

## OUR VIEW

# History won't let us forget

There is no way to sugarcoat the bewildering and abysmal departure of the United States from Afghanistan.

Over the weekend, the Taliban entered the capital of the nation — Kabul — effectively ending a more than 20-year war that killed 2,400 Americans and mauled thousands more. The speed of the collapse of Afghanistan's military against the Taliban was extraordinary and rests solely on the policy-makers of the United States.

Back home, the big headlines are COVID-19 and whatever partisan political fight is going on, but voters everywhere should at least take notice that the effort they funded — to the tune of \$83 billion — just went down the toilet.

Polls over the past few years showed Americans, as a rule, don't care about Afghanistan. Who can blame them? It is a far-off place with difficult sounding names for its cities and the memory that the deadly 9/11 terrorist attacks were spawned in that nation has faded. Now, Afghanistan is just another developing nation everyone wants to forget.

But history won't be so kind. History won't let everyone forget. History has a habit of coming back to haunt nations and lawmakers who decide — for whatever reason — to abandon ambitious foreign policy ventures.

Never let anyone fool you. We had a chance to win in Afghanistan. Not last year, nor in the past five or six years. But once there was a window, narrow for sure, to get things right.

We failed. Miserably.

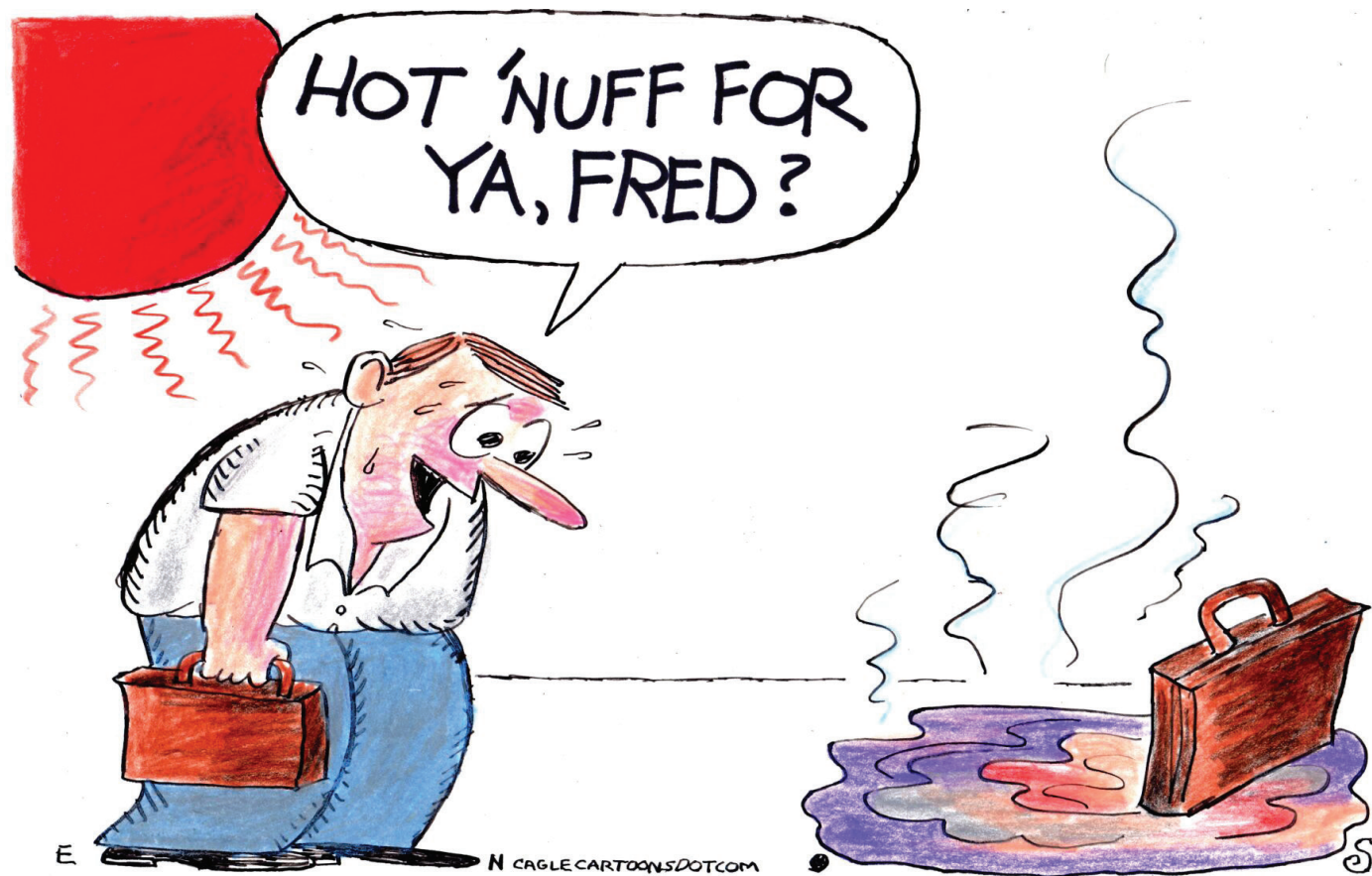
You, the reader, and taxpayer, spent more than \$80 billion to repair and prop up a nation. Your money was supposed to build a robust Afghani military to protect the nation, to ensure it was never again a haven for terrorists. That money — your money — was for nothing.

