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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Cancer declaration on meat must be put in perspective

The International Agency for Cancer Research last week decided to add processed meat to its list of carcinogens and to link red meat to cancer.

The meat industry is understandably upset. Having your product linked to cancer, no matter how slim that link might be, is never good from a public relations standpoint.

We think a full and fair reading of the facts shows that the IACR's actions add nothing to the debate that hasn't already been put forth.

The IACR classifies substances on a scale of 1 to 4. Substances such as processed

meat in Group 1 are classified "carcinogenic to humans" because there's enough evidence to conclude that they cause cancer.

Group 2(a), the classification of red meat, includes substances for which IARC has found "limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans and sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals."

In reaching its findings, IARC did not conduct original research. It instead evaluated available literature, in this case 800 cancer studies.

The IACR is clear that items classified as carcinogens don't

carry the same risk. Even among carcinogens, some things are more dangerous than others. Smoking and drinking, for example, cause far more deaths than eating meat.

IACR says that any person's individual risk of getting colon cancer is pretty low, and eating processed or red meat doesn't increase the likelihood by much.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the incidence of colon cancer in the United States is 38.9 per 100,000, and the mortality rate is 15.5 per 100,000. By comparison, the mortality rate from accidents is 40 per 100,000.

Now, there's no comfort in

being a statistical anomaly. If you or someone you love are among the few who actually get colon cancer, these statistics are dire. We would not suggest otherwise. But if you are cancer-free today, a ribeye or a pastrami sandwich is unlikely to put you over the edge.

In fact, a hot dog a day increases your lifetime chance of getting colon cancer from 5 to 5.9 percent.

The IACR says as much. Noting that meat has nutritional value and is an important protein source for much of the world's population, it does not recommend anyone stop eating meat. Rather, it suggests

only that people limit meat in a diet that also includes fruits, vegetables and whole grains. It's the same advice the USDA, the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association have been giving for years.

So, it seems to us much ado about nothing.

Unfortunately, the headline — "Meat linked to cancer" — was as far as most people may have read. And that may scare some people away.

But with major meat holidays in the offing — Christmas roasts, New Year's Day hams and abundant party trays — we think most Americans will put the story in its proper perspective.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

Congress narrowly averts train wreck

When Congress sees a problem, by golly, it gets right on it. Take immigration reform, fixing the Endangered Species Act, balancing the federal budget and reining in federal agencies that skirt the law.

Congress has jumped right on those dire problems....

Oh, wait, Congress hasn't done anything on those issues. Nothing. Nada. Zero. Zip.

What Congress has done is use its collective imagination to cook up a way to prevent trains from running into each other.

Instead of requiring two engineers to be on duty in a locomotive — similar to the requirement that airlines have a pilot and co-pilot in the cockpit — or requiring engineers to jettison their cell phones and other distractions, Congress did one better.

Under the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008, Congress required the railroad industry to invent a new, high-tech system to prevent trains from wrecking. Mind you, this system doesn't exist, and it would require

railroads that compete against each to work together. Oh, and it would cost billions of dollars and take years to develop.

But Congress was undeterred. When it comes to spending Other People's Money, no one is better than the denizens of the U.S. Capitol.

Not surprisingly, the railroads were unable to meet the deadline for inventing the Positive Train Control system. Not only that, because the deadline would be missed, the railroads were faced with the possibility of shutting down.

That's one way to prevent train wrecks.

The railroads said the congressional deadline was impossible to meet, and that Congress needed to at least give the industry a deadline extension. Congress delayed, until the whole industry was just about ready to jump the tracks.

Then, at the last minute, Congress rammed through an extension of the requirement, allowing the trains to run.

Whew. Once again, Congress had created a crisis and swooped in at the

last minute to save the day.

This would be comical if it weren't so serious. Farmers, ranchers, exporters, processors — and tens of thousands of other businesses across the nation — depend on reliable rail service to move their crops and products. One missed shipment could set in motion a series of delays that would create a disaster similar to the one last winter when the International Longshore Workers Union staged a work slowdown at West Coast container ports that cost the U.S. economy billions of dollars a day.

Speaking of which, there's another problem Congress hasn't fixed.

When it comes to on-time performance and getting the job done, Congress has no business telling the railroads — or anyone else — how to operate.

Congress needs to address the issues at hand now.

We are told that they will be addressed after the next election. If that's the case, don't be surprised if voters elect a lot of new faces to Congress to do the job.

It's time for the Obama administration to come clean on potential national monument

By GREG WALDEN
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
U.S. Rep.
Greg Walden



We've seen this movie before. A lame duck president uses the Antiquities Act to declare huge swaths of public lands off limits so he can have an environmental legacy. Right up until the night before he declared the Grand Staircase-Escalante a national monument, the Clinton White House told the Utah congressional delegation no such plans were in the works. And in his final month in office, President Clinton declared seven national monuments.

