

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Loophole in public records law

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Lynne Saxton, the former head of the Oregon Health Authority, resigned suddenly in 2017 after news of a plan to tarnish the reputation of a Portland health care provider became public.

Not surprisingly, the provider, FamilyCare Inc., sued the OHA. Saxton was deposed as part of the proceedings and admitted she had routinely destroyed text messages on her state-issued telephone.

That's a problem, and not one limited to Saxton or the OHA, according to state Archivist Mary Beth Herkert.

But, Herkert adds, Saxon's actions are only a tiny part of a statewide public records problem. Oregon and its various political subdivisions have mountains of public records, both paper and electronic. They're poorly managed.

Herkert says think of the worst house you've ever seen on the television show "Hoarders, Buried Alive."

For one thing, she says, most folks don't understand that providers of cloud services and other storage systems don't necessarily treat records the way they must be treated under Oregon law. Thus, when your space fills up, out go the old items to make way for new ones. As for text messages, telephone companies don't save them, Herkert says. They may have records of when and to whom texts were sent, but that's it. Once you delete texts from your telephone, Herkert says, they're gone for good. Texts, like written letters, are subject to the state's public records law.

Herkert, who for 30 years has been charged with storing and maintaining Oregon's public records, is on something of a mission these days. She wants state agencies, cities, counties, even cemetery districts, to understand what the problem is and what they can do to address it. The first step, she says is learning that it isn't really a storage issue so much as an electronic records management one, and there are ways to handle that.

In fact, Oregon has a statewide system for doing just that, and it's available to all government agencies. They should take advantage of it.



Millennials and education reform

Millennials, whose children are now school age, are projected to surpass Baby Boomers as the largest voting bloc next year. That means this key generation of voices holds a unique position to provide insight into the health of our public school system, suggest new ways to improve our schools and advocate for the future of black and brown children — too many of whom still lack access to a quality education.

A recent survey by The University of Chicago's GenForward Survey Project, which focuses on the effects of race and ethnicity on perception and experience, found more than 70 percent of millennials believe that students with less economic resources get a worse education than those from wealthy backgrounds. Forty percent of the nearly 2,000 respondents believe that living in a low-income environment will always impact student educational outcomes, and majorities of millennials believe that public schools aren't adequately preparing children for success in the future.

In the same study, millennials across racial lines also discussed the need for more support for our schools, with white millennials identifying increased school funding and teachers' pay as being among the top ways to improve public education in their local school districts out of 14 choices that ranged from increasing school choice to more testing.

Although public education is primarily a state and local, rather than a federal, responsibility, the president and Congress have an important role

ELIJAH CUMMINGS

in funding the public education of economically disadvantaged students, through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and students with disabilities, through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.

Currently, annual federal education funding for Title I and IDEA is significant — just under \$16 billion and \$12 billion, respectively. However, these appropriations have not kept up with the rising cost of educating our students, nor with the legitimate needs of states, including Maryland, for a more robust and realistic federal partnership.

Discord between the president's administration and pro-education advocates in the Congress has prevented the federal government from adequately addressing this challenge. Those of us who want to expand federal funding have had to fight just to avoid significant cuts in federal education appropriations.

Letters to the editor

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As a result, our nation's schools are no longer the envy of the world, a reality that threatens our long-term national security.

There is a better approach, and our nation's millennials are showing us the way.

Our national security, economic viability and morality as a society all require that the next Congress act on a bipartisan basis to significantly expand federal education funding, especially for the most vulnerable of our children.

We can't afford to scale back or slow down our efforts to provide a high-quality education to all students — and we certainly don't have the time to allow partisanship or the news cycle to distract us from this goal.

We need local and state legislators who will fight for more education funding; school leaders who will craft policies to support all students regardless of socioeconomic status or background; teachers who will dedicate themselves to attacking the achievement gap; and federal lawmakers who will give our children's education more than rhetoric.

Republicans, Democrats and independents alike expect that when they send their children to community schools, they'll get the very best from teachers, administrators and district leadership. We owe this to every student — and to ourselves.

Congressman Elijah Cummings (Twitter: @RepCummings) represents Maryland's 7th Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives. He wrote this for the Baltimore Sun.