There will be plenty of excuses, for sure, but in the end, the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan only marginally better than it did Vietnam. That should give everyone pause.

Finally, the most poignant piece of our departure is the sacrifice made by so many brave men and women of our armed forces in Afghanistan. They were deployed to that nation and performed admirably. They did everything that was asked of them. Their legacy deserved better than a hurried retreat and the abandonment of a nation.

President Joe Biden will, unfairly or fairly, take a large share of the blame for the last chapter in our longest war and he should.

Our strategy in Afghanistan failed. Now we, and future generations, will have to live with the results.



## Navigating through rattlesnake country



ALEX HOBBS  
PASTURES OF PLENTY

The ground shifted precariously underneath my sandaled feet, the stones giving into gravity as they rolled pell-mell down the hillside.

Their journey echoing off the tuff and basalt that surrounded me. Thirty-million-year-old volcanic crenellations standing sentry over the lackadaisical river below. At the water's edge, lonesome ponderosas sighed and rushes bent with the gentle current, their viridescence seeming wholly irreconcilable with the hues of browns and reds of the canyon. An irrigated pasture bursting forth from a desert landscape. A blue sky the color of a Steller's jay.

I continued my scramble, focusing solely on finding a stable path upwards. Stretched nearly horizontal on the steep cliff face, I attempted to quell the rising panic, keenly aware that a single misplaced step could render my body to a pulp. Breathing in and breathing out.

Fighting the dissonance between self-preservation and the task before me. At a certain elevation, the earthy, primordial scent of the river was replaced with sage and juniper and drought. I was an orphan on a red planet.

I didn't notice the rattlesnake at first. The intricacies of its camouflage hoodwinking my astigmatism-ridden eyes. It was the movement I noticed first, then the realization of the two feet of ground which separated it from myself — still awkwardly sprawled against the hillside — settled in. Stretched from head to tail, the snake spanned 3 feet.

Its diamond-shaped head swaying side to side, its sleek body gliding downhill like a leaf on an autumn breeze. The slow flick and shake of its rattle was the only sound heralding its descent. I stood slowly, willing myself to balance on the cliff face, and turned to watch the graceful creature.

A few feet downhill from my frozen, panic-stricken body, the snake stopped and sought sanctuary in the shade of sagebrush. Its body slowly coiled then unwound nonchalantly. A beautiful, venomous telephone cord. Satiated by its umbrageous pitstop, my friend continued its downhill journey. A feast of small rodents undoubtedly waiting for it at its destination.

It was tempting to halt my climb altogether. After all, what perils awaited me further up the cliff? A den of rattlesnakes? Scorpions? Broken bones? I would be lying to myself if I said I wasn't tempted to turn tail. To zigzag my way back down to known safety. The problem was that the only thing I was certain of was that the rattlesnake

was down there. Who, despite our bonding moments, I was sure was plotting to sink its fangs into my Teva-clad foot. The only way forward was up.

