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OUR VIEW

Tip of the Hat,
kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to the Hermiston dance team, winners of the school’s first Washington state title.

We knew it wouldn’t take the Bulldogs long to reach the upper echelon of athletics and activities north of the border, but to bring home hardware in its first campaign is remarkable. The 3A squad had to earn its trip to the state competition in Yakima by qualifying at districts.

Much of the team had been working since June to prepare for the event, but in order to compete in the show division they added three more dancers in the fall. The end product was a stunning performance of a fairy tale come to life.

The hard work paid off.

A tip of the hat to U.S. Rep.

Greg Walden for sticking to his principles and voting to overturn President Donald Trump’s veto of the border wall funding prevention bill.

In the end, the vote didn’t make a difference. Only 14 Republicans in the House voted with Democrats to prevent Trump from funneling money from unnamed military projects and other places to add billions of dollars to southern border wall construction. With lack of a supermajority, the block failed and the decision will now go to the courts.

Walden showed what we all say we want in our representatives — resolve and independence. Casting his vote to protect Congressional authority rather than acquiescing to the new norm of party before country was the right move.



Photo contributed by Ashley Seibel
Hermiston dancers vie for the state championship in the “show” category.

OTHER VIEWS

Lessons learned
from fight with
the Islamic State

The Washington Post

The capture of the last territory controlled by the Islamic State on Saturday was far from a final victory over the movement, as U.S. commanders and diplomats were careful to emphasize. The jihadists retain thousands of fighters in clandestine cells scattered across Syria and Iraq, as well as affiliates in Afghanistan, Egypt, the Philippines, Libya, Burkina Faso and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the final elimination of a self-declared caliphate that once controlled a territory the size of Britain and ruled over as many as 12 million people is worth celebrating. It represents a victory not just for moderate forces in Syria and Iraq, which did most of the fighting, but for a U.S. military mission that succeeded with a light footprint and relatively low costs.

The rapid advance of Islamic State forces across Iraq in the summer of 2014 forced President Barack Obama to reverse his premature withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country. But the campaign that then unfolded in Iraq and later in Syria was dramatically different from the previous, troop-heavy wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

U.S. strategy was to partner with local forces that would take the lead on the ground, including elite elements of the Iraqi army and Kurdish-led forces in northern Iraq and eastern Syria. American troops in Iraq and Syria, mostly Special Operations forces and trainers, numbered in the single-digit thousands.

The biggest U.S. contribution was in air power. The United States and coalition partners carried out nearly 34,000 airstrikes between August 2014 and the end of January 2019, according to the Pentagon. That proved devastatingly effective against Islamic State forces, which had no air force and scant air defenses. By U.S. estimates, 70,000 of 100,000 Islamic State fighters were killed, many of them in airstrikes.

American allies paid a heavy price, as well. The Kurdish-led alliance that fought the jihadists in Syria says 11,000 of its fighters were killed, and Iraqi security forces and militias probably lost at least as many. Large parts of Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, were destroyed, as was the Syrian town of Raqqa. Pentagon figures show 1,257 civilians unintentionally killed in coalition airstrikes, a number human rights monitors say is understated.

U.S. losses, in contrast, were remarkably light: Sixteen soldiers and one civilian were killed in action over the past 4½ years, and 58 other “non-hostile” fatalities were associated with the mission. As of the end of last year, the war has cost some \$28.5 billion — a fraction of the more than \$1.5 trillion price of the ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In all, the fight against the Islamic State showed that the United States is capable of leading effective foreign counterterrorism campaigns, provided it partners with local forces and focuses on supplying unique U.S. assets, such as intelligence and precision airstrikes. A second lesson is that the costs of playing such a role are far less, in the long run, than withdrawing and allowing terrorist groups to rebuild.

It’s not clear whether President Trump accepts that conclusion, but the history of the past decade in the Middle East ought to be persuasive.

OTHER VIEWS

Republicans really hate health care

Of all the political issues that divide us, health care is the one with the greatest impact on ordinary Americans’ lives. If Democrats hadn’t managed to pass the Affordable Care Act, around 20 million fewer Americans would have health insurance than currently do. If Republican-controlled states hadn’t refused to expand Medicaid and generally done as little as possible to support the act, national progress might have tracked progress in, say, California — so another 7 million or 8 million people might have coverage.

You obviously know where I stand on this political divide. But I’m starting to believe that I misjudged Republican motives.

You see, I thought their behavior was cynical and strategic: They opposed Obamacare because they thought there was political mileage in scaring people about change, and also in denying Barack Obama any successes. Oh, and their donors really hated the taxes on the rich that pay for the ACA’s subsidies. And right up through 2016 they could hope to convince voters that they had a secret plan for something much better than Obamacare.

Indeed, all of these things surely played a role in GOP health care strategy. But at this point they’ve clearly lost the political argument. In 2017, Republican attempts to repeal Obamacare made it clear to everyone that their party didn’t have any better ideas, and never did; everything they proposed would have devastated the lives of millions.

Then health care became the top issue in the 2018 midterms, and voters who considered it the most important issue went Democratic by a ratio of 3-to-1.



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PAUL KRUGMAN
COMMENT

20 million Americans?

It’s no longer possible to see any of this as part of a clever political strategy, even a nefariously cynical one. It has entered the realm of pathology instead. It’s now clear that Republicans just have a deep, unreasoning hatred of the idea that government policy may help some people get health care.

Why? The truth is that I don’t fully get it. Maybe it’s anger at the thought of anyone getting something they didn’t earn themselves, unless it’s an inheritance from daddy. Maybe it’s a sense that a lot of gratuitous suffering is or should be part of the human condition, or God’s plan, or something. I try to understand how others think, but in this case I really do find it hard.

Whatever the reason, however, the fact is that whatever they may claim, today’s Republicans hate the idea of poor and working-class Americans getting the health care they need.

Paul Krugman is a columnist for the New York Times.

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