

Thank you for reading and your patience

We owe you, our subscribers, a big thank you for your patience last week when print issues of the Wallowa County Chieftain were delayed due to road closures between our print facility in Pendleton and Wallowa County.

You reminded us all, again, how important your paper is to you and its late delivery is a disruption. We heard from a lot of you last week, who called — Wednesday, Thursday and into Friday — to find out why your paper hadn't arrived yet.

We lost track of how many calls we received, but we appreciate everyone who was patient and understanding.

We apologize that your paper was delivered late, but Mother Nature and the Oregon Department of Transportation had no sympathy for our need for news — and Safeway coupons — last week.

The printing facility our company owns is in Pendleton, in the building of our sister paper, the East Oregonian, which prints its own paper, The Chieftain, Blue Mountain Eagle, Hermiston Herald and Capital Press, and several other products for us, like the monthly real estate guide.

Usually, that is a good arrangement for all of our sister publications, except when road closures prevent those papers from getting out of Pendleton. Maybe we should have contacted some of the innovative mushers participating in the Eagle Cap Extreme, who managed to find ways to get around road closures to make it in time to race.

If — or perhaps when — that ever happens again, those of you who use smartphones and computers can still get access to the information we publish in the printed paper using our website, e-edition (which shows you electronic version of our print pages) and email newsletters. If you are a subscriber, you have the ability to activate your digital subscription free with your subscription. Some news and information is also available free to all users of our website.

We also use our Facebook page to share links to some of our stories each week and post other news, photos and announcements via the social media site.

For example, we also used Facebook last week to share information about a power outage that was affecting a large portion of Wallowa County. The outage was short, but with no power in our building we also could not use our computers and office Internet connection to post what we knew about the outage to our website (until the power came back on). However, we still had cell phone service, and could post updates to our Facebook page.

Today, the Wallowa County Chieftain, is more than a weekly newspaper. We have multiple products and ways to deliver news and information to Wallowa County, and the world beyond in print and digitally.

We realize that digital products, like Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and websites, are not for everyone. The printed paper is still the most important thing we do to us. We are proud and pleased that it is still important to so many of you, too. But as Mother Nature taught us last week, sometime we need other tools to keep doing what we do. We hope you will use those tool too, by signing up for our email newsletters, liking our Facebook page, activating your digital subscriptions to our website and even following us on Twitter so we can share news regardless of road conditions.

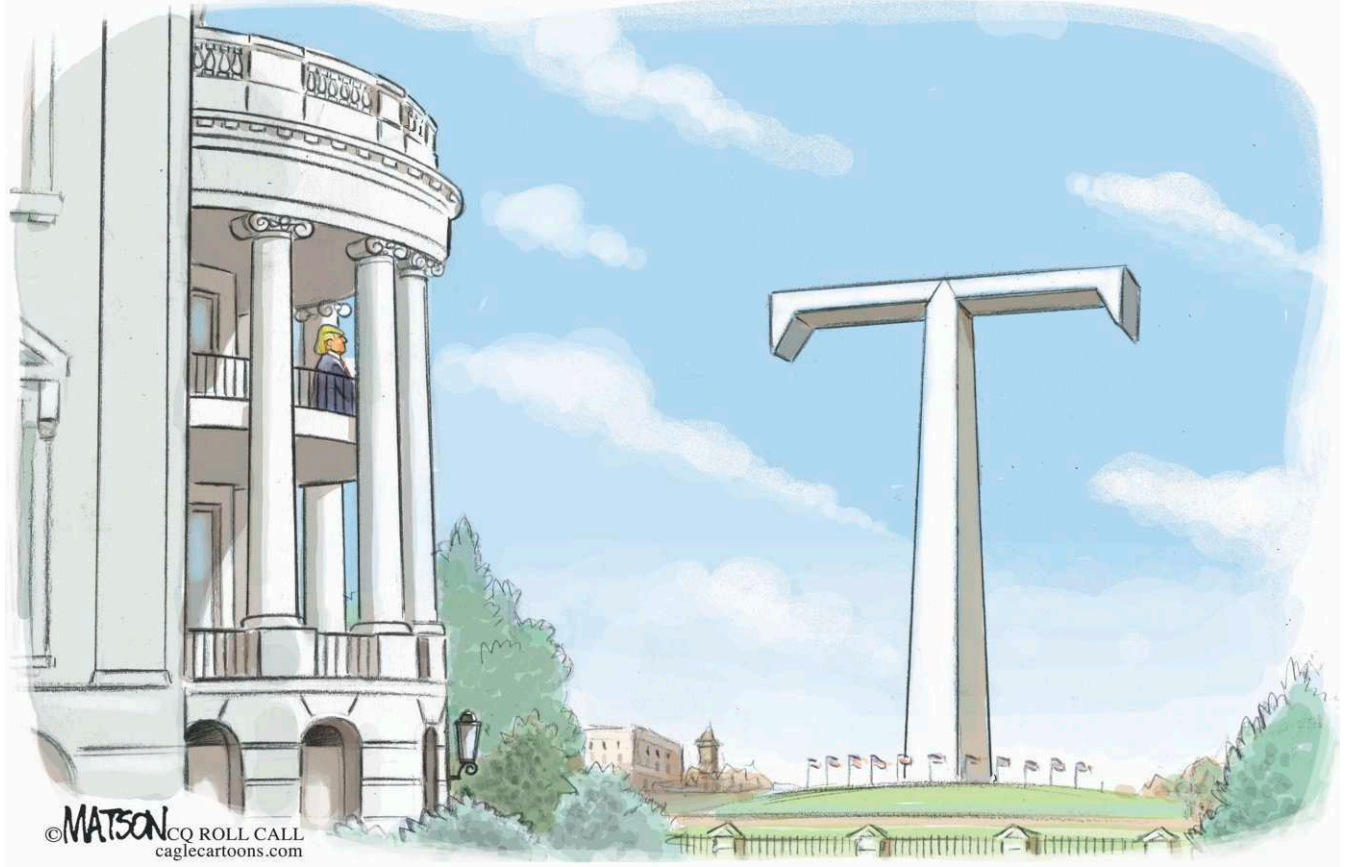
As for getting those coupons to you, we may need to work with our advertisers and digital experts to find a solution to that issue.

