

Wallowa examples matter in ACA rewrite

Well beneath the level of congressional argument over the Affordable Care Act, there is a reality that Capitol Hill needs to see. Ordinary people in places such as Wallowa County have gained benefit from the ACA. Kathleen Ellyn’s front page story illustrates two things. It depicts the predicament of one local woman, who can be described as among the working poor – both she and her husband have full-time employment. The story also shows the dramatic, positive effect the ACA is having on the financial condition of hospitals – especially rural hospitals.

There is a reason why hospital associations and hospitals across the nation are nervous about just how Congress will revamp the ACA. That is because the ACA has markedly reduced the money hospitals must spend on charity and uncompensated care.

After complaining about what they prefer to call Obamacare, Republicans now have the power to repeal it. But they recognize that repeal, without replacement, is an untenable proposition. Through congressional town halls across the country, members of Congress have come face to face with persons whose lives have been made better by the ACA.

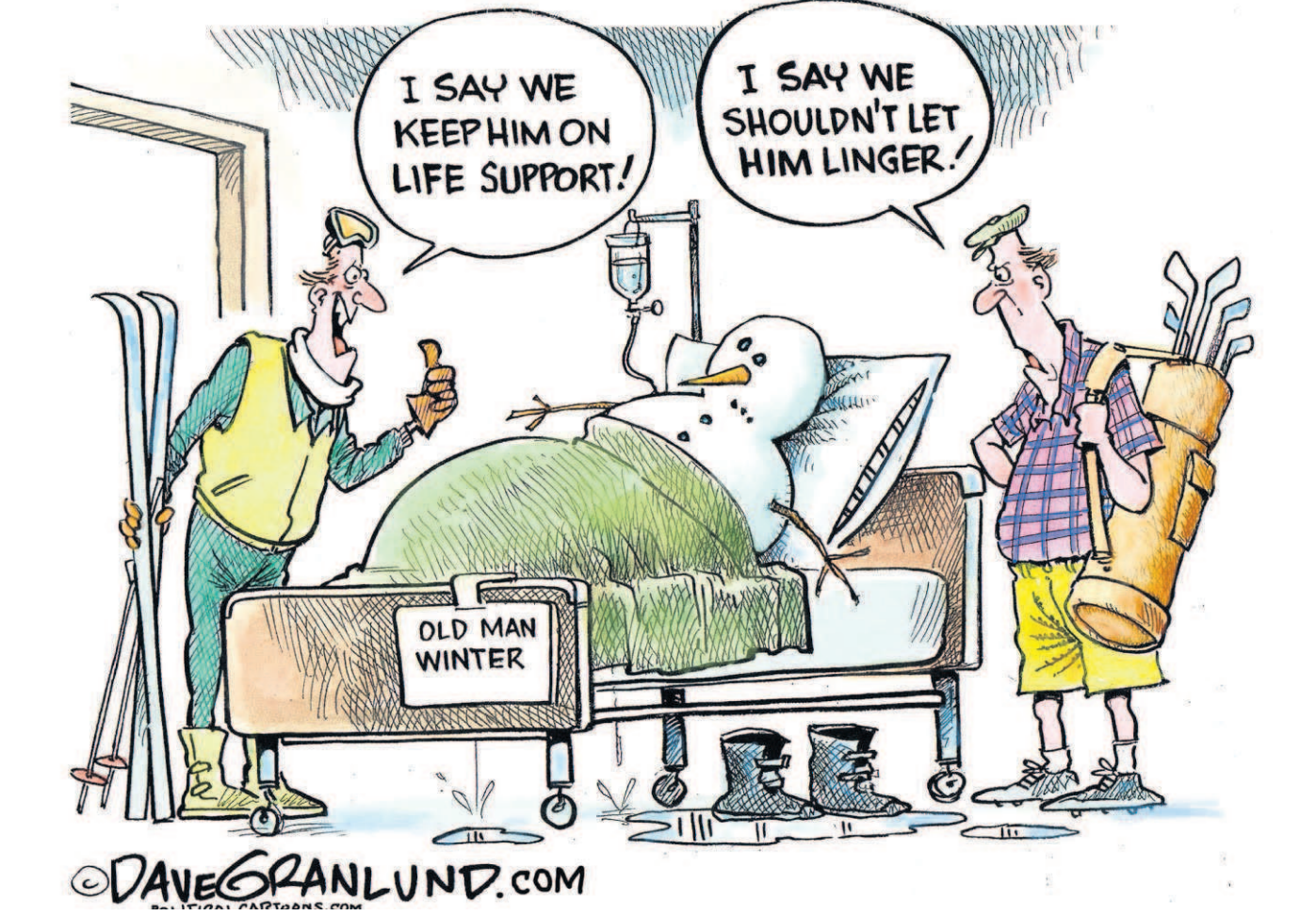
It has long been clear that the ACA needs improvement. Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden has been candid on that point. Sen. Wyden and Republican Sen. Bob Bennett of