There was asynchronicity to my encounter with the rattlesnake. I watched its every movement until it faded into the hillside, though it seemed utterly unbothered by my presence. At the risk of sounding biblical, how many other rattlesnakes have I fretted over in my life? The unrelenting feeling of being "not credentialed enough," not finishing my degree early enough, having my son in the twilight of my teenage years, not going to law school as I'd wanted. Rattlesnakes: all designed to shake me on my ascent. Designed to sow seeds of doubt. We can't go backward, there are only rattlesnakes there.

The canyon I had climbed out of unfolded before me. A great gash cleaving the earth in two, the river snaking like a ribbon of blue below. In the distance, the sandy-colored rock spires jutted from the ground. Remnants of the ancient Crooked River caldera. Somewhere at the bottom of the gorge, a rattlesnake slithered through the grass.

Alex Hobbs lives in Irrigon and is a former educator turned full-time homeschooling mom. She has a degree in political science from Oregon State University.

## YOUR VIEWS

### The virus is calling the shots, not the governor

When I called Grande Ronde Hospital, La Grande, on Friday, Aug. 13, to speak with a specialist, no one was available. I was told that everyone was "upstairs with COVID patients."

Jackson County has run out of beds and they're turning away surgical patients. They went from 99 cases on July 4 to 655 cases in one month — 0 to 60 in no time flat.

The National Guard is being sent to 20 hospitals across Oregon to help with logistics. The president and chief executive officer of St. Charles Health System in Bend thanked Gov. Brown for that help, saying that the "stress on Oregon hospitals was unprecedented."

Here's the reality — the virus is calling the shots, not the governor.

The Oregon Health Authority makes recommendations about what steps should be taken and that's what happens next. Propaganda on Facebook downplaying the severity of the virus, asking people to ignore vaccination and attacking the governor is very destructive. It has cost lives and it will cost more, including young people. That's already happened. My recommendation is simple — get off of Facebook now to keep the poison from spreading.

There is no freedom without responsibility, including responsibility to the others around you. Anyone who doesn't understand that should step aside. All of our community leaders, political, religious and those involved in health care, need to come forward with one voice and state clearly and publicly that we all need to get vaccinated. That is the only thing that will keep this from

wrecking our medical systems.

Please do your part.

Norm Cimon  
La Grande

### Bye bye Stillman Park

When the Pendleton Children's Center approached the Pendleton School District about leasing the vacant land adjacent to the Early Learning Center, Superintendent Chris Fritsch wasn't too keen on the idea, explaining that allowing a third party to develop the property via a lease would essentially amount to "gifting" publicly owned property and ultimately reducing its value to the district. Evidently the school board agreed and nixed the idea.

Since the city of Pendleton is well versed in "gifting" public property, Kathryn Brown, the children's center secretary-treasurer and city hall frequent flyer, pitched the same proposal to city management, to lease a major portion of Stillman Park. The city's parks and recreation director jumped on board with his support, as portions of the park and tennis courts have fallen into disrepair, the courts themselves rarely used for tennis. The park itself has become a refuge for unsavory characters, plagued with vandalism, and a thorn in the side for both park maintenance and the police department.

Evidently, the director must feel that with all the delays and cost overruns on the Til Taylor Park project, and since the only major recurring event held in the park is the Cowboy Breakfast during Round-Up week, the city council is in no mood to approve a major

renovation of Stillman Park.

Perhaps selling the park outright and reallocating scarce maintenance resources should be considered. The riverbanks, for one, are still littered with trees from the flood two years ago.

Rick Rohde  
Pendleton

### 'Politics' is not a dirty word

Many people these days tend to think the word "politics" is a dirty word and that it is OK to cast aspersions on anyone's ideas that may be different. Actually, the word "politics" in my dictionaries means the science or activities of government. It is a way of discussing or conducting policies regarding government.

Now, in the U.S.A., a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, it is the duty of every citizen to be involved in discussion regarding our government. Thus, to be loyal citizens, we ought all to be engaged in discussing the kind of country we want to live in.

That brings up what we mean by discussion. Discussion is the process of sharing one's ideas with others and listening in turn to their ideas. Discussion is not arguing or debating. It is definitely not using labels or pejorative terms to show disdain for someone else's ideas.

In other words, politics is a way to discuss respectfully with each other about what is needed for our country. Politics is only a dirty word when made so by the speaker.

Evelyn Swart  
Joseph

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