

EDITORIAL

Keep Columbia's water in the Northwest

In the category of ideas that just won't die, the lingering proposal to divert water from the Columbia River to California and other Southwestern states continues to outlive its usefulness, seemingly rising out of the ashes like the Phoenix every few years.

The idea — or scheme — first surfaced more than 25 years ago and raised some eyebrows and triggered some laughs.

Divert water from the Columbia River to Southern California? Are you kidding?

Nope, they were not joking. Occasionally — such as in 2015 and again in 2019 — the idea will gain a little steam. Right on the heels of the California idea, another concept to divert water from the Columbia and Snake rivers to beef up Colorado River reservoirs cropped up.

On the surface these ideas just seem to be nonsense. For one, the cost to build some kind of pipeline from Oregon to California or Nevada would dwarf even the most pessimistic estimates. Then there are all the licenses and regulations that would crop up. Then, of course, would be lawsuits by conservation and environmental groups that would stop such an effort in its tracks.

So why does this idea continue to linger?

Because the Southwest — and much of the West — is locked in an epic drought, and while the drought could fade in the future, the water woes created by the climate won't disappear.

Now, areas of the Southwest and California and the Colorado River Basin are parched. That means big cities and small towns along with farmers and ranchers are all watching their most precious resource — water — evaporate.

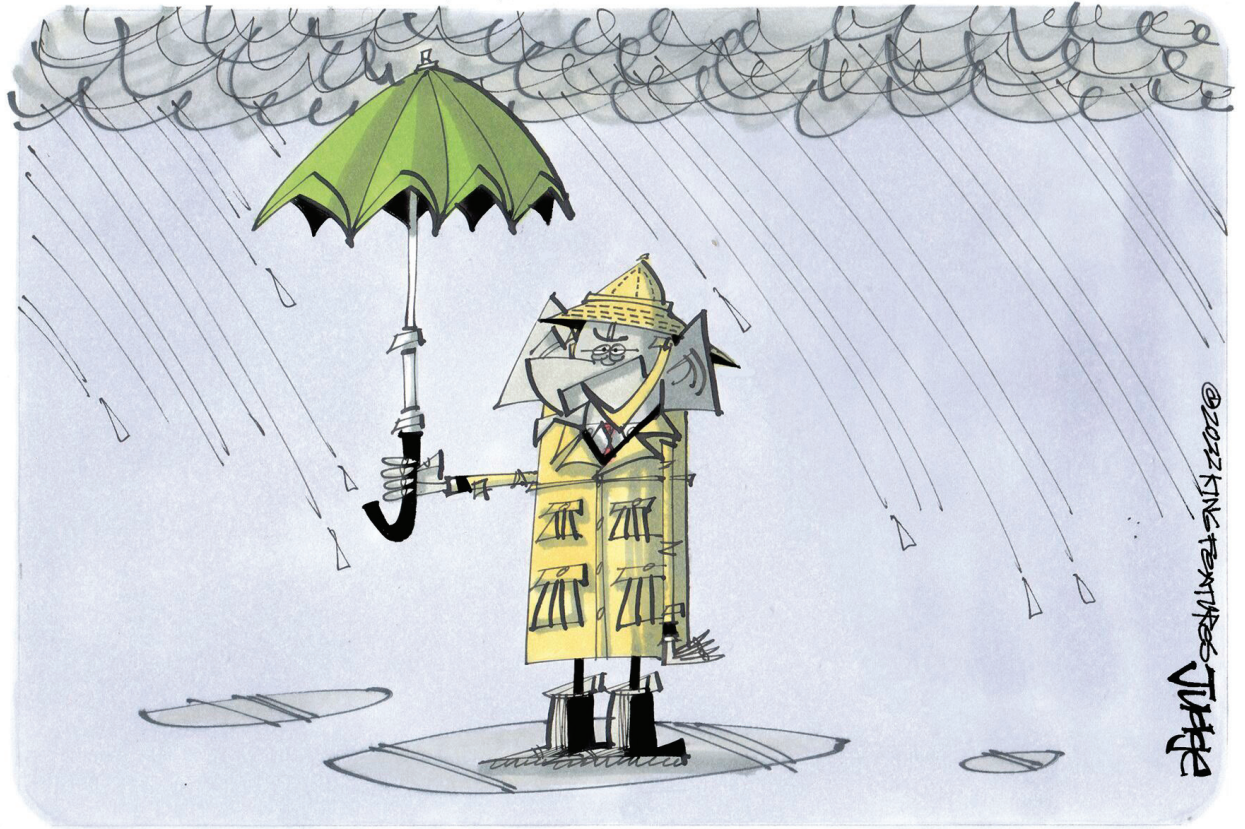
While those of us in the Pacific Northwest can shake our heads at the situation and be thankful it isn't our farm and ranches facing annihilation, the day may very well arrive when the issue of water availability becomes a hot topic in Congress.

