border would be "immoral." Instead, she favors something she calls a "technological wall." Another top House Democrat, Rep. James Clyburn, calls it a "smart wall."

Instead of building an actual physical barrier of steel, concrete or some other material, Pelosi, Clyburn and other Democrats advocate employing an array of high-tech devices — drones, infrared sensors, surveillance cameras and more — to keep track of activity at the border without physical impediments to discourage illegal crossings.

"We cannot protect the border with concrete," Clyburn said recently. "We can protect the border using the technology that is available to us to wall off intrusions."

The problem is, a smart wall would not actually wall off intrusions. Indeed, the main feature of a smart wall — in past debates it was often referred to as a virtual fence — is that it will not stop anyone from crossing the border into the United States. It can detect illegal crossers and alert authorities to their presence. But it does nothing to keep them from entering the country.

That is especially important given the nature of the migrants crossing the border illegally today. In the past, many were single adult men who could be caught and quickly returned to Mexico. But now, according to the Department of Homeland Security, about two-thirds of the crossers are families and unaccompanied children, who by U.S. law cannot be quickly returned. Once in the United States, their asylum claims — the vast majority are ultimately judged without merit — take a long time to process. During that time, many simply disappear into the country.

The point, for those illegal immigrants, is not to enter the United States without being detected. It is to enter, be caught, and begin the asylum process that will allow them to stay, one way or the other.

A smart wall is no obstacle to such crossers. On the other hand, a physical barrier would be a big obstacle and, if placed in key areas of the border, would likely reduce illegal crossings significantly. That is precisely the kind of barrier that Pelosi, Clyburn and other Democrats oppose.

"The virtual fence does not actually block the entry of anyone like a real wall or fence does," said Jessica Vaughan, policy director at the Center for Immigration Studies, which favors tighter controls on immigration. "The virtual fence only works if there are enough Border Patrol agents around to arrest the illegal crossers who are detected.

"Most importantly, this technology would not help in the case of caravan migrants pushing through the obsolete and aging barriers we have in many places," Vaughan added. "And it does not help at all if the people who cross are detected only to be released after they state a fear of return, or because they brought a minor with them, or if they are unaccompanied minors led across by smugglers."

Given the nature of the illegal flow across the border, a virtual wall would be even less effective than it might have been in the past.

Still, Democrats insist it is what is needed. Rep. Scott Peters, who delivered the recent Democratic weekly address, discussed his home city of San Diego and called for "sensors and radar ... cameras mounted on drones ... (and) state-of-the-art technologies to detect tunnels."

"That is what real border security looks like, and I can tell you that San Diegans want that border security," Peters said. "But we do not want a wall."

Under Peters' plan, the Department of Homeland Security would have to rely on technology at the border; if it wanted to build a physical barrier, it would have to get special congressional permission.

Peters briefly acknowledged that San Diego has a border fence. What he did not tell listeners was that building that physical barrier saved the city from a crisis in the 1980s by dramatically reducing the flow of illegal immigrants. In 1986, with no barrier to speak of, an astonishing 600,000-plus people were caught trying to enter illegally.

Only after fencing went up in 1989, and was lengthened and strengthened a few years later, did the flow subside. People seeking to enter the U.S. illegally moved eastward, to points where there was no fence.

The border barrier was a key factor in solving San Diego's problem. Now, a congressman from San Diego is dead set against building a physical barrier to stop illegal crossings in other parts of the country the way it did in San Diego.

Peters reflects his party's leadership and their determination to stop the construction of any more barriers on the border. But Democrats from Pelosi down still want to appear strong on border security. Now, they are advocating sensors and drones and cameras that would watch an un-fenced border — while doing nothing to stop the flow of illegal immigrants.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

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