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JESSICA KELLER
EDITOR
jkeller@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4533



MAEGAN MURRAY
REPORTER
mmurray@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4532



SEAN HART
REPORTER
smhart@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4534



SAM BARBEE
SPORTS REPORTER
sbarbee@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4542



JEANNE JEWETT
MULTI-MEDIA CONSULTANT
jjewett@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4531



KIM LA PLANT
OFFICE COORDINATOR
kplant@hermistonherald.com
541-564-4530

To contact the Hermiston Herald for news, advertising or subscription information:

- call 541-567-6457
- e-mail info@hermistonherald.com
- stop by our offices at 333 E. Main St.
- visit us online at: www.hermistonherald.com

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The course of events

So there I sat, several weeks ago, minding my own business, when out of the blue came a suggestion:

“I HAVE AN IDEA FOR YOU:”

Unfortunately, these ideas often involve auto detailing or pet grooming, but a columnist needs to know what people are thinking, so — not without a bit of trepidation — I asked what it was.

“YOU SHOULD WRITE SOMETHING ABOUT EAST OREGON:”

You mean “Eastern Oregon.”

“NO. EAST OREGON. THE STATE:”

I drew on over 20 years of legal experience to say, “Huh???”

It turned out, on further questioning, that the idea was inspired by “Tri-City legislators want Eastern Washington to secede from the state” (Tri-City Herald, Jan. 28, 2015). “House Bill 1818, co-sponsored by five Eastern Washington Republicans, including Larry Halder of Richland and Brad Klippert of Kennewick, would, if passed, create a task force to look at the impact of redrawing Washington’s boundary lines with one state east of the Cascade Mountains and one to the west.”

“REPLACE “WASHINGTON” WITH “OREGON.” DISCUSS:”

Other than having to elect Larry and Brad here, that’s easy. Government without the consent of the governed is tyranny. If the governed withdraw their consent because their leaders have become rulers, it’s 1776 all over again, though Czechoslovakia’s “Velvet Divorce” is infinitely preferable to the problems and collateral consequences of the Battle of The Dalles.

“EAST OREGON WOULD NOT HAVE AN ADEQUATE TAX BASE:”

I don’t see any reading of the Declaration of Independence to say about government, “. . . it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government but only so long as there is an adequate tax base.” Good government produces good economics, not the other way around. It doesn’t matter how adequate your tax base is if the money is frittered away on useless projects or corrupt activities that benefit only a politician’s district or cronies. Detroit used to have an awesome tax base — until more and more money went more to buying



THOMAS CREASING
OFF THE BENCH
Herald columnist

votes, at which point the tax base moved out.

“THINK OF THE SCHOOLS! EAST OREGON WOULD HAVE SCHOOLS LIKE WEST VIRGINIA!:

Well, presuming for argument’s sake that more money equals better schools — a topic for a different day, since that’s an easy 600-word essay all on its own — I went looking for statistics. In 2012, according to the Kids Count Data Center (which I selected because of the nifty sounding name), Oregon spent \$10,415 per pupil. West Virginia? \$13,227. Presuming you set store in that sort of thing, East Oregon would have a 25 percent increase in per-student spending.

