

Spare us the nuance on national monument

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, responding to questions from Rep. Greg Walden during hearings March 1, said she’s unaware of any active plan in the administration to designate an Owyhee Canyonlands national monument.

That’s good news, as far as it goes.

Backed by the Oregon Natural Desert Association, the proposed Owyhee Canyonlands wilderness and conservation area would cover 40 percent of Oregon’s Malheur County — about 2.5 million acres of what is now controlled by the Bureau of Land Management.

Residents believe designation would be accompanied by restrictions and regulations that would prohibit or severely complicate grazing, mining, hunting and recreation.

While proponents say traditional uses of the land will be allowed, a local group called Citizens in Opposition to the Owyhee Canyonlands Monument does not believe them.

There’s quite a bit of opposition to the plan in Eastern Oregon. A lot of people see it as another example of the federal government putting the desires of distant special interests ahead of the local community.

While supporters are well organized, have money, have a website, have drawn up maps and detailed proposals, Jewell downplayed it during her testimony.

“It’s been kicking around, it’s one of the things people have recommended to us,” Jewell said.

But she said the Interior Department, which includes the BLM and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has held no community meetings or discussions about the idea.

“People haven’t been actively in my office asking about it,” Jewell said.

Walden asked if there has been any coordination between the White House and Department of Interior on the issue.

“Not that I’m aware of,” Jewell replied.

You would think that she would know. But forgive us for not taking this as the last word on the subject from an administration that has raised nuance to an art form.

With 10 months and change left in President Obama’s tenure, there’s plenty of time for the plan to move forward.

While the administration has previously said it would work collaboratively with Congress, local interests and elected officials in making such designations, because the land in question is already owned by the federal government the Antiquities Act of 1906 requires only that Obama pick up his pen and proclaim it so. No fuss, no muss.

In February he designated three such monuments in the California desert covering almost 1.8 million acres.

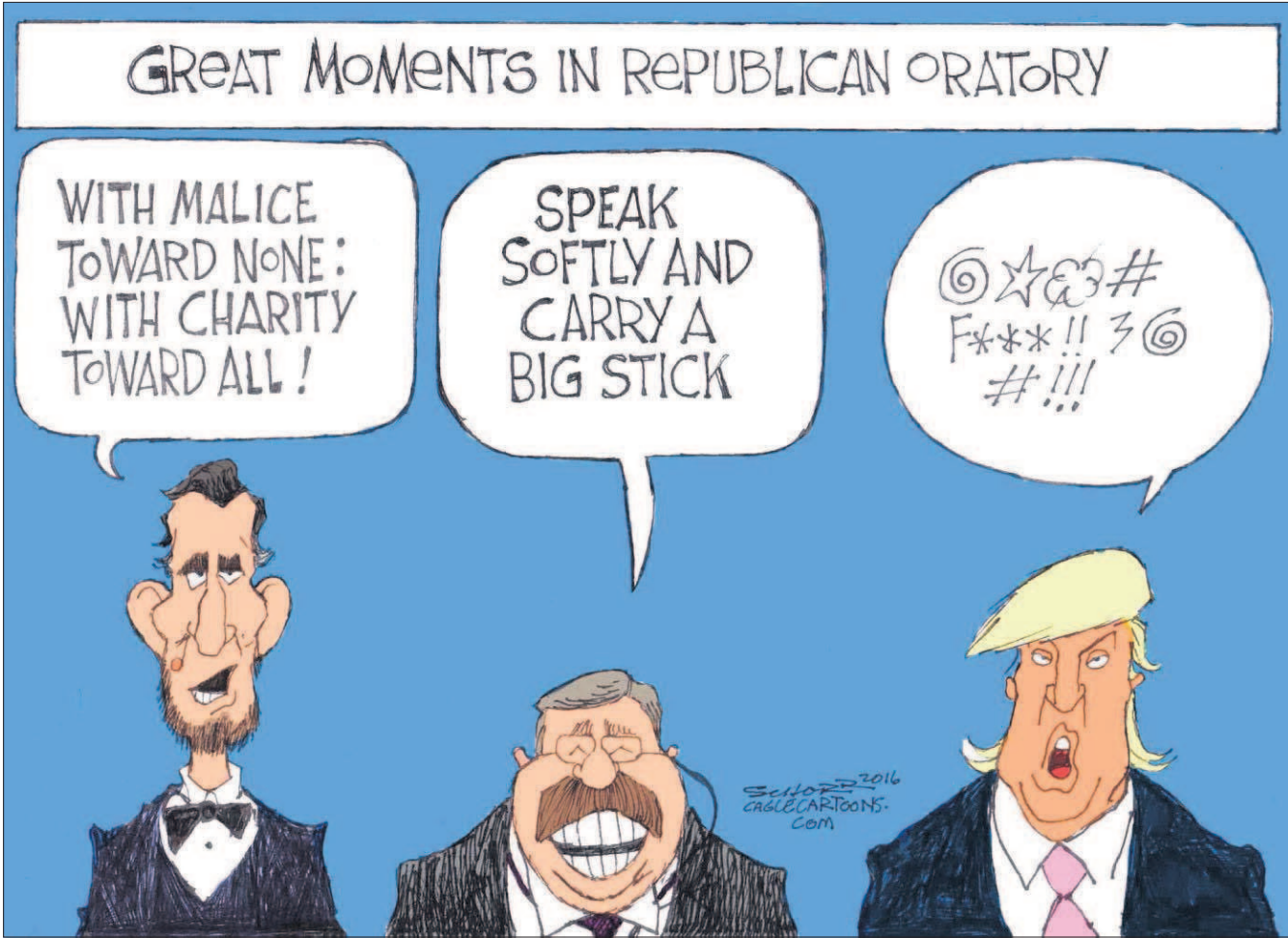
The fear on the ground is that the White House will play coy, carefully denying what is not true, not addressing what is true. Then, somewhere after the election and before Jan. 20 the deal will be done.

