

O EAST OREGONIAN

PINION

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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat,
kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to regional Republican lawmaker Rep. Greg Barreto. The Cove House of Representatives lawmaker announced he will not seek re-election in 2020.

Barreto said during a recent interview that he is a firm believer in a citizen legislature and that politics shouldn't become a profession. Barreto, who will have served three terms, appears ready to step back and let someone else from the region run for his House seat.

Barreto deserves a great deal of credit for performing his duty as a citizen-lawmaker, serving his district and then moving on.

While we don't agree with term limits, we do not believe that elected slots in the state Senate and the House should become lifelong positions that stretch for decades.

Barreto performed his public ser-

vice. He gave back to his community. Now he believes it is time to move out of the way.

Good for him.

A tip of the hat to Blue Mountain Community College for finding an innovative way to help students with their textbook costs.

The college announced recently it saved students \$1.1 million since 2015 by encouraging faculty to use open education resources, or learning material that is in the public domain or under open licensing pacts.

It is a low-cost, effective way to slash student spending and, at the same time, provide a viable platform for people to secure a higher education.

A quarter of all courses at the college now utilize the open source method.

A kick in the pants to the parties involved in the apparent stalemate to stop all of those who have labored for so long and come up so short on



EO Media Group file photo
State Rep. Greg Barreto, right, and former La Grande School District Superintendent Larry Glaze listen to input from educators and school board members in 2015.

resolving the proposed 293-mile Hemingway-to-Boardman power transmission line.

After years of public meetings, debates and studies, two La Grande groups filed lawsuits in federal court to block the venture, which is slated to run through Umatilla, Morrow, Union and Baker counties.

The project is going through a review by Oregon Department of Energy and the power line is a linch-

pin for Idaho Power's plans to meet future power needs.

We don't begrudge the two La Grande groups for filing the lawsuits. That is their right. What we find disappointing is that after this long and so many years the two sides remain so far apart in terms of a workable compromise.

Chalk up another win for the lawyers on this one. Surely, we can do better than this.

FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

Racism through a
presidential lens

People are still talking about last month's First Draft Writers' Series and Portland poet and novelist Harold Johnson — sharing his books, wanting more. An African-American who was raised in World War II and Depression-era Yakima, Washington, Johnson is a musician, teacher, and artist as well as writer. In his most recent book, "ARTICLE II: The Gallery," he gives us a special gift: an opportunity to walk in the poet's shoes as he tours the National Portrait Gallery, reporting on U.S. presidents one through 44 in the voices of black Americans.

It's a book about slavery and racism in the U.S. as told through "presidential rap sheets." It's brilliant. Both searing and — thanks to Johnson's gifts — funny. And shocking, especially if we thought we had learned about these presidents in school.

They're numbered, not named, though readers can check the list in the back of the book. The effect of looking at one president after another through the lens of racism is cumulative, overwhelming. Here's what the poet says about 11 — President Polk: "On periodic presidential visits to yr plantings, / a practice was to have the last two slaves / who'd done something deemed unslavelike / brought before you, stripped / and whipped in front of other enslaved persons."

The end of slavery was not, of course, the end of presidential racism. Some talk about making things better but do nothing, and most are like 26, Teddy Roosevelt, who says, "As a race and in the mass / they are altogether inferior to the whites." Or 28, Woodrow Wilson, former president of Princeton, who praised "The Birth of a Nation" after showing it in the White House, and called African-Americans "lazy." ("You, an educator," says Johnson.)

I was surprised to learn that number 30, Calvin Coolidge, "Silent Cal," actually spoke — in favor of anti-lynching laws. And he wrote to a citizen who had insisted that the United States was a white man's country, "I have taken my oath to support the Constitution. It is the source of your rights and my rights. I propose to regard it, administer it, as the source of the rights of all people, whatever their beliefs or race."

Silent Cal? Maybe he just wasn't heard.

When we stand in the black viewer's footsteps regarding portrait after portrait of the more recent presidents whose administrations we have lived through, listening hard for evidence of hope, we realize even more deeply what it means to have the man who integrated the armed forces refer to White House servants as "an army of coons." Or the president who helped win

World War II afraid to answer the plea to come to a city in the South and give a speech urging citizenship protections for everyone — instead, thinking maybe "further action in this field would merely result in more bitterness." ("Come on, man, you're not talking to chumps.") We remember the president who "rode the dirty race HORse to WashingTON."

