

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Would open public meeting better fit the bill?

At first glance, it is a bit difficult to aptly describe the latest initiative by the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners.

Readers may recall that the commissioners plan to hold a series of private meetings with property owners regarding a controversial plan to rebuild East Airport Road in Hermiston. Some residents assert the project will mean the loss of sections of their property in the county right-of-way.

The county decided recently to spearhead a series of private one-on-one meetings with individual residents in the area to provide more information about the plan and to help alleviate concerns.

A county commissioner, an engineer, a county road employee and others will be at each meeting with each individual resident.

The meetings appear to be a good-faith effort by elected leaders to reach out to community members with concerns. They are not public meetings — exactly — but they are not expressly private either. We understand that notes will be taken during the meetings and a summary provided



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
A car drives on East Airport Road on Friday near EOTEC. The county decided recently to spearhead a series of private one-on-one meetings with individual residents in the area to provide more information about the plan and to help alleviate concerns.

to the board.

As far as the idea itself, we applaud the commission for tackling a sensitive issue in a constructive manner. Any interaction between elected leaders and voters is a good thing. Democracy wins when residents believe and

know they have access to the politicians that represent them.

Yet we can't help but wonder why the individual meetings are necessary in the first place when a larger, more open public meeting would fit the bill.

Individual sessions between voters

and elected leaders are — or should be — a commonplace element to our democracy. All of us — within reason — should expect to be able to walk into the courthouse after making an appointment and chat with one of the commissioners about an issue.

The East Airport Road issue is an important one, especially to the residents who live on that road and are affected by decisions concerning the road and right-of-way. But in a larger sense it is also a crucial subject for the entire community, not just those directly affected by the proposal. That's because the problems that surround the proposal tend to crop up from time to time across the area. The road and residents will have different names and live in a different location, but the issue will arise in the future.

That's why we believe that while the individual meeting plan shows the commissioners have their hearts in the right place, the fact is there should be larger, open public meetings on the issue. More than one if necessary.