Walden said the angst many rural westerners feel over government management of public lands and federal overreach would be made worse by such a declaration. We agree.

The president and his representatives should just say no. Absent that, they should honestly telegraph their intentions and engage in an honest debate with the people of Malheur County and the West.

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain



Story of a life lived fully, by George

Considering that my last column emphasized the importance of respect for law and order and cautioned against making folk heroes of outlaws, this column might seem incongruous. I would like to tell you about my Uncle George, a lovable rogue and renegade, who spent the last 35 years of his life on the West Coast, where he kept safely out of sight of the mob in Boston.

George was the son of a cantankerous mother of Irish descent and an adventurous father from Crete, and like both his sisters, George inherited his dad’s dark Mediterranean good looks. My grandfather immigrated illegally into the United States via Canada and through Maine, where he passed himself off as French while temporarily using a name that he borrowed from a newspaper. Little did he know at the time that he would be setting a precedent that his son would one day follow, when George would decide to pull up stakes and live in a different place under an assumed name and new identity.

For 50 years, my grandfather operated a gas station on Ruggles Street in Roxbury, which was a mostly Greek enclave when my mom and her siblings were growing up, but which became more deteriorated and crime-ridden as the years went by.

My Uncle George sometimes worked in his father’s gas station, but he also ran a small convenience store in the corner of the four-plex where George and his wife and my grandparents lived. It was the type of store and neighborhood where metal security gratings were necessary to protect the windows and doors from being broken during the night.

As kids, my brothers and I would listen with wide eyes to George’s colorful stories (with language that George used more for the education of his nephews than his nieces) as he would describe how he jumped over the counter of his store and chased some punk through the projects after the guy had tried to rob him at knifepoint. My uncle was always



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

a fantastic natural athlete, fast and lean, in physical condition that was amazing considering the fact that for the greater part of his life, George was a three-pack-a-day smoker and a guy more likely to have a few beers than a decent meal.

George liked nothing better than playing handball, first at the YMCA in Boston, where he won city championships, and in later years of his life, at a club that he ran in Lynnwood, Wash. In Boston, George’s handball partner often was Red Auerbach, the Celtics coach, for the simple reason that Auerbach loved to win, and his best chance at doing that was if he played alongside George as his partner.

As a kid, I always noticed that George never seemed to be without a wad of cash on him, and I naively attributed that to the success of his convenience store. Later on I found out that George, who loved to gamble himself, became a middleman for bookies to pass their payments to Boston mobsters. Unfortunately for George, at some point bookies who owed him money got behind in their payments, which meant that George got into trouble with people higher up who expected payments from him. My mother once hinted that it was fear of Whitey Bulger’s gang that eventually led George to head off for Seattle to start a new life under an assumed identity.

I started reminiscing about George recently while I was watching the 1960 original version of “Ocean’s Eleven,” which featured Frank Sinatra and his rat pack of army buddies knocking off casinos in Las Vegas. In real life, George was of the same age as the characters in that movie. He was an army veteran who served right after World War II. Maybe it

was then that he acquired the easy swagger that always marked his persona. If you can imagine the classy style and the deep, dangerous, fearless voice of Humphrey Bogart in the body of a handsome Greek who always wore his hair slicked back, with short-sleeved collared shirts that revealed muscular arms, along with dress slacks and leather shoes, then you have a snapshot of my uncle that remained timeless for about 50 years.