Thank you for reading. Thank you for subscribing. Thank you for advertising. And thank you for supporting the advertisers who support us and our community. And thank you for calling us last week to activate your digital subscriptions and telling us how important your newspaper is to you.

We heard you. Loud and clear.

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain



ALTERNATIVE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

A look back at the progress of the Obama years

America needed inspiration outgoing president provided



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

In 2012 and again in 2014, I wrote columns which attempted to summarize the economic progress that had been made up to those points during Obama's presidency. Now that a new president has been sworn in, and especially in light of Mr. Trump's penchant for claiming credit for any recent advances that were occurring even prior to his inauguration, this seems like a good time to reflect on how much conditions have improved in the last eight years.

In this season of "fake news," it is worth recalling that President Obama's term began in the middle of the deepest recession our country had faced since the Great Depression. The housing market collapse that began in 2006, the stock market plunge that started in 2007, and the banking industry failures, which culminated in the crisis of September 2008, were all features of an economy that was hurtling downward on Obama's inauguration day.

The stock market bottomed out in March of 2009 (the same week that the economic stimulus package was adopted by Congress), and it has moved steadily upward ever since then. Today all major stock market averages are about three times what they were nearly eight years ago at their low ebb.

Unemployment is always a lagging

indicator in any recession, so it reached its worst point a little later, at 10 percent in October of 2009, before that measure slowly began turning the corner. Now, as Mr. Obama leaves office, his successor inherits a very healthy unemployment rate of 4.7 percent. And while many of President Obama's critics will point out that this number does not reflect all those people who are underemployed or who have given up looking for work, that factual observation could always be made about any "official" unemployment rate, and is especially an aspect of employment figures during or shortly after any recession. Nor does that observation erase the typical monthly gains of about 200,000 jobs that have occurred since the fall of Obama's first year in office.

The 2009 budget deficit (which fiscal year began in October of 2008) was saddled with the unusual burdens of bailouts for the banking and auto industries, and ran the largest sea of red ink in our nation's history, at over \$1.4 trillion. By 2015, the deficit had shrunk to one-third that size, at \$439 billion, and even though 2016's deficit is estimated at about \$544 billion, we should be reassured that the overall trend has been downward for the past eight years.

Meanwhile, other measurements that relate to consumer buying power are also positive. Inflation remains at a modest rate of about 2 percent, gas prices have stayed relatively stable and well below their peaks of the summer of 2008, and interest rates for 30-year home mortgages are still at about 4 percent. Housing construction and home sales have rebounded to about their pre-recession levels, and the bailouts of the banking and auto industries — however unpopular — appear to have served their purpose of restoring stability in both these vital economic areas.

