OPINION

Editorial

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actions internally.

No state agency is investigating. In the name of the public's trust and money, either the Ohio Attorney General's Office, the Ohio Auditor's Office, the Ohio Ethics Commission or the Ohio Inspector General's Office should.

A process without engagement

Beyond the clear lack of transparency, the board failed to involve the public — on-campus and off-campus — in the selection of the new president at a time of dramatic change and the troubling politicization of higher education.

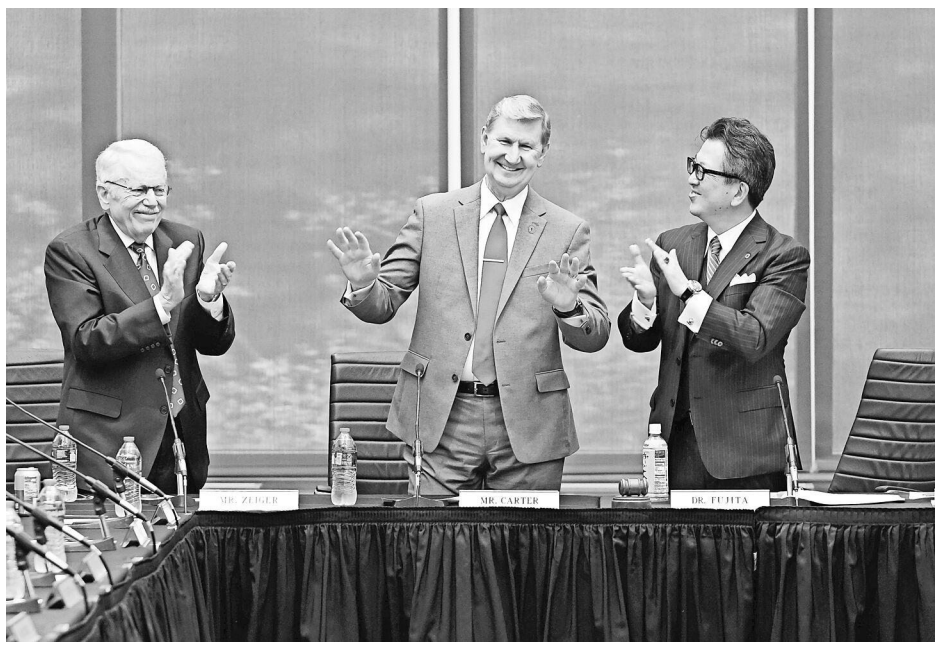
Such a seemingly hasty decision may have inadvertently thrown a hurdle in Bellamkonda's already challenging path. Many expressed hope that the public would be involved in the search for the new president.

Before Bellamkonda was announced as OSU's next president, the local American Association of University Professors chapter circulated a petition aimed at trustees calling for "a transparent, inclusive, open search for the next president."

After the appointment was announced, it wished Bellamkonda well in the president's role but expressed concerns in a statement.

"We are surprised and disappointed at the board of trustees' decision to choose a new permanent university president without even consulting faculty, staff, and students. Ohio State's system of shared governance — not to mention best practices in hiring university presidents — requires all of us having a say in the process. This hasty, undemocratic process starts this presidency on the wrong footing and sends the wrong message about our supposed shared values."

It took about three months to hire Carter, a retired, 3-star United States Navy vice admiral, after Johnson stepped down in May 2023, after a two-year term. Her plans to depart were announced the prior November.



Walter E. "Ted" Carter Jr., reacts to applause from Ohio State University's board of trustees and the audience on Aug. 22, 2023, after he was named the university's 17th president. Then the head of the University of Nebraska, he assumed his role at Ohio State in January 2024. ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Dispatch reporting back then revealed Johnson had strife with the board of trustees, allegedly partly related to Wexner Medical Center Board Chair Les Wexner, a New Albany billionaire now under scrutiny for his business dealings with sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The provost position was vacant for a year before Carter hired Bellamkonda.

Carter called the provost position "the most important hire I'm making."

"We've got to get this one right, and it is taking maybe a little bit longer than I would like," he told the Dispatch.

Bellamkonda, OSU's provost and executive vice president since January 2025, holds a PhD from Brown University in medical science and biomaterials and has had a long career in academia and research.