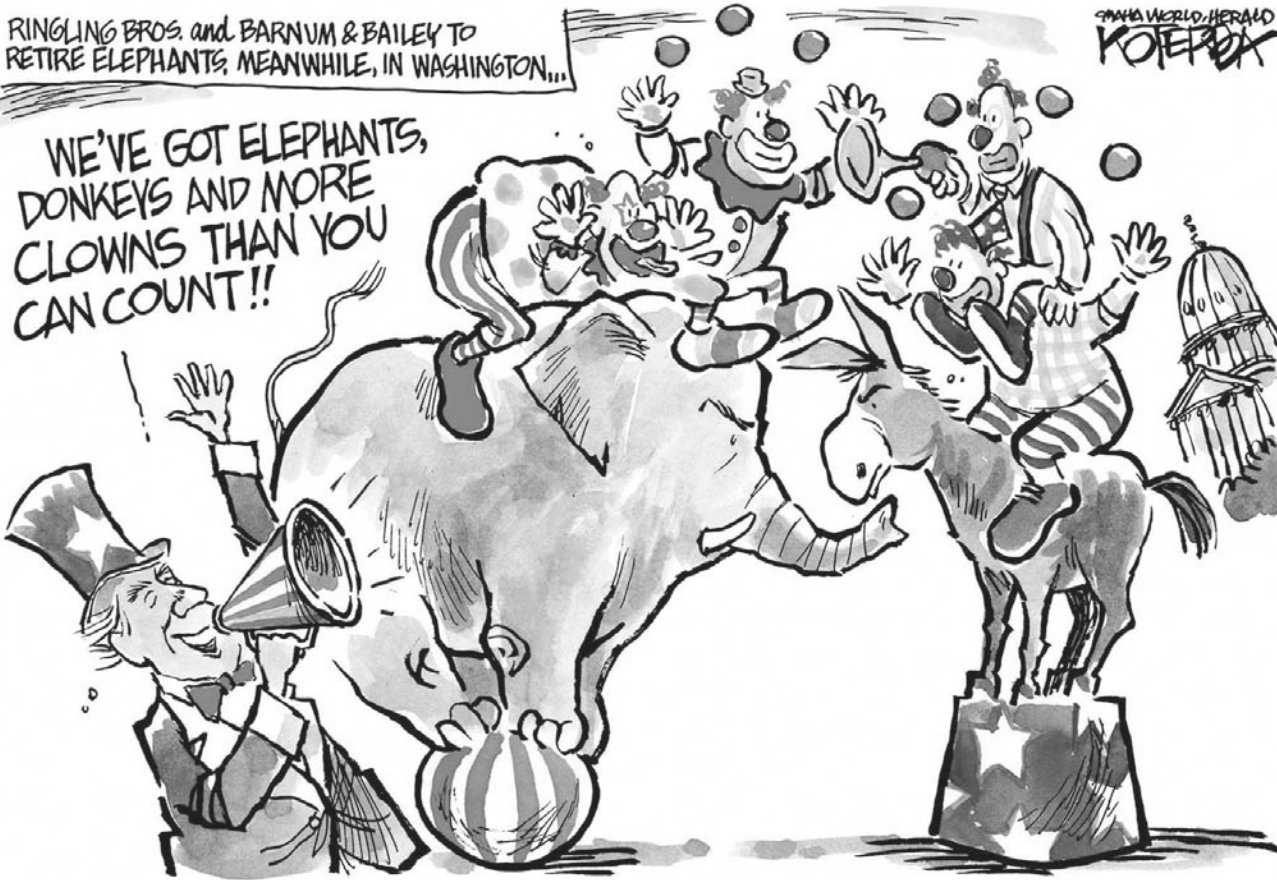
And let’s look at some other benefits, going back to the 2014 elections. The state judges of East Oregon would continue concentrating on judging, not teaching, as Measure 87 took a thumping out here. Not to mention that East Oregon would continue to be a cannabis-free zone, Measure 91 having been passed by the Wet Side and the State of Jefferson.

The Declaration of Independence stands for the belief that people have a right to decide for themselves how — or how much — others can tell them what they have to do. Right now, the people of “East Oregon” are “. . . more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.” The day may come when “. . . a long train of abuses and usurpations” becomes too much to bear. If — when — that day comes, let’s hope “West Oregon” has the sense to make it “Czechoslovakia” and not “1861.”

“ALL RIGHT, FINE. THE MATTER IS DISCUSSED. BY THE WAY — THE HAMSTERS ARE LOOKING A LITTLE SCRUFFY, SO. . .:”

I knew it. But that’s just the independent opinion of an opinionated non-pet grooming guy. Let’s hear your opinions on the topic in letters to the editor or by email to hermistonherald@hermistonherald.com or offthebench@gmail.com.

— Thomas Creasing is a Hermiston Herald columnist and municipal court judge



Who better to listen to?

If state legislators are not inclined to listen to lobbyists in the quest for more education funding for the next biennium, maybe they will be more impressed with the need after hearing from a student.

Umatilla student Alfonso Bernal, a fifth-grader at McNary Heights Elementary School, went to Salem this week with Superintendent Heidi Sipe and spoke to legislators Tuesday about attending school and the challenges in the classroom. He related how classes have to rely on donations from businesses for classroom material because schools can’t buy the supplies themselves and how classes are overcrowded because there are not enough teachers and schools can’t afford to hire more. He compared his experience with those of his older sisters, stating that the education they received is better than what he is receiving.

First, area residents should be proud they have a fifth-grader who is well spoken and confident enough to speak to members of the State Legislature in their house, even



JESSICA KELLER
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with a little coaching from a superintendent. Addressing a large group of strangers in an unfamiliar setting is enough to intimidate most adults, let alone a child, even with a trusted adult at his side.

Secondly, Bernal’s message is an important one for everyone to hear.

After all, who better than a student to let people know what children encounter in the classroom on a daily basis?

Even though Bernal didn’t specifically mention education funding, the bottom line can’t be lost on legislators, with the 2015-17 budget under consideration. Educators and superintendents across the state have been very vocal in their dismay with the \$7.235 billion proposed budget for K-12 education funding.

