

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

CELEBRATION AND REMEMBRANCE

In Wallowa County, late May is a time of celebration and remembrance. Celebration as our youth graduate and move forward toward fulfilling lives. Remembrance of those who gave their lives so that these young people could fulfill their dreams. Though they may seem unrelated, the two are intimately intertwined.

We all know that without the freedom to choose our individual paths — the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness that Jefferson enshrined in the Declaration of Independence — our nation would be impoverished in spirit and innovation. Education is a major stepping-stone along this path.

Our June graduates are well on their way toward applying those three unalienable rights to a successful and productive future. Some will go on to college and perhaps graduate school. Others will hone their skills in less academic settings. Some will become doctors, nurses, computer coders, lawyers, veterinarians, and some will start businesses. Some will enter the armed services. Some will become skilled mechanics, firefighters, artists, pilots, or heavy equipment operators. Some will construct our fences, barns,



houses and buildings.

We should be proud of each and every student, each and every graduate. They are on their way to a bright future of their own choosing, and one that America's Founding Fathers sought to guarantee. We hope that they will stay here and continue to build our community. Or if not, that they will one day return.

But without the sacrifice of those we remember on Memorial Day, none of this would be possible. Memorial Day is an occasion that rose from our grass-roots tributes to soldiers who died in the Civil War. In the late years of the war, and after its end, Americans began spontaneously holding springtime services in towns and cemeteries across the nation to remember

those who gave their lives for their cause. In 1971, Memorial Day — the last Monday of May — became an official U.S. holiday. Waterloo, New York has been recognized as the official place of origin. Their remembrance was first held as an official community-wide event on May 5, 1866, with businesses closed and services at local cemeteries.

This year, the Eagle Cap VFW Post 4307 and Wallowa Lake American Legion Post 157 will hold services at Wallowa County cemeteries, culminating in a 1 p.m. service at the County Courthouse that will remember 29 men and women who have served and who passed away this year, including military, EMT, and firefighters. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to them. We should all pause and pay them tribute, as well as to the many living veterans who have had their lives forever changed by their service.

Without the sacrifice of these men and women throughout our history, our graduates would not have the bright futures and the paths to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that Americans are assured today. Celebration and Remembrance. It's a time for both.

Notes on our current political standoff

Sometimes it's helpful to take a few steps back in order to get a better perspective on what is happening around you right now.

If you turn the clock back about 30 years, you might recall that Reagan's presidency was marred by the Iran-Contra scandal, while George H.W. Bush's one term as president began as the world celebrated the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. What you might not recall from that period is that a couple of years into his presidency, Bush acted on the advice of his deputy Attorney General William Barr and pardoned several former Reagan administration officials for their role in the illegal arms deal, effectively ensuring that Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger would not testify that the former vice president had not really been "out of the loop," as Bush had claimed, regarding that violation of law. Barr was later rewarded for his loyalty and expeditious handling of the matter by being promoted to Attorney General, where he served until Bill Clinton was elected in 1992.

Meanwhile in the former Soviet Union, new countries were forming, previously held state assets were being gobbled up by high-ranking officials, oligarchs were consolidating vast wealth, and an economy and government that resembled an organized crime syndicate was filling the newly created economic and political void. Foremost in the scramble for power was Vladimir Putin, the former head of the Soviet spy agency, who knew how to use his inside connections and secret dirt to leverage power for his own personal and political gain.

At the same time in the United States, according to recent revelations from tax returns over more than a decade during this period, a flamboyant New York businessman named Donald Trump was losing more than a billion dollars in a variety of failed ventures including casinos, hotels, an airline, and a football league, and paying virtually no taxes during that time. In fact, the estimate of a billion in losses might have been conservative, because according to a story told by Trump's daughter Ivanka, her father once pointed to a homeless panhandler and said casually, "That guy is worth about

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan



eight billion dollars more than I am."