It is also worth noting, especially as Congress debates its repeal or replacement, that under the Affordable Care Act, about 30 million more Americans gained health care coverage. Partly because the Republicans succeeded in branding the program "Obamacare" and partly because of the flaws that were inherent in an imperfect, patchwork solution right from its inception, the progress that has been made in this area will probably not be recognized until its absence is sorely felt by those who will no longer have access to these recent improvements.

As a staunch supporter of President Obama, I am thankful that he took the helm at a time when America badly needed his inspiration of hope for better days. I believe that history will treat him far more kindly than his opponents did, and that his humility, grace and leadership will be sorely missed in the years ahead.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Experts: State budget is bleak

Oregon's future looks bleak — at least per the Legislature's budget experts.

Teachers, counselors and other school employees could lose their jobs; and class sizes could soar. Thousands of low-income Oregonians could lose medical and dental. Justice could move more slowly in the state courts.

The co-chairs of the Legislature's Ways & Means Committee — Democratic Sen. Richard Devlin of Tualatin and Rep. Nancy Nathanson of Eugene — last week presented their state budget framework for the next two years. Unlike Gov. Kate Brown's proposed budget, it would rely on existing revenue instead of new taxes. But unless the Legislature does raise taxes, Oregonians across the state would receive fewer services.

That debate — more taxes, cost efficiencies or both — will frame this year's legislative session, which begins Feb. 1.

The irony is that Oregon will have nearly \$1.3 billion more in revenue to spend during 2017-19 than during the current two-year budget period.

However, Oregon faces a \$1.8 billion shortfall between that revenue and what the state would need to keep agencies,

GUEST EDITORIAL

From the East Oregonian

programs and schools operating at the same level as today.

This gap was not a surprise. Many lawmakers, especially Republicans, had warned that the state budget was on an unsustainable path even though Oregon — especially urban Oregon — had emerged from the Great Recession.

The reasons have long been known. Federal funds that financed a vast expansion of the Oregon Health Plan are being cut back, leaving Oregon to either pay a larger share of that insurance or take coverage away from some people. PERS bills continue to rise for schools and government agencies. Voters added more costs in the ballot measures they approved this fall.

Meanwhile, too many legislators expected the budget hole would be filled by Oregonians. They counted on voters this fall to pass the largest corporate tax increase in state history. Instead, voters wisely said no.

This budget crisis — this fiscal fiasco — illustrates why Oregon needs a more

disciplined and long-term approach to budgeting.

"We're uniquely good at identifying problems and spending money to solve them. We're not as vigorous at looking at efficiencies," state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said.

The state lacks a guiding set of priorities of which programs and services are most important and most cost-effective. So interest groups — many of them representing worthy causes — fight to make their case with lawmakers every two years.

"The big challenge always is to provide the services people want and expect with the resources they give you," said Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, who is starting his 35th year as a public official.

The budget framework released Thursday leaves Hansell fighting to preserve the state police forensics lab in Pendleton and to ensure state funding to deal with wolves that prey on livestock.

And across the state, legislators and parents are worried about the state's financial roller-coaster will hurt schools.

The Legislature's No. 1 responsibility is to pass a balanced budget. That will happen. But will it be a responsible, forward-thinking budget?

The value, benefit of public lands

I write with concern about Congress' recent decision to assign zero value to public lands (House Resolution 5). This step allows the new Congress to sidestep requirements that a bill giving away a piece of federal land does not decrease federal revenue or contribute to the federal debt.

This decision directly impacts people who hunt and fish in Eastern Oregon and those who rely on outdoor recreational spending. Public lands

LETTERS to the EDITOR

generate millions of dollars in revenue for our state and local businesses, in the form of outdoor recreational spending and tax receipts.

This decision opens the door to a transfer and sale of thousands of acres in the Wallowa, Umatilla, and Malheur National Forests. This results

in reduced access and increased costs of management for state and local governments.

In a time when political differences between residents of Eastern and Western Oregon are often laid bare, I hope that all Oregonians can support and protect our public lands for current and future generations benefit and enjoyment.

Scott Leonard
Milwaukie, OR

WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

USPS No. 665-100

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Wallowa County's Newspaper Since 1884
Enterprise, Oregon

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PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY BY:
EO Media Group

Periodical Postage Paid at Enterprise and additional mailing offices

Subscription rates (includes online access)	1 Year
Wallowa County	\$40.00
Out-of-County	\$57.00

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

See the Wallowa County Chieftain on the Internet
www.wallowa.com
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POSTMASTER — Send address changes to
Wallowa County Chieftain
P.O. Box 338
Enterprise, OR 97828

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