Utah had an alternative to President Obama’s proposal. It is a pity that the Obama White House would not give a hearing to the Wyden-Bennett bill, especially because it could have gained bipartisan support.

But here we are in 2017. In the ensuing drama, Rep. Greg Walden will play a huge role, as chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

It is unfortunate that politicians become hostages to their own rhetoric, but that will always be so. In this case, Republicans’ myopic obsession with repeal created an illusion which they apparently believed. Now, with the responsibility of leadership, they cannot repeal the ACA without a reasonable replacement – one that does not make worse the situations of persons who live in places like Wallowa County.

And they must not cause the financial situations of rural hospitals to deteriorate.



OK Theatre rocked Saturday

By Steve Forrester

My wife and I spent our first night in Enterprise at the OK Theatre. The place place was rocking as we walked into a near capacity crowd. Billy Strings and his bluegrass group was eliciting shouts from the audience.

Billy (born William Apostol) is from Traverse City, Mich. He plays a Preston Thompson guitar, made in Sisters, Ore.. It’s a top of the line instrument.

Strings’ group included mandolin, bass and banjo. Those players came from North Carolina and Portland.

Our family’s love of Bluegrass was fueled years ago by hearing a young Ricky Skaggs sing at the Birchmere, in Alexandria, Virginia. Ricky was a walk-on that night, joining Buck White and the Whites.

I was eager to see the OK, since I’m a believer in the revival of historic theaters – like restoration of the Liberty Theater in Astoria. The OK opened in 1918. It’s older than the Liberty, whose birth was 1925.

Saturday night at the OK



was a perfect example of why these old performance venues matter. In the dark and cold of winter, the music inside lit up the town.

Theaters like the OK and the Liberty become social gathering places. That was apparent on Saturday. All ages were in attendance. In addition to the middle aged, there was a large younger crowd, many with small children.

Following Strings were the Shook Twins. It is always a delight to hear siblings sing, because such a unique harmony of timbres is only found in family members.

All across Oregon, this has been a desperate winter. That is the case in our hometown of Astoria. In Pendleton as well. And I’m hearing that this winter has turned the heads of even old timers in Wallowa County.

Walking to the OK Theater, we passed a Chevron station

Presidents Day means even more in 2017

What do we make of Presidents Day in 2017? There was a time when Washington’s birthday and Lincoln’s birthday were object lessons for school children.

Today it’s the adults who are reflecting deeply on what the presidency means.

Even though we have a relatively new occupant of the Oval Office – b especially divisive ca examples of Washing and Lincoln are essen understanding what places the American presidency apart from so many other countries.

The men including Washington who crafted our system of government understo and explicitly dealt with concerns presidents could too important. It inevitable the top elected job in a great nation becomes the focus for blame and credit. But in the U.S. system of government, the president is a public employee, not the personification of the nation, as was the case in the European monarchy we left behind. The presidency is important but our nation is infinitely more important.

The historian Garry Wills in his book “Cincinnatus” points out that Washington was at his greatest when he gave up power. He did that in resigning his military commission before becoming president.

Washington did it again when he chose not to run for a third term as president. In retiring, he recognized something that is basic to our nation – that presidential power must be peacefully transferred from one president to the next. Historians have noted that until that occurred – until Washington handed it to John Adams – the promise of the Constitution was not fulfilled.

Former Oregon Sen. Mark Hatfield was also a Lincoln scholar. Hatfield noted that Lincoln’s ultimate quality was pragmatism and mercy.