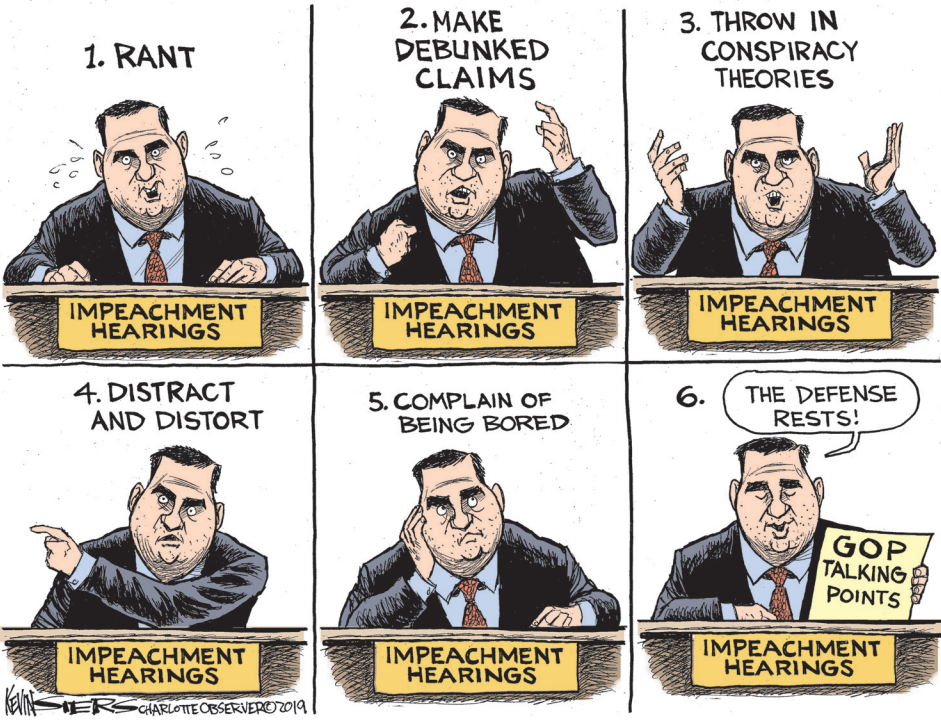
But being knocked sideways by such recognition can help us face the world with deeper understanding. We live in a country where many find the slogan "Black Lives Matter" threatening, and where white men march with tiki torches chanting, "Jews will not replace us." Feeling empathy reminds us that we are all in this together.

On Thursday, Nov. 21, First Draft will give us more opportunities to explore contemporary questions from someone else's perspective. Alex Kuo's Mao's "Kisses: A Novel of June 4, 1989" is told from the point of view of Ge, the (fictional) personal note-taker of China's leader Deng Xiaoping — who has the "inside dope" of the events leading up to those tanks in Tiananmen Square. "What is the real China?" Ge asks.

And Joan Burbick's Stripland follows four characters whose lives were upended by the 2009 shooting of a Nez Perce man by the Idaho State Police. The stories of a homeless man, a woman lawyer, a bereft photographer, and an internet trickster intersect and overlap as they try to understand, exploit, or seek revenge for the killing. Americans are polarized, we're told. We need to try to understand each other. Feel our connections, empathize with others. Writers help us do that.

See you at First Draft.

Bette Husted is a writer and a student of T'ai Chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.



OTHER VIEWS

Eighth Street Bridge
completion highlights other
needed repairs

Despite the delays and cost overruns, Pendleton's newest bridge is open for business and undergoing its finishing touches. It's a marvelous structure, complete with antique streetlights and a pedestrian underpass. It's pretty obvious that no expense was spared as pedestrian safety was a primary concern.

What a difference a couple of years makes. Southwest 13th Street, one of few access streets to Pendleton's South Hill, was in deplorable condition, full of potholes and crumbling. More patching was not the answer. City officials felt a complete rebuild was the only solution. The addition of ADA-compliant sidewalks was considered too expensive, especially since there was a stairway nearby. Though that particular stairway was in pretty bad shape from years of neglect, I believe they felt once the street was completed, upgrading the stairway would be considered.

Unfortunately, repairing the stairway was not an option, and it was condemned. It was decided a new walkway with lights and a handrail for safety was the ultimate solution, and the condemned stairway would be removed because it presented a safety hazard to children in the area since it was in such close proximity of the Early Learning Center. Fast forward to today

and check the progress. A steep temporary gravel path remains, partially overgrown with weeds at times, unlit, and without a handrail. The old condemned concrete stairway? Yup, it's still there too.

Considering the condition of our city streets, the total absence of sidewalks in much of the city, and the unsatisfactory solution afforded pedestrian access to and from the South Hill, wouldn't a well-lit crosswalk at Southeast Eighth Street have been acceptable and much more cost-effective? You bicycle riders can rest easy. The new bridge and the block approaching the bridge have dedicated bike lanes. Pedestrians? Sorry, no crosswalks.

The real kicker in this whole project wasn't the delays and cost overruns that were paid from our street repair funds. It was the number of substandard streets city officials agreed to transfer from county ownership to the city just to get the county to pay for their share of the bridge replacement costs. What did we get? We've got a bridge that nobody really wanted, and by the Public Works director's own admission, the added bonus of millions of dollars of additional street repairs to the city's backlog. Repair costs for Southwest Hailey alone are estimated in the millions. It seems the city would have been much better off simply paying the county's portion. With the high costs expected for Southwest Hailey alone, it'll be years, if ever, before any substantial repairs are made.

**Rick Rohde
Pendleton**

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