I fear the Obama administration — urged on by outside interests groups and wealthy corporations seeking a marketing niche — is up to the same "dark-of-night" declaration on the Owyhee River canyon in Eastern Oregon.

Last Thursday night, in Adrian (population 177), more than 500 people turned out to a public meeting organized by state Rep. Cliff Bentz to voice their deep concerns about this possibility. Extra chairs had to be brought in to the local gymnasium, and people were still standing in the aisles.

One person who wasn't there? Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell. Although I called on her or a senior representative to attend the meeting, no senior members of the administration attended.

If they had, they would have heard a message loud and clear: Residents of Eastern Oregon don't want another "Washington, D.C. knows best" federal designation that would further destroy our way of life.

Yet, despite this public outcry, I believe the administration is playing hide the ball from the public. The Obama administration needs to come clean about what is planned for these millions of acres of land in Eastern Oregon.

Those of us familiar with Eastern Oregon know that the Owyhee River canyon in Malheur County is home to some of the most beautiful landscapes in the country. We also know that these lands are an important part of the economic base for Malheur County, which generates more than \$370 million annually in agriculture business according to Oregon State University, of which \$134 million comes from cattle.

The Bureau of Land Management and other federal agencies manage 4.5 million acres, or 73 percent of the land in the county, making public lands grazing an integral part of most local family ranch operations, many of whom have cared for this high desert country

since the 1860s. For generations, these local families have been good stewards of the lands. They've worked cooperatively and collaboratively with federal agencies to manage these lands with an eye towards the long-term viability of the range and their family's livelihood.

Much like thinning an overstocked forest, grazing helps reduce the amount of fuel available to large rangeland fires that threaten watersheds and sage grouse habitat in the arid climates of southeastern Oregon. When fires do start, the volunteers in the Rural Fire Protection Association are positioned to respond promptly and are highly effective, thanks to their intimate knowledge of local terrain and weather.

Over the years, these ranchers have developed springs and other water sources that have supported their cattle, but also countless numbers of wildlife that share the range. The latter benefit has been particularly valuable during recent droughts.

In towns like Adrian and Jordan Valley, ranching is the base of the community. Whether through hiring employees, or buying needed supplies for the ranch or their family, they are injecting money into the local community.

A monument designation larger than the states of Rhode Island and Connecticut would greatly restrict or eliminate grazing and other productive uses of the land. It will shake the foundation of these communities and cause harmful economic impacts to the county and the surrounding region.

I've worked with my colleagues in the House to include language in the funding bill for the Department of Interior prohibiting the creation of this national monument. Our farmers, ranchers and rural communities are most affected by the decisions made on public lands. I will continue to work to return the focus on locally driven management efforts, and stop these unilateral actions that lock up our public lands and negatively impact our communities.

The Obama administration has done enough damage to the West through their overzealous regulations. We don't need a presidential declaration locking up more of our public lands and choking our local ranch economy.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden represents Oregon's Second Congressional District, which covers 20 counties in Southern, Central and Eastern Oregon.

Readers' views

Why organic farmers have 'turned' on NOP leader

The opinion piece "Another example of a federal agency operating by fiat" (Oct. 30 Capital Press) misses the point as to why many organic growers and processors now feel Miles McEvoy must be replaced.

Miles is a personal friend. I have great respect for him as an individual. But the change in process for "sunsetting" synthetic materials in organic production severely weakens the entire organic industry and should be reversed.

Synthetic materials were never intended to be permanently permitted in organics. The goal has long been that customers should get the 100 percent organic they pay for. But there were no organic substitutes for a few needed items, so certain synthet-

ics were temporarily allowed until organic substitutes could be developed. Strict sunset rules required that at least 10 of 15 National Organic Standards Board members approve an extension of non-organic substances in organic products. Organic replacements are being developed. The system was working as intended. The change initiated by Miles McEvoy requires a two-thirds majority to REMOVE a non-organic ingredient from the "allowed" list. Given the industry representation on the NOSB, this locks in these synthetic ingredients that were supposed to be phased out. This weakens the organic food industry and harms all of us who seek to provide our customers with real organic food.

Jonathan Spero
Lupine Knoll Farm
Grants Pass, Ore.

Send Columbia River water to California

The drought on the West Coast is causing serious impacts: drinking water, irrigation and agricultural production, fish and wildlife impacts, jobs and tax base.

If, as some are predicting, this will be a long-term drought, all of us need to support a planning/impact study of diverting Columbia River water flow — with an average 200,000 cubic foot per second flow at Vancouver, Wash. — down 250 miles to the California border, and perhaps over to the Colorado River at Las Vegas, connecting to existing canals. The failure to address long-term consequences of continual drought are really beyond comprehension.

William Riley
Soap Lake, Wash.