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Ferguson fallout

Part one of this two-part series was a short description of several proposed Oregon laws that, if not directly related to the problems discovered in Ferguson, Missouri, sure seemed coincidentally related to the (in)justice system the city was running, one which preyed (and may still be) on its own people as sources of revenue.

Part two was a discussion of some economic costs those laws might impose on cities and counties. Here in part three (yes, of a two-part series) we'll cover some of the non-economic costs that may well be forthcoming. One of those costs has been described — a slowdown in court services. For instance, at some point, Judge Spicer, the Morrow County justice of the peace, will retire. Without other attorneys in the county, Morrow County will need to appoint — or elect — a non-attorney judge. The county will have to send that judge to the judicial education college, paying tuition, room and board. An ambitious candidate could take the course prior to running and campaign as “shovel ready,” but how many residents of Morrow County will spend thousands of dollars to enhance their education resumes that way? Particularly if those costs will be paid for them, and they will earn a salary while attending school, if elected.

Rather than pay that cost, Morrow County may well decide to close its justice court, in which case the cases handled daily there will go to circuit court. Circuit court normally sits once a week in Morrow — but if it has to pick up the caseload from a closed justice court, then a judge may have to be there two or even three days a week. Which slows cases in Umatilla County — unless Oregon adds another judge to the 6th Circuit.

Justice courts in other eastern Oregon counties could be in similar circumstances — no attorney and no budget for training (or the recording system), which means circuit courts have to handle those cases. Slower case resolution equals aggravated parties.

Worse is the social cost of the corrosive effect that the Ferguson debacle has had on public perceptions



THOMAS CREASING
OFF THE BENCH
Herald columnist

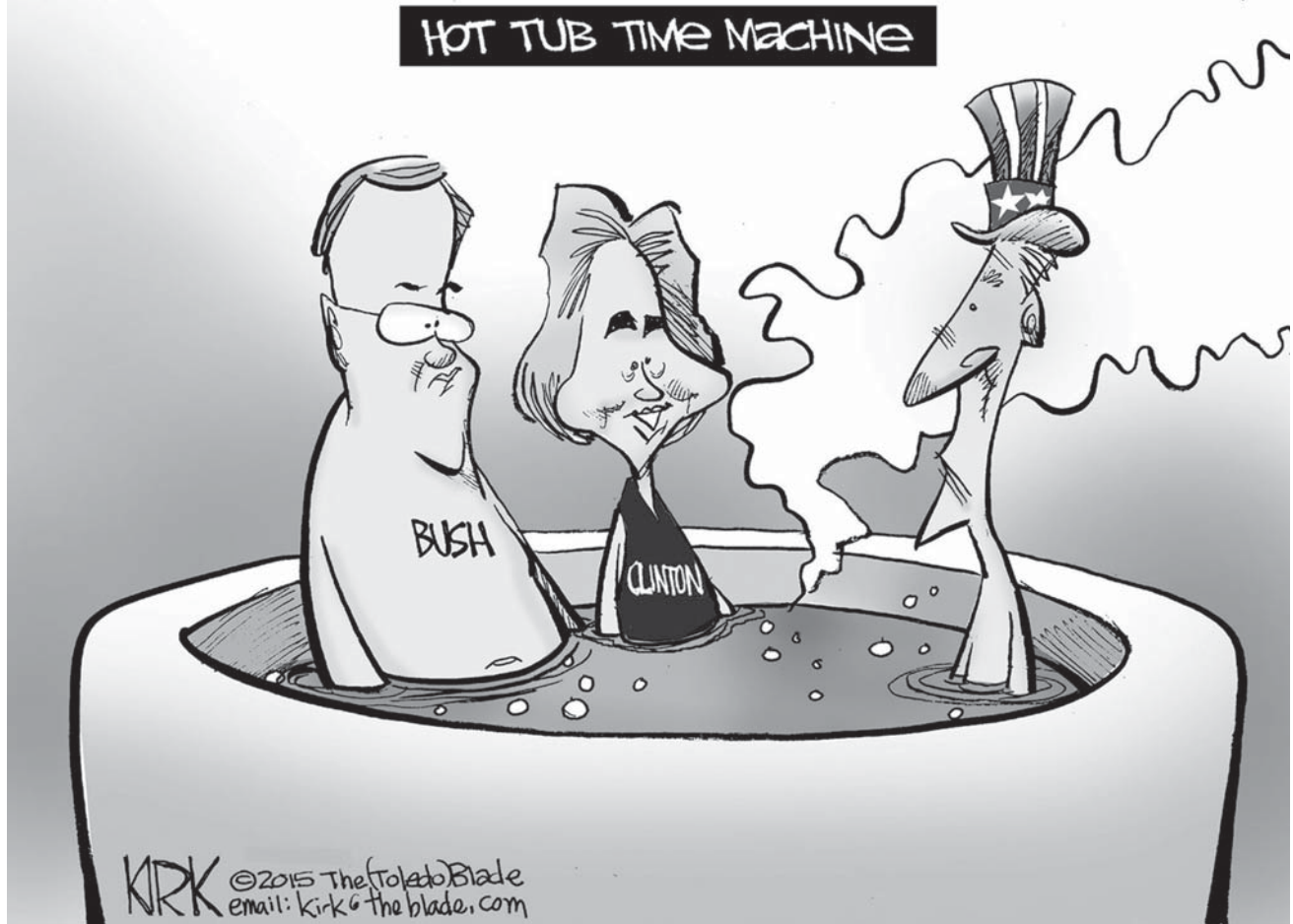
of local courts. Disgruntled defendants frequently believe that police and courts are “just in it for the money.” Ferguson’s court was evaluated by the city administration based on its proficiency in extracting cash from defendants, so now other courts have a much more difficult argument to make in that regard. Couple that with all of the political “backscratching” that was occurring between administrators and court personnel, both in Ferguson and with other cities, and it’s no wonder that people are cynical about their governments.

