

OUR VIEW

A voice for fairness

In an era of bare-knuckled politics, the career of William Ruckelshaus provides valuable lessons. He was the first administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. He died in Seattle in late November at age 87, leaving behind an unblemished career as a voice for environmental reason.

Ruckelshaus was no stranger to pitched political battles. His career in President Richard Nixon’s administration abruptly ended when he resigned his job at the U.S. Department of Justice instead of firing the Watergate special prosecutor.

After two turns as EPA administrator — as the agency’s first chief under Nixon and again under President Ronald Reagan — Ruckelshaus probably knew more about how the EPA and statutes such as the Endangered Species Act work than anyone else.

In 2011, Capital Press interviewed Ruckelshaus about the EPA, the Endangered Species Act and more. Edited for space, here are some of his thoughts:

On the Endangered Species Act: If the law is working properly, the “how to” is an agreement by the people who will be impacted by the necessary changes. It doesn’t work as well as it ought to, because a lot of times the government comes in and imposes habitat requirements the manager of the land doesn’t find completely reasonable.

On the Clean Air Act: After a couple of years of administering it, I knew it needed change. ... What has proven really hard is to get these laws changed ... I think, the people who lobbied the laws through were primarily outside the government, and the government agencies that administered these laws and the staffs on committees remain in place for a long time — they get a vested interest in the law and fight furiously against any changes.

The scope of the Endangered Species Act: It encompasses a lot more than Congress probably originally intended.

Changes needed in the Endangered Species Act: If I’m forced to put buffers alongside streams that run through my land to protect salmon, sometimes those buffers take a significant amount of land, and I think they should be compensated for that. ... If that’s a public good being asserted against a private property owner, why shouldn’t the public pay for it the same way they do with a highway?

On environmental regulations: Some guy writing the regulation in Olympia or in Salem, and not being on the actual land itself, can’t possibly draft a regulation that makes sense on every piece of land. So the landowner has the regulator from the government coming on their land, starting to tell him how to manage it. He’s been managing for five generations and this guy’s maybe six months out of school.

(Let) the individual landowner have a lot more authority about what he should do to manage the land in such a way that it doesn’t adversely impact the environment. And compensating them where significant costs are involved.

On collaboration: If they’d see themselves as part of a family, they’d begin to make progress. But if they see themselves as adversaries, as enemies, then you don’t make any progress. ... My experience of listening to farmers and environmentalists when they finally let their guard down, they are not nearly as far apart as they think they are. I’ve heard farmers say, “Well, if that’s what you want us to do, that’s not so hard.” And here the environmentalists would say, “Well, I guess that’s not really the problem, is it?”.

These words offer wisdom to all sides of many issues, whether they involve the environment or other topics. Maybe the world needs more voices for reason like William Ruckelshaus. We’ve seen plenty of the alternative.

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MY VOICE

Observer should end running out-of-area columns

A recent run of syndicated columnists appearing under “Other Views” in The Observer was disturbing.

Monday, Dec. 2: “Animals have an ally in the Trump administration” by Ryan Moore congratulates the EPA for encouraging research labs to decrease use of lab animals. While this is certainly commendable, the EPA under Trump has been undermined and shackled in attempts to protect our air, water and soil from deadly pollution.

Ryan Moore has been banned from Facebook for his inflammatory messaging. His primary job is social media strategist. He has managed numerous high-profile accounts and has spent over \$700,000 running social media ads for conservative causes and campaigns. This sort of “columnist” likely pays papers to run messages as editorials.

Wednesday, Dec. 4: “Trump was right to stand up for vet” by Christine Flowers, an outspoken voice for conservative women, refers to Trump’s pardon of Chief Petty Officer Eddie Gallagher. She contends Gallagher’s offense was a simple “breach of etiquette.” While SEALS almost never testify against one of their own, Gallagher was an exception. They accused him of killing an unarmed elderly man, shooting into crowds of civilians, bragging about shooting women, claiming Muslims should be eliminated and intimidating soldiers under his command. Ultimately Gallagher was convicted of being pictured with the body of the young

ISIS boy he was accused of stabbing to death after medics had stabilized him for a leg wound.

Friday, Dec. 6: “Trump should veto greedy Green Act” by Phil Kerpen. Tax credits toward promoting electric cars and government money for environmental justice education obviously infuriate Kerpen. No mention of giant tax credits supporting fossil fuels. No acknowledgment of global warming and its expected impacts on the poorest world populations.

Kerpen is president of American Commitment dedicated to restoring and protecting free markets, economic growth, constitutionally limited government, property rights and individual freedoms. He is also a conservative lobbyist in Washington, D.C.

The Founding Fathers made strict laws to protect our democracy from the avarice inherent in capitalism/corporations. These initial safeguards were gradually undermined by corporate money. Corporate practices created the economic divide seen in America today.

The Dec. 6 cartoon disgracefully characterized Alexandria Octavio-Cortez riding a fat unicorn labeled as Green New Deal farting the Rainbow Coalition emblem.

These opinions and cartoon are available online.

Credible columnists write from across the political spectrum. If Observer finances limit them to writers receiving primary compensation through exposure to their political messages,

About the author

Mary McCracken of Island City is an advocate for sustainable, flourishing and diverse environment, economy, democracy and culture. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

The Observer should end out-of-area columnists altogether. Editorial comment is readily available in all flavors without The Observer. The space could be repurposed for non-divisive subjects such as the “Farmers Almanac.” Editorial money could go toward local reporting. As Observer editor Phil Wright noted in a recent column, local news is his primary concern. Let’s leave it at that. Under his guidance local news is being well covered.

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