

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Baseball can pay its own way

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

In 2003 major league baseball fans persuaded Oregon lawmakers to help finance a stadium worthy of the then Montreal Expos. In 2004, the Expos became the Washington Nationals, though the financing bill that was to help bring them to Oregon remained on the books.

Now a group of largely Portland-area lawmakers hopes to eliminate the financing law and leave major league baseball supporters to find another way to build a stadium. We hope the lawmakers are successful.

The law would allow the state to put \$150 million toward a stadium, not all that much, at least by professional sports standards. It would allow the state to collect income taxes on money earned by baseball players and their wives and set them aside to help finance a stadium. The tax would be collected on both home and visiting team salaries over 30 years and used in much the same way cities use tax increment financing to build low-income housing and pay for it with taxes collected over time. The law limits the state's collections to \$150 million, which in 2003 was expected to cover half the cost of the stadium.

It didn't make sense then and it doesn't make sense now.

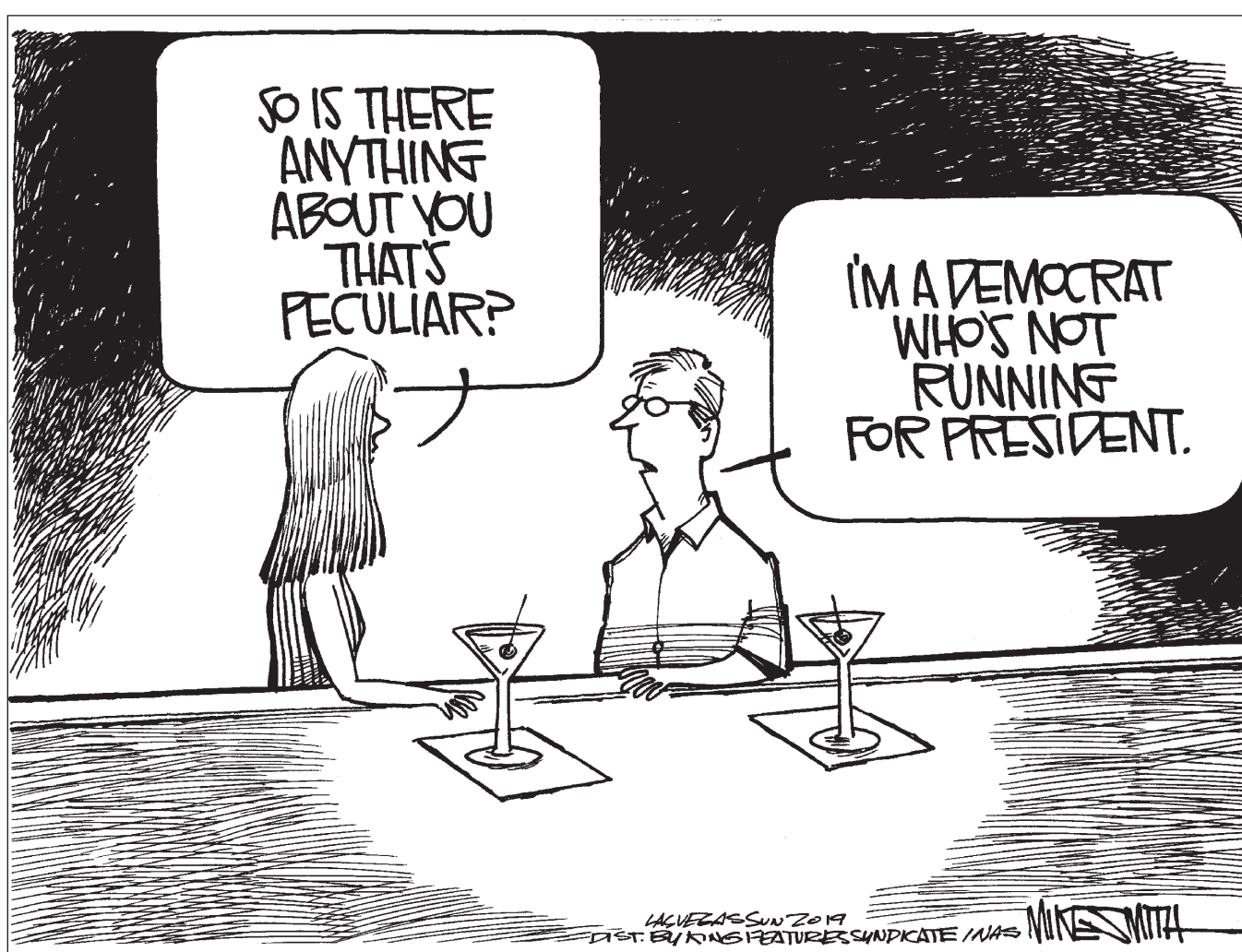
Major league baseball may be the greatest thing since sliced bread, but the idea that the state should set aside some of its tax revenue to bring it here makes no sense anytime. It makes even less sense as lawmakers work to find ways to increase revenues — taxes — to spend on public employee retirement, schools and a host of other worthy causes.