Sometimes life gives people a second chance, and George got his in Lynnwood. There he established a successful handball club where he taught and played the game and even helped raise a whole new generation of players. The guys loved him, their wives would bring him meals, and their kids who got to skip church on Sundays to go play handball alongside their fathers called his club, “George’s church.”

A few weeks after George had once joked with me about how he had cheated death by the way he had always smoked and drank, George’s good luck changed with a stroke at age 69. He never smoked another cigarette. With a lot of help from the other members, George continued to run the handball club for some years after that, but eventually they had to give the place up. His handball buddies remained intensely loyal to him even after he needed to be in an assisted-living facility. They took turns coming to see him each day and playing cards with him, just like they had done together at the club for decades.

George was probably the best story-teller and the funniest guy I ever knew. When he died at age 80, he had eighteen dollars in the bank. A year later, his handball buddies held a pizza party to remember him. About 75 people, including this proud nephew, came to share stories and laughs about him.

My Uncle George died a rich man after all.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Let’s abolish Daylight Saving Time

I agree with David Miles’ attempt to abolish time changes. I would like to add that time changes in the spring and fall interfere with medication regimens, causing serious side effects in a person’s system — serious headaches and other complications. Keeping on schedule with medication is extremely important to some people. It takes at least a week before your body adjusts to the time change and for people to adjust to the change personally and accepting it, which can be difficult for young and elderly alike.

Mike Brink
Gresham

Support Enterprise’s great theater

There was a free concert last night at the OK (Theatre). It was great; a potluck to break in the new space, then a wonderful band. People danced, ate, socialized, loved on one another a bit — pure magic. Good ol’ Wallowa County magic, the kind we all know and love.

Sandwiched in the middle of the evening was an announcement that I feel needs amplification. It was made by our very own Darrell Brann, the owner/operator of the OK. The gist was that if you paid for a season pass up front, you’d get tickets to a show a month for a year, and be one of a cadre of “OK People” with some other perks. He would get a reliable revenue stream to make it all happen. This announcement, made in his humble style, is really so much more. This incredibly talented and motivated man has made it his mission to not only keep an amazing venue, the OK Theatre, open for all of us to enjoy but to bring in consistently top-shelf entertainment all year.

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Darrell is a world-class musician himself, a bluesman extraordinaire, not to mention his contracting business and his charming wife and kids, all of whom help. He is quietly asking for our support, in his determined, quiet way. I think it needs be shouted from the rooftops. Get behind this guy, Wallowa County. He is the real deal, and he is asking us to help him keep the community spirit alive and well in downtown Enterprise.

There are no “free” concerts. There is a family working hard at an historic building to insure that we all continue to have something very, very special: community and a great place to commune. Cheers.

Carl Lincoln
Enterprise

We should keep our troops at home

I received an unsolicited letter from Oregon Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) dated Feb. 15 that lists the very things we should question about the current Congress. The letter is too long to list in its entirety in this forum, so I am quoting one issue at a time. This week, veterans:

“We also have a strong tradition of giving our veterans the best care possible. Americans are rightly outraged by the scandals at the VA. Our vets have fought to defend our freedom, and we must ensure they receive the benefits or care they’ve earned. That’s why we’ve passed legislation to hold senior manag-

ers at the VA accountable, boost funding for housing and health care (including mental health care) for vets and allow veterans to get quality care outside the VA in the communities where they live.”

Who can argue with the motivation for this action? We can, however, question the motivation for putting our young men and women in harm’s way. Were our veterans there to defend our freedom, or (more likely) simply there because someone did not share our ideology? “Intervention” is no less damaging than war.

Yes, the exception is Osama bin Laden, who attacked the USA and was killed almost 10 years later in Pakistan. This is a volunteer army whose recruitment has glossed over the danger of returning without arms, legs, impaired sight, mental damage or suffering from chemical warfare — or not returning at all. The establishment seems to have ignored the destruction of life inherent in our wars. Wars are waged not just with a map drawn on a piece of paper. How can there be compensation for the loss of limbs and physical or mental ability?

Certainly we must be prepared to protect ourselves, but we seem to have been the aggressors in recent conflicts. Let’s keep our troops at home and we will not need new legislation for veteran care and benefits.

As an independent who at one time had Republican leanings, I find the present GOP direction suspect. Neither of our major political parties addresses my concerns or resolves problems. The government is responsible to the people. Can we not find politicians who share such a commitment?

David Ebbert
Enterprise

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