YOUR VIEWS

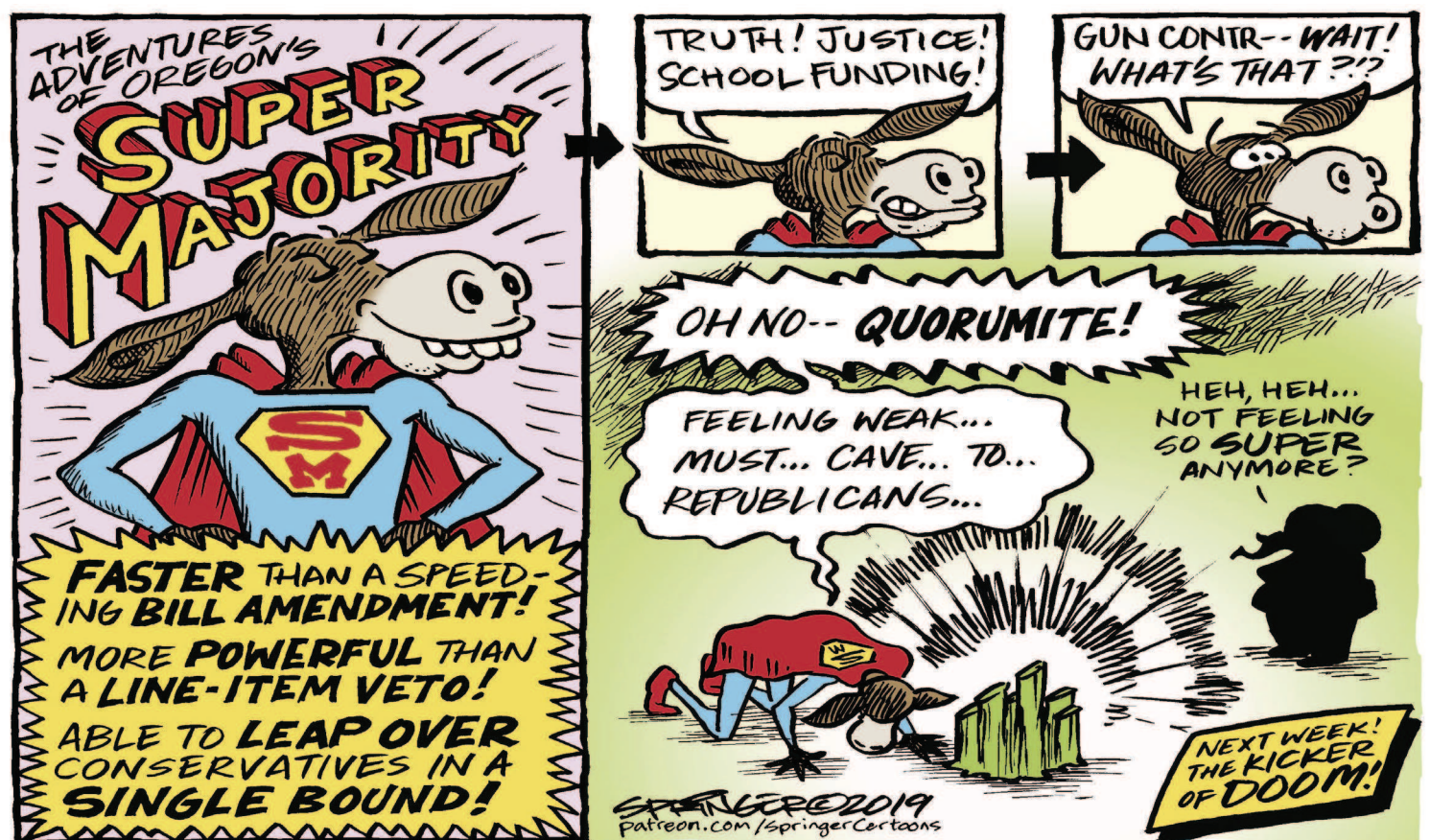
Women's bodies are their business

Several states are passing legislation to tightly control women's reproductive health and choices. Our own legislature has periodic rumblings along these lines.

How arrogant. It is absurd that white male politicians try to control and legislate women's reproductive health, contraception, and family planning. Women face numerous and complex individual situations every day. They should be able to manage their own bodies with the advice of those they respect. They should be able to do so without Big Brother looking over their shoulders.

No one has ever gotten pregnant without the participation of a man; therefore, men should share in the responsibilities. If these efforts to curtail a woman's choice continue, we should demand legislation putting sideboards on men's reproductive health and activities. It would only be fair.

Jeff Blackwood
Pendleton



OTHER VIEWS

Joe Biden and restoring the old (pre-Trump) order

There was a school of thought that said former Vice President Joe Biden would begin to sink in the polls the moment he announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination. Biden's first day in the race, the thinking went, would be his best day.

In fact, the opposite has happened. Since formally becoming a candidate on April 25, Biden has shot up in the polls. On announcement day, Biden held a 6.3-point lead over second-place Sen. Bernie Sanders in the RealClearPolitics average of polls. Today, that lead is 23.5 points. That is a big change.

Polls do not tell us who will win an election months from now. But they do tell us what is happening at this moment. And at this moment, Democratic voters, who are sometimes said to be moving left and itching to transform the United States with a Green New Deal, Medicare for All, and through-the-roof taxes on the rich, are in fact responding to a decidedly more centrist appeal.

That appeal, from Biden, is a promise not to fundamentally remake Ameri-

can society, but to restore things to the way they used to be. And "the way they used to be" means before Donald Trump.

Obviously, Democratic voters want to replace a Republican president with a Democratic president. But they are especially dismayed by Trump — and some, driven by increasingly strident news coverage, seem to have gone nearly 'round the bend about him.

But for some center-left Democrats, the solution to the Trump Problem — that is, the fact that Trump is president — might not be the Green New Deal or Medicare for All. It is to restore the pre-2017 order in American politics.

And Biden, Barack Obama's vice president from 2009 to 2017, is the physical embodiment of that old order.

That is what Biden promises. Nearly every day, he repeats some version of his core campaign pledge: "I want to restore the soul of this country."

Biden's unexpected choice of the 2017 events in Charlottesville, Virginia, as the theme of his announcement was a way of saying that something has gone terribly wrong in the United States and that

he wants to return to the pre-Trump past. Addressing a real or imagined moral crisis is one way for an opposition candidate to run against an incumbent president whose term has brought solid economic growth, low unemployment and higher wages.

How long will Biden's lead last? Who knows? There is simply no telling how the Democratic race will play out. In the last two Republican nomination contests, we saw one race, in 2012, in which several candidates alternated holding the lead before Mitt Romney finally won. In the other, in 2016, we saw Trump lead a big field virtually the entire time. Now, with an even bigger Democratic field, the race dynamics are not yet clear.

Plus, for Biden specifically, there will always be the issue of age. Biden will be 78 years old on Inauguration Day 2021. That is the same age Trump would be upon leaving office, should he serve eight years. But Biden would be just beginning his presidency nearing the age of 80. That is totally uncharted territory in United States history. (By the way, one other candidate, Sanders, is even older.)

Even if Democrats want to restore the old order, they might decide a younger candidate should do the job.

They might also want a candidate without Biden's record of fizzling out in presidential campaigns. In his first run for president, in 1988, Biden withdrew amid a plagiarism scandal before any votes were cast. In his second run, in 2008, he quit after finishing fifth in the Iowa caucuses. So he has run twice and never even made it to the New Hampshire primary.

Now, though, Biden stands ahead of the field. Democrats know how old he is, they know he has lost in the past, and they still like him.

There's a truism that elections are always about the future, not the past. That's often the case. But what if it isn't this time? A lot of political truisms did not hold up in the 2016 election, which was won by a man with another promise of restoration, to Make America Great Again.

Now, many Democrats seem happy to support a candidate who pledges to take them back a few years. Again, that could change, but for the moment it shows how many Democrats yearn to return to a time before Trump.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

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