State Sen. Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, is a lead sponsor of the repeal bill, just as she was of the bill that created the tax plan in the first place. She was wrong then; she's right today. She knows Oregon has no business picking up part of the tab for a baseball stadium.

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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Your views

OTEC should provide power, not political patronage

Oregon Trail Electric Consumer Cooperative (OTEC) is a nonprofit corporate utility incorporated in the state of Oregon as a consumer cooperative. Its purpose, as stated in the articles of incorporation, is to be a cooperative electric utility providing the essential public service of helping its members to have access to the electrical energy that is so necessary to their lives.

The purposes of the cooperative are stated specifically in the Articles of Incorporation:

1. To benefit primarily residential and small farm consumers of electric energy.
2. To generate, manufacture, purchase, acquire and accumulate electric energy for its members only and to transmit, distribute, furnish, sell and dispose of such electric energy to its members only,

and to construct, purchase, lease as lessee and in any manner acquire, own, hold, maintain, operate, sell, dispose of, lease as lessor, exchange and mortgage plants, buildings, works, machinery, supplies, apparatus, equipment and electric transmission and distribution lines or systems, necessary, convenient or appropriate to accomplish any or all of the purposes of the cooperative . . .

5. To assist its members to wire their premises and install therein electrical and plumbing appliances, fixtures, machinery, supplies, apparatus and equipment of any and all kinds and character, and, in connection therewith and for such purposes, to purchase, acquire, lease, sell, distribute, install and repair electrical and plumbing appliances, fixtures, machinery, supplies, apparatus and equipment of any and all kinds and character. . .

Please notice that there is no reference to a philanthropic or charitable purpose that is unrelated to providing essential electrical energy to members. OTEC was formed to provide its members with the benefits of electrical energy, not to become a philanthropic foundation serving the special interests of nine directors. Charitable foundations adequately fulfill that function. When OTEC takes the membership's money to give to individuals for purposes which are unrelated to the provision of essential electrical energy, such as monetary awards or trips to Washington, D.C., it begins to look more like political patronage, wherein favors are given in return for political support.

For more information about OTEC see <https://bakercityyorg.blogspot.com/>.

Christopher Christie
Baker City

Shutdown breeding cynicism

The U.S. Senate voted late Thursday to grant back pay for furloughed federal workers, which is usually what happens when the government shuts down. It's a benevolent and fair thing to do — 800,000 employees forced off the job or having to work without pay because of a political fray shouldn't go without income through no fault of their own.

It's sad that granting back pay for lost hours is so routine for federal workers that it has become a custom. But that tradition should frost taxpayers who foot the bill for tens of millions of work hours in which no work was done.

President Donald Trump reportedly has promised legislators he'd sign the measure, though it has yet to come to a vote in the House. So if it does come to pass as expected, at least federal workers victim to the shutdown won't suffer so much financially.