At some point elected leaders and others in the Southwest, California and Nevada will face a series of very difficult choices to find water. That's when the bizarre ideas — like diverting water from the Columbia River — may start to look and sound a lot more palatable than they did a decade before.

That's why our own federal elected leaders must be vigilant regarding the future. The idea that seems absurd now may not seem that far-out when farmers and ranchers are going out of businesses because of drought and the capacity to serve a major metro area like Phoenix with water vanishes.

■ *Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.*

WHAT YOU SHOULD WEAR WHEN POLITICAL EXPERTS PREDICT A SUNNY DAY...



COLUMN

GOP problems run deeper than candidate quality

By DAVID A. HOPKINS

Is it Dr. Mehmet Oz's fault that the "red wave" expected by many Republicans didn't materialize on Election Day? Did the Pennsylvania Senate candidate violate the physician's Hippocratic Oath — "first, do no harm" — by inflicting severe damage to his own party's electoral fortunes?

You might think so, given the tenor of many post-election analyses. One of the main storylines of this year's campaign has depicted a dramatic tension between a fundamentally favorable national climate for the Republican Party on one hand, and on the other, a weak slate of individual nominees foisted on GOP leaders by misguided primary voters.

Oz, who was easy to view as a celebrity dilettante suddenly parachuting into politics — and the state of Pennsylvania — from elsewhere, became perhaps the most frequently cited example of Republicans' candidate recruitment problems. But fellow Senate nominees Herschel Walker of Georgia, Blake Masters of Arizona and Don Bolduc of New Hampshire, as well as gubernatorial candidates like Doug Mastriano in Pennsylvania and Tudor Dixon in Michigan, struck political analysts as flawed standard-bearers for the Republican Party.

While candidate shortcomings do appear to have affected the final results in several key races, Republicans' disappointing performance up and down the ballot can't be fully explained by the flaws of a few specific candidates. Instead, Republicans suffered from a blemished national image that hurt the party's nominees regardless of their political competence.

By historical standards, the most surprising

outcome of the 2022 elections was the unusually modest partisan swing in the House of Representatives. Elections for Senate and governor have traditionally been less predictable, but the president's partisan allies nearly always lose House seats — sometimes dozens — in the midterms. Since World War II, the movement toward the opposition party has averaged 26 seats and 7 points in the national popular vote. When the president's approval rating is below 50%, the expected shift is even greater.

While votes are still being counted, it's clear that House Democrats experienced a small fraction of the 40-seat loss that Republicans suffered in 2018, even though President Joe Biden, whose job approval rating is hovering around 41%, is slightly less popular today than Donald Trump (42%) was at the same point in his presidency.

Yet this asymmetry can't be fully explained by pointing to a poor set of Republican House candidates. A few of this year's nominees were controversial or scandal-ridden, but many others were thoroughly typical and unobjectionable politicians who nonetheless struggled to capture battleground districts.

Republicans also failed to establish a consistent advantage on what's known as the generic ballot, a standard polling question that asks voters simply if they plan to vote Democratic or Republican, or which party they prefer to control Congress, without mentioning candidate names. If there were a significant number of Americans who were generally inclined to support the Republicans but who balked when confronted with a specific unappealing candidate, we presumably would have observed a bigger advantage for the GOP on the generic ballot than in the actual voting results.

Instead, the final pre-election polls found a nationwide Republican advantage of 1 percentage point on the generic ballot while the national House popular vote is likely to favor Republicans by a slightly larger margin.

Republicans' inability to translate an unpopular Democratic president and unsettled economic climate into a clear electoral advantage suggests that the party was burdened by a tarnished national reputation.

Voters who expressed dissatisfaction with the condition of the nation under Democratic rule didn't necessarily believe that Republicans offered better solutions to their problems. It's very possible that the GOP's current emphasis on cultural populism left it with less credibility to address Americans' economic concerns. And the unpopular Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* not only energized an angry Democratic base but also worried moderate voters that Republicans would impose strict abortion bans if entrusted with power at the federal and state level.

Yes, Dr. Oz and his fellow untested neophytes weren't much help to their party this year. But it's easy to pin the unhappy outcome on individual scapegoats. Instead, they should be examining the deeper set of challenges that prevented the GOP from enjoying the out-party's usual midterm rebound.

Still, no disappointment is permanent in our highly competitive era. Both the country and the government remain closely divided — and the next campaign season is about to begin.

