

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Progress on sage grouse

The sage grouse's status as a newsmaking bird, in Baker County and elsewhere in its range across several states in the arid inland West, has diminished somewhat since September 2015, when the federal government decided not to list the chicken-size species as threatened or endangered.

But that was not the final word.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is slated to review the sage grouse's status in 2020. And it's likely that groups that petitioned the federal government to formally protect the bird will continue to advocate for that.

This is relevant in Baker County, and not only because sage grouse live here.

Surveys over the past decade or so have shown that sage grouse are struggling in the county, their numbers having declined by about 70 percent.

(Baker County is on the northern fringes of Oregon's sage grouse range, and the county harbors less than 10 percent of the state's population of the bird.)

This means that if the federal government decides to list sage grouse, the local effect, in terms of potential restrictions on livestock grazing, off-road vehicle travel and other activities on both public and private land, could be substantial.

One possible way to offset those effects is to help sage grouse populations recover. Little wonder, then, that local officials working toward that end were ecstatic to learn last week that the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board had approved \$1.7 million — and possibly up to \$6.2 million over the next six years — for projects in Baker County designed to improve sage grouse habitat and deal with other threats to the bird.

The money, which local officials hope to use to leverage several million dollars more from federal sources, likely will yield the biggest dividends on private land. Baker County is unique in Oregon in that most of the county's identified sage grouse habitat — more than 70 percent — is on private property.

Moreover, some of the actions likely to benefit sage grouse — combating invasive weeds such as cheatgrass and medusahead, and removing water-thirsty juniper trees prominent among them — also would improve the condition of rangeland where most of Baker County's beef cattle graze during part of the year.

The Watershed Enhancement Board grant — from Oregon Lottery revenue — gives Baker County landowners, as well as officials with local, state and federal agencies who are part of the Baker Sage Grouse Local Implementation Team, a chance to accelerate the ongoing campaign to make the county's rangelands more resilient to drought and wildfire, while simultaneously helping sage grouse.

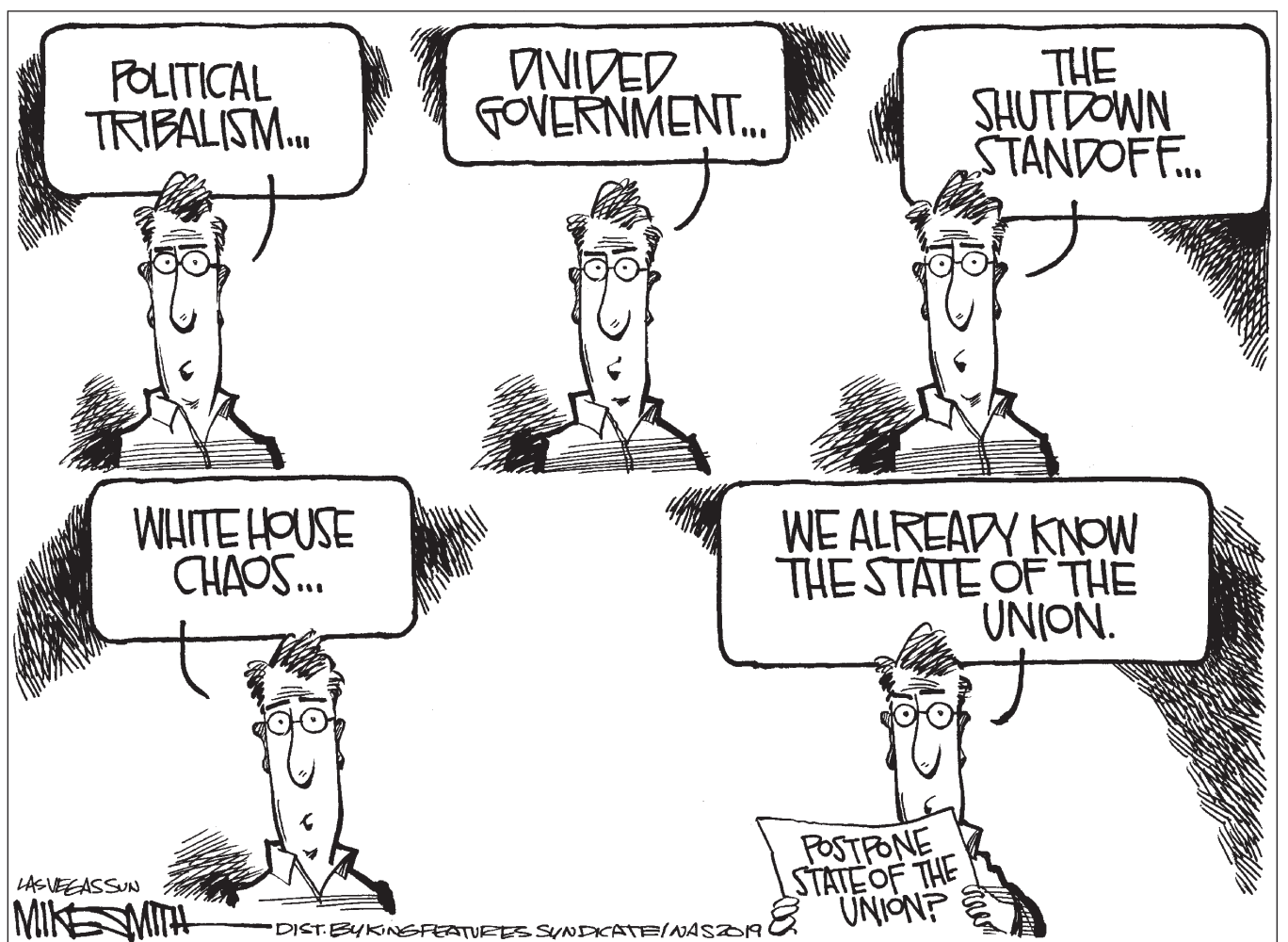
The concept of a "win-win" is a tired cliché, but in the case of this newly invigorated project, it happens to be an apt description.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

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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State of the union: Why bother?