Even though it is an increase from this biennium’s education budget, much of the additional funding — if school districts are to receive any — will be dedicated to

implementing full-day kindergarten. As a result, the proposed \$7.235 billion is not much help to school districts struggling to rebuild reserves and programs cut in the past 10 years. Many districts, like the Hermiston School District, are just trying to maintain the status quo — building programs and reserve funds to pre-recession levels have been impossible so far, and the fear of what another recession would do to school services, funding, staffing, etc., continues to loom in the minds of administrators and teachers.

In the mean time, students like Bernal are the ones at the receiving end, and hearing from them every once in awhile is a good reminder to legislators as a whole as they settle on funding allocations for the next biennium. The need for more money is no doubt a common refrain to which legislators are accustomed. What public service agency, or person, for that matter, is going to say it does not need any more money or turn down additional funding when it is available?

Allocating resources when the pot only holds so much money is an unenviable task to be sure, and with different organizations regularly lobbying legislators for additional funding, it would be so easy for the requests to blend in with each other and get lost in the din.

This is why a new voice, like Bernal’s, is so invaluable, especially because it belongs to a child who is being impacted, not from a representative speaking on behalf of a special interest as a whole.

While Bernal’s testimony may not have much bearing on education funding when it comes time for legislators to approve the budget, they would do well to remember Bernal when making their decisions — \$7.235 billion, after all, is not just a number. It represents teachers hired, classroom sizes, supplies purchased, programs offered and, ultimately, children. This is one situation where it’s important to see the trees as much as it is the forest.

— Jessica Keller is the editor of the Hermiston Herald. She can be reached at jkeller@hermistonherald.com

City, port handled conflict admirably

BY JOE FRANELL
SPECIAL TO THE HERMISTON HERALD

You might be aware that I was involved as a facilitator/mediator during the negotiations between the City of Umatilla and the Port of Umatilla in regard to the zoning issue that surfaced about a year ago and subsequently was sent to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals.

What you might not know is how those negotiations got started, who was involved and how things ultimately got resolved. Now that the disagreement has been resolved, I thought I should take a few minutes to share with you my experience.

Let me start by admitting that I have a preconceived opinion about politicians in general, and I expect that most people share it. In fact, my opinion was shared by Abraham Lincoln, who said, “Politicians are a set of men who have interests aside from the interests of the people and who, to say the most of them, are, taken as a mass, at least one long step removed from honest men.”

That said, I personally know several of the parties who were involved in the dispute between the city and the port and had already come to believe that they did not fit Lincoln’s description of a politician. So, when I got a call early last October from one of those men, Roak TenEyck, one of the Umatilla city councilors and the then president of the

Umatilla Chamber of Commerce, asking me to consider helping facilitate negotiations between the city, the port, and the involved land owners, I couldn’t say no.

You see, Roak and Kim Puzey, the port manager, had been talking about the situation and had both become convinced that letting LUBA decide the outcome would damage everyone involved. They needed to find another way. To be clear, they rightly believed that letting LUBA pick a winner and a loser would ultimately result in all parties losing.

Once they agreed to negotiate, they involved Lyle Smith, who was also on the City Council; Bob Ward, the Umatilla city manager; and John Turner and Tim Mabry, who are on the port commission. These six and I met for the first time on October 20, 2014. After that first two-hour meeting was over, I was told by both the city and the port that they expected it to last for only about 10 minutes because the dispute was so pronounced and the disagreement so strong. They were pleasantly surprised and cautiously optimistic leaving that meeting. I also noticed a palpable resolve from the participants. That first meeting gave them hope that appeared to result in determination to find a solution.

We met three times to explore and ultimately work through the details of the solution that you are aware of. Each meeting lasted about two hours.

I would be remiss if I didn’t point out the very real temptation

to fight because of the high emotion, pent-up frustration and perceived loss of reputation that both sides faced because of the press coverage to date of this situation. I point this out because understanding that temptation makes their focus on finding a win-win solution even more remarkable. They had to set aside their own feelings and personal agendas for the good of the citizens they serve.

George Washington once said, “I have no other view than to promote the public good, and am unambitious of honors not founded in the approbation of my Country.”

James Freeman Clarke said, “The difference between a politician and a statesman is that a politician thinks about the next election while the statesman thinks about the next generation.”

I think it is clear that the participants in the negotiations and the full memberships of the port commission and the Umatilla City Council behaved as statesmen in the full spirit of Washington’s view of public service.

While conflict is unfortunately unavoidable in life, I’ve always believed that the true measure of a person is how they handle conflict when it appears. If that is true, our area is lucky to have public servants like those I had the privilege of working with through this process.

— Joseph Franell is the CEO and general manager of Eastern Oregon Telecom