■ *David A. Hopkins is an associate professor of political science at Boston College and the author of "Red Fighting Blue: How Geography and Electoral Rules Polarize American Politics."*

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.

• Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

• The writer must 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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OTHER VIEWS

Give Elon Musk a chance to fix Twitter

Editorial from The Chicago Tribune:

About the only people happy with Elon Musk's first days at Twitter were the network's shareholders who saw their long moribund stock turn into hard cash at the rate of \$54.20 per share, a price that anyone paying attention knew was way more than they were actually worth.

Everyone else, it seemed, was up in arms, including most of the employees, many of whom were laid off, and a subset of the site's heaviest and most progressive users. Shonda Rhimes ("Not hanging around for whatever Elon has planned. Bye!") and Whoopi Goldberg ("I'm getting off today because I just feel like it's so messy") to name but two, exited the platform in theatrical fashion, as did Sara Bareilles and Toni Braxton.

In her announcement on "The View," Goldberg headed down a rabbit hole of absurd paradoxes.

"People keep saying it's free speech, but all speech is not free speech," she said. "Some speech is not OK free speech. So everybody has to agree on that, but if people keep saying, 'You hurt my free speech,' it's going to be a

problem."

We'll let you sort that one out. Suffice to say that some people only now believe in the speech they deem acceptable.

But let's be clear about a few things. Twitter was losing money and, for a public company, that's generally a problem. Even during the halcyon days for social media, otherwise known as the pandemic, Twitter did not see any kind of meaningful increase in shareholder value, certainly not as compared with other channels such as Facebook.

And on Nov. 9, even Facebook announced layoffs of some 11,000 workers; not as drastic a percentage as Twitter, for sure, but a larger number of lost tech jobs. The social networks ate the lunch of traditional media by being leaner and meaner, but in time, they became bloated, complacent and vulnerable to competition.

While his methods were far from ideal, Musk had no choice but to reduce expenses and/or find new revenue sources. And as all media companies well know, the two major categories available are advertising and subscriptions. Most end up

with some combination of the two with a preponderance of the latter. Twitter had been trying to make money only on the former, but that wasn't working.

So what other choice does Musk now have? Go nonprofit after shelling out \$44 billion?

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That would make him quite the philanthropist, but the guy is an entrepreneur.

Not discussed enough in all of the Twitter debate is the unstated conflict of interest involving media organizations screaming anti-Musk sentiments from their home pages.

In the early days of Twitter, traditional media companies generally saw the channel as a way of disseminating their content and finding new readers. But as companies like The New York Times have diversi-

fied from mere journalism into broader content creation, such as recipes, puzzles, movies, educational materials and paid podcasts, they've come to see the site as competition, taking away their paying audiences for such endeavors.

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For media bosses, Twitter has morphed into one massive headache. It sucks up the time of their journalists, who obsess over the peer validation to be found there, at the expense of the newspaper's own paying subscribers. Many a media career has ended, and many an apology has had to be written, over an ill-considered tweet flowing from the red-hot flames of anger or pique. And newsrooms have been roiled over countless ethical arguments over what staff journalists should or should not be allowed to say,

or opine about, under their personal Twitter handles.

Twitter also has been selling ads on the back of curating content created by these newsrooms without offering meaningful compensation, a situation that many media companies increasingly find intolerable.

Hence, companies, including the Times and The Washington Post, long ago concluded that Twitter was not so much a friendly, distributive network as good, old-fashioned unfair competition. They'd rather own their own Twitter-like channels and Insta-stomping all over Musk has been one way to exploit the weak underbelly of a blue bird whose wings they've long wanted to clip.

For all those reasons, we sympathize with Musk, a smart guy who has been castigated before he has done much at Twitter.

His ideals of a channel that respects all points of view equally may well prove to be naive in a country where one half defines much of the speech of the other half as various degrees of unacceptable. And since one person's opinion is another's misinformation, he'll likely end up

tying himself and his company in knots just trying to sort out contrary but legitimate points of view from actual, factual lies. That's not as clear a line as his detractors like to say.

Musk also will likely find that advertisers are not so fond of being next to certain kinds of speech. Some degree of ideological curation is, in our real world, inevitable. Musk is learning this lesson fast.

And we have one other suggestion for the tweeter in chief.

It was a mistake to blend the "blue check," a marker designed to help users trust someone else's identity and avoid malicious confusion, with the need for subscription revenue. We think Musk should keep the verification scheme separate and come up with a different subscription package incentive.

But more power to him for trying to minimize censorship and create a place where both sides of the great divide we are seeing so clearly in the results of the Nov. 8 election can at least have a brief conversation. And, given all the above difficulties, he deserves some time to figure out a plan.