He last served a four-year stint as provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Emory University, a private Atlanta institution of16,000 students.

Ohio State is this state's most cherished university. Bellamkonda and his team will have their work cut out for them as they try to right a ship emerged in a sea of controversy.

We urge the board to help Bellamkonda by doing a much better job of living up to the university's principles prescribed to students, staff and faculty, including "putting people at the center of all we do."

Ohio State is better than this embarrassing episode in its history. The university is of utmost importance to Ohio. So is the person who leads it.

The truth must be revealed to rebuild all that has been broken.

This piece was written by Dispatch Opinion Editor Amelia Robinson on behalf of the editorial board of The Columbus Dispatch. Editorials are fact-based assessments of issues of importance to the communities we serve. These are not the opinions of our reporting staff members, who strive for neutrality in their reporting.

Suddes

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utility investment proposals, customers can end up paying [steeper rates] years before the [electricity] demand appears and, in some cases, even if it never does." And as the House Bill 6 scandal demonstrates, the Statehouse lobbying clout of electric utilities is huge. (DeWine signed HB 6.)

All in all, the thinking behind the governor's address seemed to be that, with barely ten months left in his term, it'd be pointless for him to ask politically fickle General Assembly Republicans to pass measures that, for whatever reason, might rake up controversy in GOP legislators' re-election campaigns.

That's all the more so given that the United States is waging an undeclared war against Iran, risking the lives of young Ohioans in uniform.

Common sense

Also in play in Columbus, if not in the governor's speech, is the future of health-care services for low-income Ohioans given Republican congressional antics with what amounts to care-rationing.

According to the state Budget Office, the latest count of Ohio Medicaid clients is about 2.8 million, just under 24 patients per 100 Ohio residents. That is, statistically speaking, next time you're in your doctor's office, or visiting someone in the hospital, keep in mind that Ohio taxpayers are covering the bills of nearly one in four patients.

The governor emphasized investing in Ohio's future – its children – and in a range of governmental tweaks, That's why on Tuesday, as throughout much of his career, DeWine offered what he's usually delivered: Common sense, no-glitz management.

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Eastburn

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A modern elevated rail system would not simply be an infrastructure project, it would be an investment in time, economic growth and the long-term quality of life that has made Columbus one of America's most desirable places to live.

As a sixth grader back in 1988, I rode the COTA bus from my house to meet a friend near Fifth Avenue. From there we'd continue downtown to City Center Mall to buy the latest CDs.

During the adventure, I learned public transit could mean freedom, even before you're old enough to drive.

Today, Columbus is one of the largest metropolitan areas in America without a rail transit system.

That reality becomes obvious every weekday morning.

Thousands of workers sit in traffic on I-270, I-70, I-71, U.S. 33 and other major corridors.

They love their cars, but few people enjoy driving them through congestion, construction zones and endless orange barrels.

Traffic doesn't have to be a nightmare

Modern elevated rail systems — like those in Chicago, Honolulu, Seattle and Vancouver — run above existing roads on raised tracks. These systems allow trains to move efficiently through cities without taking lanes away from drivers or causing major disruptions during construction.

For a fast-growing city like Columbus, that kind of system could transform how people move.

Columbus already offers a great quality of life: strong schools, safe neighborhoods and a growing job market. But transportation options have not kept up with that growth.

For most residents, the only alternative to driving is the bus. While the Central Ohio Transit Authority provides an important service, rail would add the speed, reliability and regional connectivity that large cities depend on.

The environmental benefits alone would be significant.

If even 66,000 commuters — about a quarter of current drivers — shifted from cars to rail each day, Columbus could reduce carbon emissions by roughly 132,000 tons annually.

That is equivalent to removing tens of thousands of cars from the road and avoiding hundreds of millions of miles of driving every year.

Rail would also reduce congestion for everyone, including drivers.

It encourages walkable neighborhoods and shorter trips. It connects people to jobs, entertainment and cultural districts without the stress of parking or the cost of ride-shares.

And rail would strengthen buses and ride-share services — not replace them.

