

**GUEST EDITORIAL  
FROM THE ALBANY-DEMOCRAT  
HERALD**

## Risk of wildfire isn't over yet

Indulge us again as we reflect on wildfire season, which (so far) has been relatively light.

There were big wildfires elsewhere in Oregon, but for the most part, the mid-valley escaped unscathed. We did endure stretches when smoke from fires elsewhere filled the valley, but by and large, it would appear that we're out of the woods.

But let us add this asterisk to that now: We're in the middle of a stretch of warm early-autumn days.

Until we finally make the turn to fall, fire officials still are somewhat worried about dry conditions. It's not at all out of the question that we could still see wildfires flare up and make a bit of a run in the few days remaining this month and even into October.

In the meantime, the turn to fall typically means that Congress turns its attention away from wildfire issues until the next season flares up as temperatures rise and forests dry out.

So it was refreshing to read this week about new legislation from U.S. Sen. Jeff of Oregon to create a \$1 billion fund that would allow the U.S. Forest Service to increase the pace and scale of wildfire reduction projects, empower federal agencies to work with local communities to plan and prepare for wildfires and permanently reauthorize a collaborative forest restoration program that brings stakeholders together to thin forests.

"I'm hoping it'll become a bipartisan vision," Merkley said in a conference call with reporters. "Everybody who pays any attention to the forest sees these benefits."

Well, maybe. Although it is true that federal agencies such as the Forest Service are in the midst of a long-overdue reassessment of the role of fire in our forests, top officials at the agency admit that more work remains to change generations of thinking there. And evidence is mounting that thinning by itself doesn't get the job done in terms of reducing the frequency and intensity of wildfires: That work has to go hand-in-hand with controlled burns — and many residents of the West still feel skittish about using fire to fight fire. (That smoke issue in particular is a potent one throughout the West, but wildland managers are increasingly sophisticated about the tools they use for these burns, including smoke management.)

In addition, any time politicians start talking about "thinning" forests, environmentalists start to worry (and sometimes with justification) that it's coded talk for green-lighting clear-cuts or running roughshod over the other important things we expect from our national forests — recreation, for example, or protecting sources of clean water.

So the Merkley legislation isn't a slam dunk, not by any means — and Congress over the last decade or so has not exactly raced to embrace fire-management legislation.

But asking for a billion bucks to tackle this work is a nice stroke, in that it highlights the sheer amount of maintenance and thinning work required on our national forests.

Our sense is that \$1 billion wouldn't get the job done — but it would be sufficient to tackle projects that long have been neglected for lack of proper funding. (In many cases in the past, funding for this type of work got sucked away by the increasing costs of fighting fires, but Congress finally passed legislation to ease that "fire-borrowing" practice.)

"It's way past time to do a lot more on the front end to make our forests more fire-resilient," Merkley said. That's for sure. We'll see if Merkley's colleagues agree — and, if so, to what extent they're willing to fund that work — when (and if) Congress takes up the legislation.



## Your views

### Berry: Clinkenbeard is the better of candidate

To the Editor:  
I personally know the two candidates running for the Imbler City Council Position 5. In my estimation, Terry Clinkenbeard is the better of the two candidates. I've known Terry as a hard-working, quick-minded man with a "get 'er done" attitude. He would be a great asset to the decision makers on the city council.

I believe Teresa Dewey is known for making the wrong decisions. Even with her background of city council experience she has not contributed anything to the well-being of our city.

Between the two candidates, Terry Clinkenbeard will be best for our city.

Duane Berry  
Imbler

### Wickre: McLeod-Skinner aims to confiscate all firearms and ammunition

To the Editor:  
Rep. Greg Walden is running for re-election to represent Oregon in Congress. His opponent is Jamie McLeod-Skinner, a left-wing politician from Santa Clara, California, and Phoenix, Arizona.

Her website calls for: "Ban on future sales of military grade weapons, including bump stocks, to civilians (if a ban fails, I would support limiting civilian use of military weapons to firing ranges, securing the weapon on site); and Government buy-back program for military grade weapons, with no resale to civilians."

"Military grade"? All firearms have at one time or another been developed for/or used by the military. If she is trying to indict

modern sporting rifles, like the AR15, they function no differently than any sporting rifle built since 1900. The AR15 cartridge (.223 Rem) is not as devastating in long range accuracy or stopping power as the venerable 30-06 or dozens of other big game cartridges.

Bump stocks? She must know that these are a gimmick and even if they worked, our warriors already have full auto weapons.

Her website also calls for a ban on armor piercing ammunition? Currently, 18USC 921(a)(17) bans the manufacture and sale of handgun ammo that has this capability. They haven't banned rifle ammunition, based on vest penetration, because it would ban almost every rifle cartridge made.

By her own words, her aim is to confiscate all firearms or the ammunition to make them usable.

Please vote for the Constitution and vote Greg Walden.

Douglas Wickre  
Joseph

### Barry: Wes Williams could be a venerable judge in the tradition of Judge Brownton

To the Editor:

Wes Williams will be an exemplary judge. He's worked with every aspect of the law, representing farmers, ranchers, loggers, teachers and small business owners.

He knows how anxious plaintiffs and defendants are about appearing in court to testify about issues that will dramatically affect their lives. I'm confident that Wes will always be courteous and informed.

He's committed to providing a safe, fair courtroom experience for every

### Write to us

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are limited to 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's address and phone number (for verification purposes only).

We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We do not fact check. We will not publish poetry, consumer complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Thank you letters are discouraged.

Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks. Email your letters to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com) or mail them to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850.

#### Letters deadline

The Observer does not run endorsements of more than 350 words.

The Observer will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the letters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day if necessary. Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by noon Friday, Oct. 26. You can email them to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com), drop them off at our La Grande location, or mail them to The Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, 97850.

We will publish our last letters on Friday, Nov. 2. Election Day is Nov. 6.

individual.

When I served on the Governor's Judicial Fitness and Disability Commission, I read many complaints about inappropriate courtroom behavior. Judges were reported as rude, unprepared and prejudiced. In the past, I've seen these regrettable behaviors in our local courtrooms. Of course, I was not the only one who witnessed and discussed them. Fortunately the local situation has improved. Judge Tom Powers is a respected jurist. He and Wes Williams will constitute an admirable judiciary for the 10th District Court.

Over the years, I've enjoyed discussing many aspects of the law with Wes. I appreciate his passionate interest in the law as well as his commitment to the human cost of laws ignored, misunderstood or misapplied. I believe he will see serving as judge not so much as a personal

honor but as a profound responsibility.

When my family first moved to La Grande, Wes Brownton, recently retired judge, was still mentioned with affection and respect. In addition to his colorful personality, he was memorable for his wisdom, patience and dignity.

I can think of only one long-serving judge since then who has come close to earning that degree of admiration. It's time we had another, a judge who is a respected member of the community, who has an established record of competence and impartiality.

I can envision Wes Williams becoming a venerable judge in the Wes Brownton tradition. Judge Brownton must have anticipated this day; he willed his law library to the young Wes Williams.

Lois Barry  
La Grande

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Phone:  
**541-963-3161**

Toll free (Oregon):  
1-800-422-3110  
Fax: 541-963-7804

Email:  
[news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com)  
Website:  
[www.lagrandeobserver.com](http://www.lagrandeobserver.com)  
Street address:  
1406 Fifth St., La Grande

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