Fortunately — though perhaps not coincidentally for Trump — toward the end of the nineties, when Trump's real estate ventures were about all he had left and when he could not get a conventional loan from U.S. banks, along came a former Soviet official and another Russian investor who called themselves the Bayrock Group, and they began shifting Trump's focus from real estate development to selling his worldwide "brand." Within a few years, Deutsche Bank, which was now doing more business with Russian and eastern European investors, were willing to back some of Trump's real estate developments, and by 2008, Donald Trump Jr. reported that "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets." One example was a property in Florida that Trump Sr. was able to sell to a Russian investor for \$95 million during the depths of the housing collapse, apparently only for the odd purpose of allowing that oligarch to tear down the buildings and sell the land for a mere \$35 million.

By 2015, Trump was boasting in that Russia, he had met with "the top level people, both oligarchs and generals, and top of the government people. I can't go further than that," he continued mysteriously, before adding, "and the relationship was extraordinary."

What Trump labeled as "extraordinary" is probably true in the literal sense of the term, but others have found Trump's "relationship" with the Russians to be peculiar and highly suspicious. So much so that in July of 2016, the FBI began to investigate whether Trump or members of his presidential campaign might be conspiring with Russians to influence the campaign and the election. Following revelations about that investigation in early 2017, Trump fired his FBI Director James Comey, but in order to quell the uproar that followed, a special investigation was

authorized into Russian meddling, headed by Robert Mueller, another former FBI Director who was deeply respected by politicians on both sides of the aisle.

About a year into Mueller's investigation, in June 2018, along came a 20-page letter from the former Attorney General William Barr to President Trump, in which the then-civilian Barr complained about the entire nature, scope, and alleged unfairness of the special counsel's investigation. Trump obviously relished Barr's criticism, and he rewarded Barr for his views by choosing him in 2019 to replace Jeff Sessions as the new Attorney General.

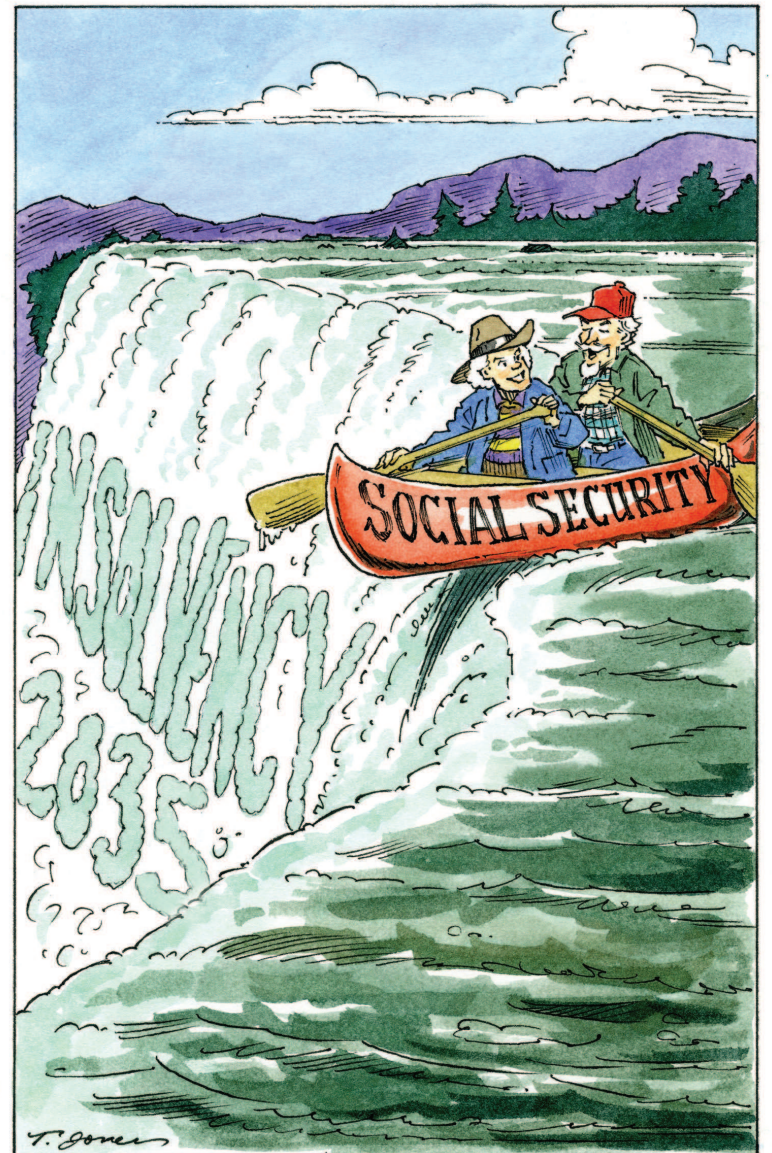
So it really should have come as no surprise to people who have followed Barr's career that now Barr has tried to condense the 448 page Mueller Report into a four page letter that aims to exonerate the president of all wrongdoing, even though Mueller himself did not do that in his actual report. Meanwhile a newly elected Democratic House is exercising their Constitutional powers by conducting their own investigations into Trump's finances, and his connections with the Russians during the campaign and during his administration.

