

OUR VIEW

Town halls are crucial

As we have written before on this page and in this space, town hall sessions held by elected leaders are crucial for the health of democracy.

The subject is relevant because Rep. Greg Walden will swing through Morrow County this week for a town hall session in Heppner.

Walden, who is Oregon’s sole Republican federal lawmaker, will also visit Rufus, Arlington, Burns and Tygh Valley.

The sessions may seem mundane for most but they actually provide one of the best forums for voters to interact with their federal legislators.

Walden said he already has conducted 40 town halls in Oregon during the year and, most likely, he will do even more before the year comes to an end.

Walden, of course, isn’t alone. Lawmakers across the nation hold town hall sessions frequently, and Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley also spend a lot of time on the road. Wyden is especially proficient with holding town hall meetings, often in places — such as Eastern Oregon — where his political views stand in sharp contrast to the prevailing sentiments of the regions voters.

But political dogma isn’t the issue when lawmakers like Walden or Wyden swing into town. At least it shouldn’t be. That’s because at the end of the day, our elected leaders — whether Republican or Democrat — represent us all. Their goal should be — as it clearly is with Wyden and Walden — to listen to everyone about their concerns.

For area residents, the town halls are the perfect environment to interact with the men and women who make legislative decisions in Washington, D.C. Knowing what our elected leaders are doing — and why they are doing it — is a crucial pillar to our democracy.

While there is a lot of discussion and debate about important issues facing our nation, it is often so polarized that understanding any of it can be a challenge.

That’s why town halls are a good thing. At a town hall meeting a voter can stand up and ask a question and receive an answer. Whether they like the answer is beside the point. The point is the people we have elected stand before us and give feedback and updates on what goals they seek to achieve.

Democracy can be a messy business, but it only functions if there is clear communication between the body politic and those chosen to represent it.

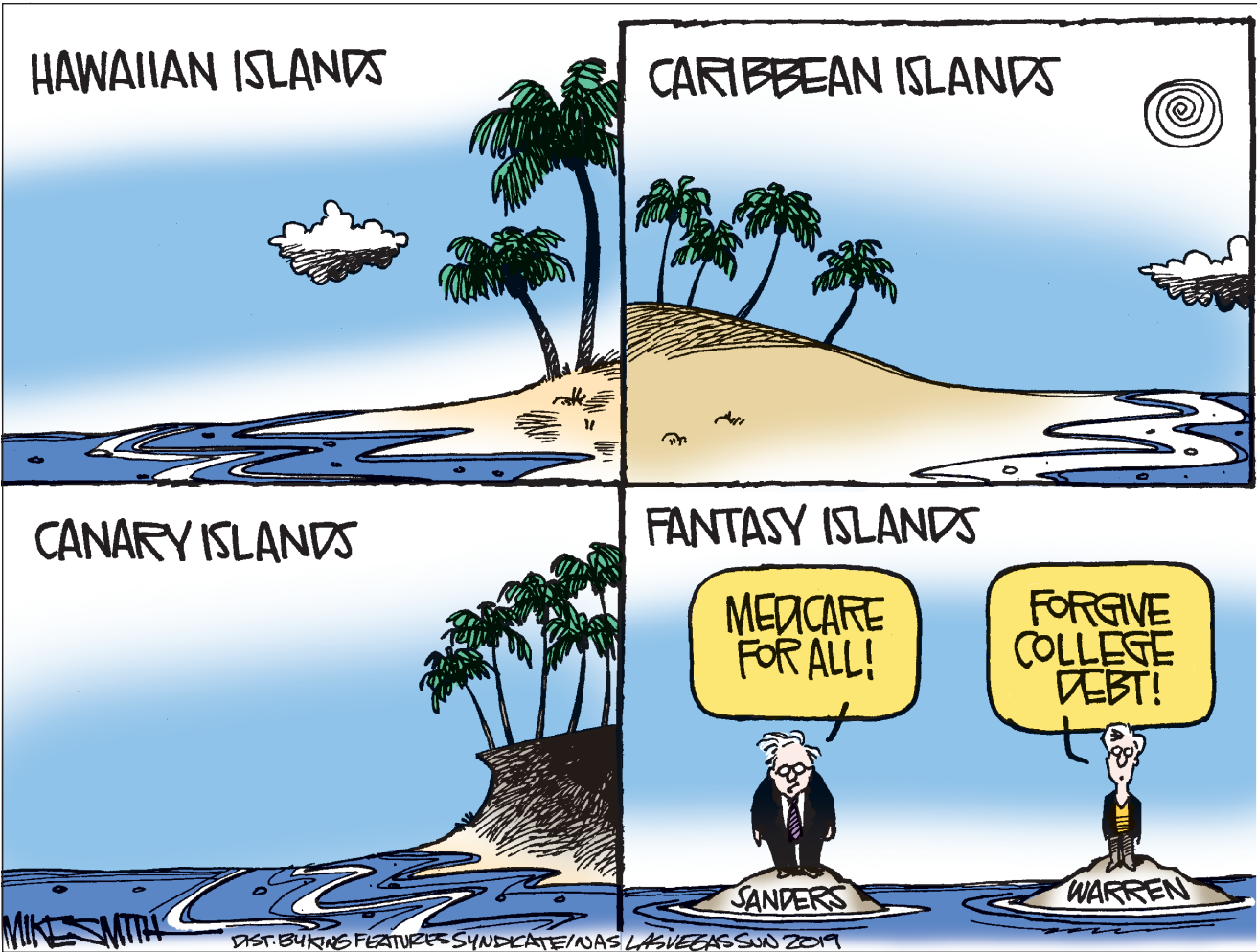
Practicing democracy shouldn’t be a hassle but an important element of day-to-day life. That means if you get the chance, you should take the opportunity to attend one.