At least one source characterized Speaker Nancy Pelosi's disinclination to President Donald Trump to deliver the State of the Union Address in the House chamber as "political theater."

Maybe. Or we could just call it "hardball." Pelosi was applying legitimately held power in pursuit of a policy goal. In this case, the goal was reopening the government and withholding \$5.7 billion toward a wall that, Democrats believe, would serve little purpose beyond helping Trump fulfill an impulsive, ill-advised campaign promise to the minority of Americans who think the wall is a good idea.

Whether hardball or theater, Pelosi had legitimate reasons for disinclining the president. I'm not sure how much the security of the address would be compromised during a shutdown, but clearly it's not fair to ask people who are already working without pay to work even harder in order to support an event that is entirely unnecessary.

And why a speech? Throughout most of our history the constitutional requirement for a presidential report "from time to time" to Congress on the state of the union has been met in written form.

In fact, I suspect that our earliest presidents would have been appalled — perhaps disgusted — by the spectacle of the modern State of the Union address, in which both houses of Congress, the Supreme Court and the heads of the military assemble annually to inadvertently exalt and celebrate a single citizen whose main job is to execute the

JOHN M. CRISP

laws passed and vetted by the other two branches of government.

The pomp. The ceremony. The cheering. The extended standing ovations. Talk about political theater. George Washington would shake his head and wonder what has become of us.

As it happens, this would be a particularly good year to dispense with the SOTU address or to render the constitutionally required report in writing. All presidents assert that the state of the union is "strong." This year it's a bigger stretch than usual to call the SOTU strong, but we can be assured that Trump will do so, despite the fact that by the end of the month there is a decent chance that part of the government will still be shut down.

In fact, it wouldn't be hard to write Trump's speech for him. If he holds true to form, the SOTU will be the strongest it's ever been in our entire history, and he's likely to take credit for it. He will assert that the economy is booming and unemployment is low, especially among blacks and Hispanics.

He will argue that America is finally getting the respect it deserves in the world, that he has forced our NATO allies to meet their defense obligations, that we are winning the trade war with China and that North Korea is on the brink of denuclearization.

Trump is unlikely to mention,

however, climate change, which is the true national emergency. Nor will he mention the weakening of international institutions that have helped stabilize the world since World War II. Nor will he mention the increasing impunity enjoyed by autocratic, strong-man governments.

He's unlikely to mention the weakening of the American middle class, the retreat from our commitment to provide health care for all citizens or our deteriorating infrastructure. He will brag about his biggest accomplishment of the past two years, the tax cut for those at the top of the income scale, but he's unlikely to mention the \$1.5 trillion deficit induced by the cut.

In short, a Trump SOTU address would be predictable to the point of irrelevance. Much of what he would say would be deceptive or untrue, but the very setting in an august chamber of Congress before the assembled powers of our nation would tend to give his language a kind of credence that it doesn't deserve.

I suspect that there will be a speech; Trump probably won't be able to resist. Parts of the speech will be wrong, parts will be misleading and parts will blame other people. None of it is likely to enhance the state of our nation.

John M. Crisp, an op ed columnist for Tribune News Service, lives in Georgetown, Texas, and can be reached at jcrispcolumns@gmail.com.

Your views

Society is over-protecting its citizens

How did my grandparents do it? They survived the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression and World War II. All without counseling or therapy. They put their heads down and worked through life. Life is like that, sometimes conditions are beyond our control and to no fault of our own, bad things happen. Sometimes it's poor choices and there is none to blame except self.

I listen to all the bad things happening to people on the news. I hear "grief counseling is available" to those in need.

We are creating a generation of "those in need." We've convinced them they need counseling and everything has a label so you can medicate it. We do a grave disservice to those who need to lean into life. Sometimes counseling is needed in tragic events, I get that.

Parents seem to coddle their kids from every aspect of life and no wonder no one wants to leave home even into their 20s or 30s. The nest is always safer than real life. But what a rude awakening they receive when they try to fly on their own.

Sometimes I think it's best to let

them figure it out and struggle a bit. It builds the character like those who really did struggle with real problems mentioned above. It molds them into solid citizens. Ones who don't shrink away from troubles or turn to prescription solutions. Our epidemic is not over-medicating, it's over protecting. Our hope is not in meds, booze, pot or mankind, our hope is in God. That other stuff is merely a distraction from life, not a solution.

My humble opinion.

Thomas Wilcoxson
Baker City

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Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Mike Downing, Loran Joseph, Randy Schiewe, Lynette Perry, Arvid Andersen, Ken Gross and Doni Bruland.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Dustin Newman, police chief; John Clark, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Jeff Smith, roadmaster; Matt Shircliff, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Cindy Carpenter, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.