But the uncertainty and the financial stress is taking a toll, particularly in agencies where morale is already low. The union for the Transportation Security Agency says some of its members —

SCOTT MARTELLE

who are considered essential personnel and must stay on the job through the shutdown — have or are planning to quit rather than be forced to work without pay. Ditto for the air traffic controllers. And two other unions representing a wide range of federal workers, including Customs and Border Protection officers, have filed lawsuits against the government over the practice.

That shouldn't surprise. This is the third shutdown in a year for federal workers (albeit one of them lasted only a few hours) and it's understandable that the stress from such uncertainty and employer dysfunction would have folks looking for the exit.

In an economy in which four out of five workers live paycheck to paycheck, granting back pay is the right thing to do for furloughed workers. But it's not just federal employees who are caught in the political crossfire; in what has be-

come another tradition, federal contractors lose business during the shutdown and don't get paid.

So not only does the country not get the work for which it will be paying furloughed employees, private-sector contractors that the government has increasingly come to rely on take the shutdown in the wallet, with some small operators saying they are being forced to lay off workers and fear for the future of their businesses.

Meanwhile, most congressional Republicans — who can usually be counted on to look out for the health of American businesses — continue to stand with Trump over his demand for a wasteful and ineffective border wall that most Americans don't want, while the government services they do want (and pay for) are circumscribed.

No wonder Americans are so cynical about Washington.

Scott Martelle is a columnist for The Los Angeles Times.

GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from The Chicago Tribune:

One hot day in August 2003, much of the northeastern United States and the Canadian province of Ontario suffered the biggest blackout North America has ever seen. A sudden power surge crippled hundreds of power plants and knocked out service to some 50 million people — darkening homes and businesses, halting trains and subway cars, snarling airline service and trapping people in elevators. Most of the affected places didn't get the lights back on for two days.

It was a sobering lesson in the vulnerability of modern communications networks and electrical grids, which are crucial to modern life. This blackout was an accident, traced to a computer problem. But the next one might be a deliberate act by a foreign adversary.

Americans have long experience worrying about airline hijackings, truck bombs and mass shootings by terrorists. The Russian hacking of Democratic National Committee networks and use of social media to influence the 2016 presidential election is well-known. The broader danger of the power grid being sabotaged — causing our economy and society to grind to a halt — is easy to forget.

It's not just a speculative worry. It's a real-life possibility that Russian hackers have already explored — with disturbing success.

Last year, the Trump administration called out a "multi-stage intrusion campaign by Russian government cyber actors" in which "they staged malware, conducted spear phishing, and gained remote access into energy sector networks."

The hackers managed to compromise util-

ity control rooms. Similar efforts, believed to be the work of Russians, caused a major blackout in Ukraine in 2015.

In the U.S. case, The Wall Street Journal recently reported, the culprits used a variety of common tactics: "The hackers planted malware on sites of online publications frequently read by utility engineers. They sent out fake resumes with tainted attachments, pretending to be job seekers. Once they had computer-network credentials, they slipped through portal used by utility technicians, in some cases getting into computer systems that monitor and control electricity flows."

One cybersecurity firm said the attack breached systems at some two dozen utilities. But the government admits it doesn't know how many companies were penetrated. More alarming, some of the hackers may still have access to such systems, waiting

patiently for the right moment to strike.

The danger has been apparent for some time, but our leaders have not impressed on the public the urgency of the challenge. A recent draft report of the President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee said it is "one the United States simply must enduringly address as a matter of national strategic imperative." The panel urged a major effort, akin to the 1960s effort to land astronauts on the moon, to "make the internet safe and secure for the functioning of government and critical services for the American people by 2028."

What has emerged about the 2017 intrusion gives new weight to that recommendation. Americans are exposed to hostile hackers with alarming capabilities. There is no time to waste in building defenses to foil them.