In response, Barr seems to be acting more as Trump's personal attorney rather than as the Attorney General of the United States. In the absence of Michael Cohen, Trump's former "fixer" who has now been convicted on several charges, Barr has stepped in to try to "fix" the president's troubles by arguing that Congress has no power to investigate or prosecute a sitting president, and that the courts might not have such power either. Suffice to say that the chairs of the House Committees on Financial Services, Intelligence, Judiciary, and Oversight and Reform all disagree, as does the House Speaker.

Barr recently taunted Mrs. Pelosi, asking if she had brought her handcuffs for him. But what she has brought are contempt charges that have been approved in committee and will likely soon be brought against Barr before the entire House.

Stay tuned for further developments.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph



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WHERE TO WRITE

Washington, D.C.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D — 516 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244. E-mail: wayne_kinney@wyden.senate.gov Web site: http://wyden.senate.gov Fax: 202-228-2717.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D — 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. E-mail: senator@merkley.senate.gov. Fax: 202-228-3997.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R (Second District) — 1404 Longworth Building, Washington D.C. 20515. Phone: 202-225-6730. No direct e-mail because of spam. Web site: www.walden.house.gov Fax: 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 North Central, Suite 112, Medford, OR 97501. Phone: 541-776-4646. Fax: 541-779-0204.

Pending Bills

For information on bills in Congress — Phone: 202-225-1772.

Salem

Gov. Kate Brown, D — 160 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-4582. Fax: 503-378-8970. Web site: www.governor.state.or.us/governor.html.

Oregon Legislature — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Web site: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).

State Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove (District 58) — Room H-384, State Capitol, 900 Court St. N.E., Salem OR 97301. Phone: 503-986-1458. E-mail: rep.gregbarreto@state.or.us. Web site: http://www.oregonlegislature.gov/barreto

State Sen. Bill Hansell, R (District 29) — Room S-423, State Capitol, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1729. E-mail: Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us. Web site: www.oregonlegislature.gov/hansell.

WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

VOLUME 134

USPS No. 665-100

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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Wallowa County's Newspaper Since 1884

MEMBER OREGON NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Published every Wednesday by: EO Media Group

General manager, Jennifer Cooney, jcooney@wallowa.com
Interim Editor, Ellen Morris Bishop, editor@wallowa.com
Publisher, Chris Rush, crush@eomediagroup.com
Reporter, Stephen Tool, steve@wallowa.com
Reporter, Ellen Morris Bishop, ebishop@wallowa.com
Administrative Assistant, Amber Mock, amock@wallowa.com
Advertising Assistant, Cheryl Jenkins, cjenkins@wallowa.com

Periodical Postage Paid at Enterprise and additional mailing offices

Subscription rates (includes online access)	1 Year
Wallowa County	\$45.00
Out-of-County	\$57.00

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

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