A century on, pondering the end of the Great War

A century ago the guns ceased to fire and the slaughter, the greatest slaughter mankind had ever inflicted on itself, ended.

At 11 o'clock on the morning of Nov. 11, 1918, soldiers for the first time in more than four years could stroll about the battered ground of France and Belgium without fearing that they would be riddled with machine gun bullets or atomized by an artillery shell or disemboweled by a bayonet thrust from a man whose language they did not speak.

At that moment, when the Great War ended — its combat phase, anyway — optimism replaced despair.

Though the stench of gunpowder and poison gas and rotting corpses would linger, there was a pervasive sense that humanity had reached a milestone, that the unprecedented, indeed the unfathomable, sacrifices since 1914 would yield the sweet fruit of lasting peace.

Today, of course, we know how wrong our forebears were, how misplaced their idealism.

We know that the Great War was not the "war to end all wars." Nor was it the war that "made the world safe for democracy."

Less than a generation later



JAYSON JACOBY

the conflict would swap its "great" status for a Roman numeral, as though it were merely the first episode in a film franchise destined to spawn a sequel of even more significance.

World War II would indeed eclipse its predecessor in every statistical sense. The fighting spread over more of the globe and cost billions more dollars and ended tens of millions more lives.

Yet Nov. 11, 1918, is no historical footnote. I would argue, in fact, that it is the fulcrum not only of the 20th century but of everything that has come after.

This is no revelation, to be sure.

Historians for decades have explored the link between the Great War and what we might call the modern world. The connections are so obvious, so undeniable, that it could hardly have been otherwise.

It requires no great leap of logic to believe that had the Great War

not happened — or, at any rate, had the conflict not been concluded with the Treaty of Versailles and its egregiously punitive treatment of Germany — then the Second World War would not have been fought.

If the victorious Allies, immediately upon the signing of the armistice, had ended the sea blockade that was literally starving Germany, had they made a more equitable settlement at Versailles, postwar Germany likely would not have seethed with quite the level of resentment over the next two decades.

This would have deprived Adolf Hitler — himself a soldier of the Great War — of the most important tool he used to bend to his will the most powerful nation in Europe and thus set off the cataclysm of 1939-45.

And if we can blame the Second World War solely, or even largely, on the First, then it follows that the 1914-18 war sowed too the poisonous seeds whose bloody harvest marked the rest of the century.

The Cold War, for instance, was among the defining events after 1945, and it is beyond dispute that the First World War is a proximate cause (though certainly not the only one) of the 1917 revolution that led

to formation of the Soviet Union and everything — the Berlin airlift, Korea, the Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam — that resulted from the long, strange conflict between Communism and capitalism.

Still and all, I find it implausible to believe that other epochal events — the splitting of the atom and the invention of atomic weapons, most notably — would not have happened if not for the Great War.

Certainly the exigencies of the Second World War accelerated that research, but the history of scientific discovery strongly argues against the notion that such a fundamental aspect of physics would not have happened regardless of warfare.

None of this is knowable, of course.

History entices us to engage in endless speculation about the correlation of events — this is perhaps its greatest attraction — but the world is far too complex to allow us the comfortable certainty of causation in every case.

Yet on this occasion, one century after the guns fell silent in Flanders fields and the other killing grounds, I find it irresistible to ponder what might have been.

In particular I wonder how things

might have turned out differently if the men who had suffered so terribly, who had seen so many of their fellow soldiers die in all sorts of horrific ways, had had some influence on the "statesmen" who drafted the terms at Versailles. It was the bellicosity of the latter which ensured that Germany would not be vanquished, as they believed, but would instead become an even more dangerous enemy, and one led not by professional soldiers such as Ludendorff but by a madman.

The men who fought for the Allies in the Great War made it clear in their memoirs that whatever hatred they had for the Germans was leavened by respect — respect not only for their foes' fighting ability but also the kinship of men who were caught in the same deadly maelstrom no matter which country's uniform they wore.

I'd like to believe that most of those men would have gladly given up the temporary and ersatz satisfaction of humbling the defeated Germans to avoid their sons having to face them again, in some cases across the same befouled fields.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.