As a famous writer once said, “Government only occurs with the consent of the governed.”

To the extent that cities, counties, states, provinces and nations are believed — or worse, proven — to be more interested in plundering their people for personal gain (and doing favors for friends) rather than protecting people’s rights — which that same writer said is the purpose for which governments are formed — those governments will find their authority sliding away. The harshest police state cannot put an officer behind every citizen, and even when there are plenty of soldiers and police, there’s no guarantee that they won’t side with the anti-government actors. Ferguson, and all the similarly situated governments that just haven’t been called out by the Department of Justice yet, is like acid on the social bonds that should tie people together. Recovery is possible — but only if it’s wanted. It may be that the legislation in Salem, despite the imposed costs, is a right step, but only time will tell if the cure is worse than the disease.

But that’s just the “three of two” opinion of a math-challenged, opinionated guy. Share your opinions in response in letters to the editor or by email to hermistonherald@offthebench@gmail.com. Names of the terminally shy will be withheld on request.

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



Why not women in combat?

Should women serve in combat? Right now the military is answering that question with a final verdict scheduled to come down from Defense Secretary Ashton Carter in January 2016. This will inevitably become a political question — and thus particularly useless in producing a satisfactory answer — but until then it’s useful to understand that the military sees this question differently than you and I do.

It’s too easy for me, a politically minded civilian whose military experience is limited to paintball and Boy Scouts, to see the question of women in combat through a fairness lens. When I look at this, I see women following in the footsteps of African-American and LGBT troops as the latest generation to achieve equal opportunity in the military.

But someone with a military mindset doesn’t care what is fair, only what is best for the mission. That finally came clear to me when I asked my friend Kyle Dearing, a Marine who served in the Al Anbar province of Iraq in 2006, for his opinion of women serving in combat.

“Honestly, if they can do the job as well as their male counterparts, I have no problem with it. None



JASON STANFORD
Cagle columnist

at all,” he said. And all that seems fair, but that’s when he peeled back the curtain on his perspective. “If their inclusion involves reducing standards so that they can participate, it’s no longer about what’s good for the Corps, it’s about what’s good for females. The individual doesn’t matter in the service, the mission is the only priority.”