Local buses could focus on short neighborhood routes feeding into rail stations, while ride-share drivers would see more demand transporting passengers to and from those hubs.

A rail network in Columbus could follow the corridors where people already live and work. Areas like Northland, the Northwest Dublin corridor, the Hilltop, the University District near Ohio State University and the growing retail and employment centers around Easton already contain dense populations and major job clusters.

A four-line system connecting Worthington, Dublin, Hilliard, Reynoldsburg, Grove City, Polaris, Easton, downtown and the airport could place more than 50 stations across the region.

With efficient routing, travel times could be competitive with driving.

For many commuters, that would mean leaving traffic behind.

Columbus residents deserve their time back

But the real reason Columbus needs rail is not just transportation. It is time.

Time spent stuck on highways is time lost with family. It is missed dinners, missed games, missed moments.

A modern rail system would give thousands of people that time back, allowing them to read, work, relax or simply enjoy the ride instead of gripping a steering wheel in gridlock.

Columbus' transportation system should reflect what the city is and will become.

Dave Eastburn, a 1994 Upper Arlington High School graduate, is a retired Army lieutenant colonel. The Tampa, Florida, resident has a master's degree from the George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management and a bachelor's degree in journalism and communications from Campbell University.

Derrow

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A de facto state of war

Our guests agreed that the theocratic rulers of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been in a de facto state of war with the U.S. and our allies since its inception 47 years ago. Their incessant chants of "death to America" have never been hollow.

In 1979, they seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran, holding staffers hostage for 444 days, humiliating the hapless President Jimmy Carter. Their violence against the U.S. continued four years later when they financed the Hezbollah suicide bombing that killed 241 U.S. service members in Lebanon.

Their oil-supported funding for Hezbollah destabilized Lebanon, which had been known as the prosperous "Switzerland of the Middle East." Their economic and military aid to Hamas led directly to the largest mass murder of Jews since WWII and the war that followed. And their financing of the Houthis in Yemen sparked a civil war that's killed nearly 400,000 and brought violent piracy to shipping lanes for as much as 12% of international trade flows.

Despite claims by supporters of President Barack Obama's Iran nuclear deal, the mullahs never gave up their quest for nuclear weapons, and the military means to protect and deliver them.

For perspective, the threat from the impoverished totalitarian nuclear-armed North Korea pales in comparison to that from the jihadist death cult that controls Iran. And 11 years ago, then-senator and current Secretary of State Marco Rubio accurately predicted Iran's behavior following Obama's disastrous deal.]

War is hell

McMaster and Pompeo, along with the dozen or so other former members of our military with whom I spoke, know the horrors of war firsthand. Many Ohioans have family or friends still on active duty, as do I.

Ohioan William Tecumseh Sherman, a Union general during the Civil War, reminded us that war is hell. But history teaches that peace isn't merely the absence of war. It's the product of the clarity to see threats, the strength to act, and the sacrifices necessary to thwart barbarism before it spreads too far to stop.

None of us know for sure how the Iran conflict will end — even the best plans are obsolete after the first shot is fired.

As the evening ended, one insight from these speakers resonated deeply. What history may one day describe as a grand strategy often begins as a judgment in the moment.

New Albany resident Philip Derrow is a retired business owner. He was a two-term member of the New Albany-Plain Local Board of Education. He is a regular Columbus Dispatch contributor. Reach him at philderrowdispatch@gmail.com.

Letters

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This nation is now emulating the Russian invasion of other countries to take over their lands and resources.

When asked if there were any limits on his international power, President Donald Trump told the New York Times, "My own morality. My own mind. It's the only thing that can stop me." Trump said, "I don't need international law."

A Republican leader, Senator Lindsey Graham, remarked about bombing Iran, "We are going to make a ton of money. ... Venezuela and Iran have 31% of the world's oil reserves. ... This is a good investment."

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, when asked if the demolition of Iran was an opportunity more than an imminent threat, replied, "I think much of that discussion is silly and academic."

The daunting questions now are: Who and what justifies the sending of U.S. military troops to invade and blow up a country? Do we recognize the sovereignty of nations? Do we send military troops to take over resources and land because we want them?

Wonder what World War II soldiers would think?

Jean Gawronski, Powell