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Letters to the editor

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Email: news@bakercityherald.com



Best games teach real life lessons

An old detail kept elbowing me, tugging at my sleeve like an annoying little kid, when President Donald Trump said he thought it might be a good idea to buy Greenland.

Then I went back to check on the map of the world as depicted by the classic board game “Risk”: Greenland is one of the golden-yellow territories in the game, as a much part of North America as Canada and Mexico.

Maybe Donald Trump was remembering this when he said he wanted to buy Greenland. But if that were the case, of course, he’d also consider buying Mexico as part of the same package deal. Not likely.

Or maybe Mr. Trump’s entire focus has always been on his own board game which, unsurprisingly, is called “Trump: The Game.” I’d never heard about it until Facebook friend Char Piacentino proved to me that she wasn’t making it up.

If you haven’t heard of it either, don’t worry.

First issued in 1989, “Trump: The Game” didn’t exactly enthrall the nation. A Dec. 30 L.A. Times article that year announced that Trump’s game was “among the retail sales bombs this holiday season,” along with a line of children’s clothing promoted by Pee-Wee Herman.

The winner of Trump’s game is the one who merely amasses the most money. The players start, naturally, with an inheritance. (Who doesn’t? I once asked my father about our inheritance, and he said, “Your brother gets the pots. You the pans.”) After that, it’s luck, not skill, that gets you ahead.

Ironically enough, although Trump’s



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game was reissued in 2004, it never was an earner: It sold fewer than half as many units as expected.

Hasbro stopped manufacturing it.

There’s another vintage board game I worry an American president might become too good at playing. It’s called “Go For Broke.” Its rule book, from 1965, now seems almost prescient: “Players receive one million dollars ... and race to be the first player to spend all of their money and go bankrupt. Players can risk money at the Racetrack, the Casino, play the Stock Market or make donations to charity.”

I wasn’t allowed to play the board game “Risk” when I was a kid, so what do I know about diplomacy, conflict and world conquest? It was the early 1960s, and my brother Hugo, six years my senior, played “Risk” with other cool kids, all of whom were boys.

Girls, perhaps unsurprisingly, were not encouraged to go anywhere near “Risk.”

While our brothers were strategizing about how to occupy continents and territories, whether to attack, move or pass, and how to build up their borders for more effective defense, their little sisters and I were busy learning skills that would become important to our lives as women. We practiced our own crucial rituals in games such as “Mystery Date,” in which we assembled “outfits,” then opened a door to reveal whether our outfits matched that of the potential

mate on the other side.

Talk about risk.

Or we learned how to be named “Miss Popularity” by becoming expert at buying dresses, getting autographs, preparing for picnics, and — even in 1961 — getting a silver credit card.

Boys had to slay their enemies to win; all the girls had to defeat were our friends.

But while the boys could form alliances, make treaties and dominate globally, girls used a miniature plastic phone to address the eternal questions of womanhood with nuanced replies such as “yes,” “no” or “busy.”

At what board game should the president of the United States be proficient? Should she play a mean game of “Mille Bornes,” or would that indicate too close an alliance with the European Union? Should he be unbeatable at “Scrabble”? Should she sizzle at “Chutes and Ladders”?

A world leader should be good at “Life” and learn the rules of “Sorry,” because all of them will face “Trouble” at some point. But they need to have a “Clue.”

The best games teach real lessons, and at the very heart of every game is the need to keep everyone engaged. To fold up a map of the world, throw the pieces onto the floor and walk away would be a real risk.

You wouldn’t want to do it for all the gold in Greenland.

Gina Barreca is a board of trustees distinguished professor of English literature at the University of Connecticut and the author of 10 books. She can be reached at www.ginabarreca.com.

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from The San Diego Union-Tribune:

President Donald Trump’s apparent view that Americans want a federal government that abandons humanitarian norms was once again on display last week with two more decisions about the treatment of detained unauthorized immigrants.

The first is the Trump administration’s attempt to nullify a 1997 court agreement, known as the Flores settlement, that put a 20-day limit on detaining minors in immigration detention centers and set standards for how such children are treated. The new rule would establish minimum standards

for conditions at the detention centers while allowing families to be detained indefinitely. It would take effect in late October if it survives expected court challenges and wins the approval of a federal judge.

Given the poor conditions at some detention centers, it’s hard to accept at face value the claim that this new rule would make the Trump administration do more to improve conditions. Instead, the rule appears to be a continuation of Trump administration efforts to discourage unauthorized immigrants and refugee seekers by treating them poorly.

The second decision got less attention but is similarly dubious and mean-

spirited. Officials with the Customs and Border Protection agency announced that migrant families being held in detention centers near the southern border won’t be given flu vaccines even though, as CBS News reported, three migrant children have died while in U.S. custody from the flu in the past 12 months. With the flu season expected to begin in October, people are likely to die as a result of this decision. Pediatrician Richard Pan, a Democratic state senator from Sacramento, rightly reacted by saying, “Denying basic preventive care to human beings in our country is contrary to American values.” That’s not politics. It’s decency.

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

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Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR

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Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

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

State Sen. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-301, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. District office: P.O. Box 1027, Ontario, OR 97914; 541-889-8866.

State Rep. Lynn Findley (R-Vale): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep. LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; 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; Ray Duman, 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 Shirtcliff, district attorney; Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

Baker School District: 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Andrew Bryan, Kevin Cassidy, Chris Hawkins, Katie Lamb and Julie Huntington.