Wrote Hatfield: “Lincoln did not feel that he chose his place in history, but rather that history had chosen him. Clearly no other individual could have brought so much good out of the seemingly infinite seas of madness and blood with which he was forced to deal.”

Added Hatfield: “The true essence of Abraham Lincoln was his ability to lead without sacrificing compassion.”



WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

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P.O. Box 338 • Enterprise, OR 97828
Office: 209 NW First St., Enterprise, Ore.
Phone: 541-426-4567 • Fax: 541-426-3921

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MEMBER OREGON NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

PUBLISHER: Marissa Williams, marissa@bmeagle.com
EDITOR: Steve Forrester, editor@wallowa.com
REPORTER: Stephen Tool, stool@wallowa.com
REPORTER: Kathleen Ellyn, kellyn@wallowa.com
NEWSROOM ASSISTANT: editor@wallowa.com
AD SALES CONSULTANT: Jennifer Powell, jpowell@wallowa.com
OFFICE MANAGER: Cheryl Jenkins, cjenkins@wallowa.com

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Brady is out of the mud and at the pinnacle

Some readers might recall that back in 2015, this unabashed New England Patriots fan wrote a spirited defense of my favorite football team, in the wake of the “Deflategate” accusations against them. What stung the most for many of us in “Patriots Nation” was seeing Tom Brady’s name dragged through the mud by a league office and a commissioner who seemed so determined to stand by their own bungled investigation and unquestionable authority that they were willing to unfairly tarnish the best team of this era and the greatest quarterback of all time.

I will not use this space to relitigate my case against the Deflategate fiasco, because in the two years since that notorious AFC Championship game, Tom Brady and the Patriots have made the best refutation possible, right on the football field. Brady and his teammates have racked up two additional Super Bowl championships since that time, thereby making an additional mockery of the ill-founded accusations of “unfair competitive advantage” they were allegedly gaining by nefarious means.

Some athletes perform best when they have a chip on their shoulder. Tom Brady’s pro career began with that chip when he fell to the sixth round in the 2000 season NFL draft. He spent his first year in the NFL as a backup to Drew Bledsoe, and he completed one pass in three attempts for a grand total of six yards in his rookie season.



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
John McColgan

But like the driven student of the game that he has always been, and like his coach, Bill Belichick, has always preached, Brady “did his job,” and was ready in 2001 when Bledsoe was injured and Brady was called on to be the “Next Man Up.” Since he took over as starting quarterback in 2001, Brady has led his team in 15 seasons (he missed nearly the entire 2008 season because of a devastating knee injury in the opening game), and he has brought the Patriots to the playoffs 14 times and has earned 13 division championships. And while some of Brady’s overall passing statistics, such as touchdowns, yards gained, completion percentage, or QB Rating, might be slightly lower than a few other elite quarterbacks, Brady’s regular season wins already surpass those of every other quarterback who has ever played; and at age 39, Brady shows no sign of falling off.

Some sports fans might argue that Terry Bradshaw or Joe Montana deserve more credit than Brady because they are each 4-0 in their respective Super Bowl careers. I would counter that both in Super Bowls and in overall playoff performance, Brady now leaves

all other quarterbacks in the dust.

Brady has led the Patriots to 11 AFC Championship games and has won 7 of those games. In his 7 Super Bowls, he has now earned 5 victories. And even in the two Super Bowls that he narrowly lost to the Giants, Brady led fourth quarter comebacks that put the Patriots ahead with less than three minutes remaining in the game. Unless you expect him to also play defense, or to simultaneously pass and catch the ball, there is only so much one player can do to bring his team to victory.

Brady’s playoff record now stands at 25-9. Montana’s record of 16-7 is the next best, but it falls short of Brady’s both in overall wins and in winning percentage. And now after leading the Patriots from a 28-3 deficit with less than three minutes remaining in the third quarter to an astonishing 34-28 overtime victory over the Falcons in this year’s Super Bowl, Brady can add to his legacy the indisputable claim of the greatest Super Bowl comeback of all time.

Tom Brady won some vindication with that comeback, but he also cemented his case for the distinction of the Greatest Quarterback of All Time by being the only one ever to have earned Five Super Bowl rings. From here on out, the rest of his career will just increase the gap between his accomplishments and everyone else’s.

John McColgan is a native Bostonian and a proud Patriots fan who writes from his home in Joseph.