A new book coming out this week indicates that the military is in the process of accepting the obvious: Some women are perfect for combat and in fact add another layer of effectiveness. “Ashley’s War” by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon tells the story of the women of the Cultural Support Team. These were women trained for combat and assigned to special ops teams in Afghanistan.

Sending an all-male combat force into a country with sexist attitudes towards women limited our military’s effectiveness. It was considered culturally rude for our male soldiers to talk to local women, but they knew what was going on in their villages. We needed our women to talk to their women to get that intelligence without offending the hearts and

minds of the locals.

Before the special ops guys created the CST program, many military units were figuring this out on their own. A friend of mine who served in the Army infantry told me that they just took nurses on their missions. Female interpreters were particularly prized because male insurgents never considered that they were intelligent and sometimes openly implicated themselves in bombings. Next stop, Gitmo.

But as far as the military admitting what it was doing, Cultural Support Teams were the beginning. Pick up “Ashley’s War.” It’s a great read and a compelling account of what the head of the Army Special Operations Command, Lieutenant General John Mulholland, called “a new chapter in the role of women soldiers in the United States Army.”

It’s hard to finish the book without seeing through the military’s eyes how the women of the CST made our special ops teams more effective at catching the bad guys and avoiding trouble. Whether or not it was fair seemed irrelevant. This only worked because they served the mission.

Considered from that point of view, it’s even harder to argue that women

should not be allowed to try out for combat units.

The results will be necessarily mixed. A two-and-a-half-year-long experiment with the Marine Corps Infantry Officer Course ended without a single female graduate. But preliminary results at the Army’s Ranger School in Georgia were so encouraging that this last weekend women began formal training alongside the men.

Until the Secretary of Defense makes his final decision early next year, any graduates of Ranger School who happen to be women won’t be able to serve in the Rangers with their male graduates, regardless of how they may help the mission. In the end, that and not the arbitrary criteria of gender should be the only answer to a question that we’ve been asking for far too long.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Passing BMCC bond will improve lives, communities

Editor,
Very soon we will find the 2015 May Election Ballot in our mail boxes. This is our opportunity to voice our opinion for issues facing our local communities. In this ballot you will find the request for a new Blue Mountain Community College bond.

We believe that investing in BMCC will bring a change in lives as well as in our communities.

Ultimately, the BMCC bond is not about me. It’s not about BMCC. It’s about what our friends and neighbors need to empower their community to create positive change for the future.

Join us in voting “YES” for the Blue Mountain Community College bond.

BRYAN AND LOU ANN WOLFE
HERMISTON

Support students by voting for BMCC bond passage

Editor,
In the many years I worked for Blue Mountain Community College, I watched students pursue their dreams with affordable, accessible post-secondary education. For over 50 years, BMCC has provided quality instruction and training for local jobs and occupations in eastern Oregon. The majority of BMCC students remain in the area and contribute positively to our communities.

Technology changed dramatically during my years at the college and continues to become more sophisticated. In order to provide students with the current technology and infrastructure the bond on the May ballot will help fund these essential upgrades. Also, the buildings at all

campuses are aging and some are in critical need of heating, plumbing and electrical retrofitting. Equally important are security and ADA compliance, which will also be improved with bond funding.

The bond will fund three facilities in Hermiston, Boardman and Pendleton to offer new workforce training programs. A renovated ag center, precision irrigated ag center and an advanced manufacturing workforce training and early learning center will prepare students for jobs in our agriculturally based economy. BMCC serves 10,000 students each year, and four of five stay to live and work here. Let’s provide them with quality and relevant training leading to family wage jobs.

Please join me in voting “YES” for the BMCC bond.

MARGARET SAYLOR
HERMISTON

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Letters Policy

The Hermiston Herald welcomes original letters for publication on public issues and public policies. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. Phone numbers will not be published. Letters may be mailed to the Hermiston Herald, 333 E. Main, Hermiston, OR, 97838; or emailed to editor@hermistonherald.com