

OUR VIEW

Animal 'cruelty' initiative frightening

It sounds farfetched, and quite likely it is. Oregonians ought to hope so, anyway. At least those Oregonians who like to eat the occasional burger or slice of bacon. Or hunt deer and elk. Or watch or compete in rodeos. But the economic destruction that Initiative Petition 13 could cause in this state is so severe, and so widespread, that the effort, however quixotic it might be, simply can't be ignored. David Michelson of Portland is the chief petitioner. His goal is to put on the statewide ballot in November 2022 a petition that would criminalize, under animal abuse laws, essential parts of the ranching business, including branding and dehorning cattle and castrating bulls. Even artificial insemination could be classified as sexual assault of an animal, which is a Class C felony.

Backers of the initiative emphasize that it would not actually prohibit ranchers from selling their animals to slaughter — but they could do so only after the animal dies naturally. You needn't be in the livestock business to know this won't — can't — work.

The petition would also eliminate exceptions to animal cruelty laws for hunting, fishing, rodeos and wildlife management.

It might seem unbelievable that a majority of Oregonians would vote for a measure that would wreak such havoc on an industry that's a big part of Oregon's economy. But little wonder that the Oregon Farm Bureau and other groups are preparing to counter the petition with compelling stories about how much damage this effort could have.

Public records advocate should be independent

Oregon's public records advocate should be an advocate for openness and transparency.

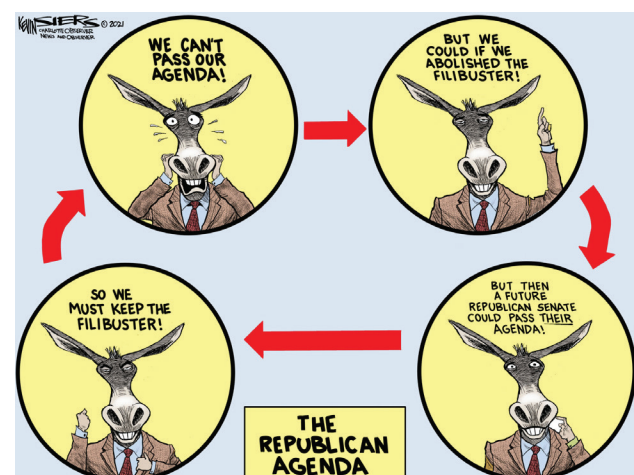
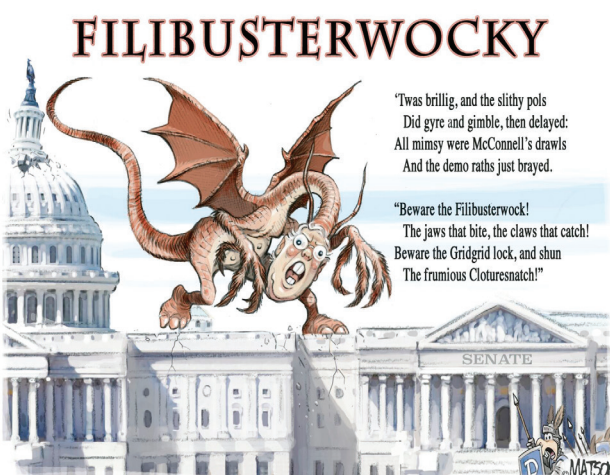
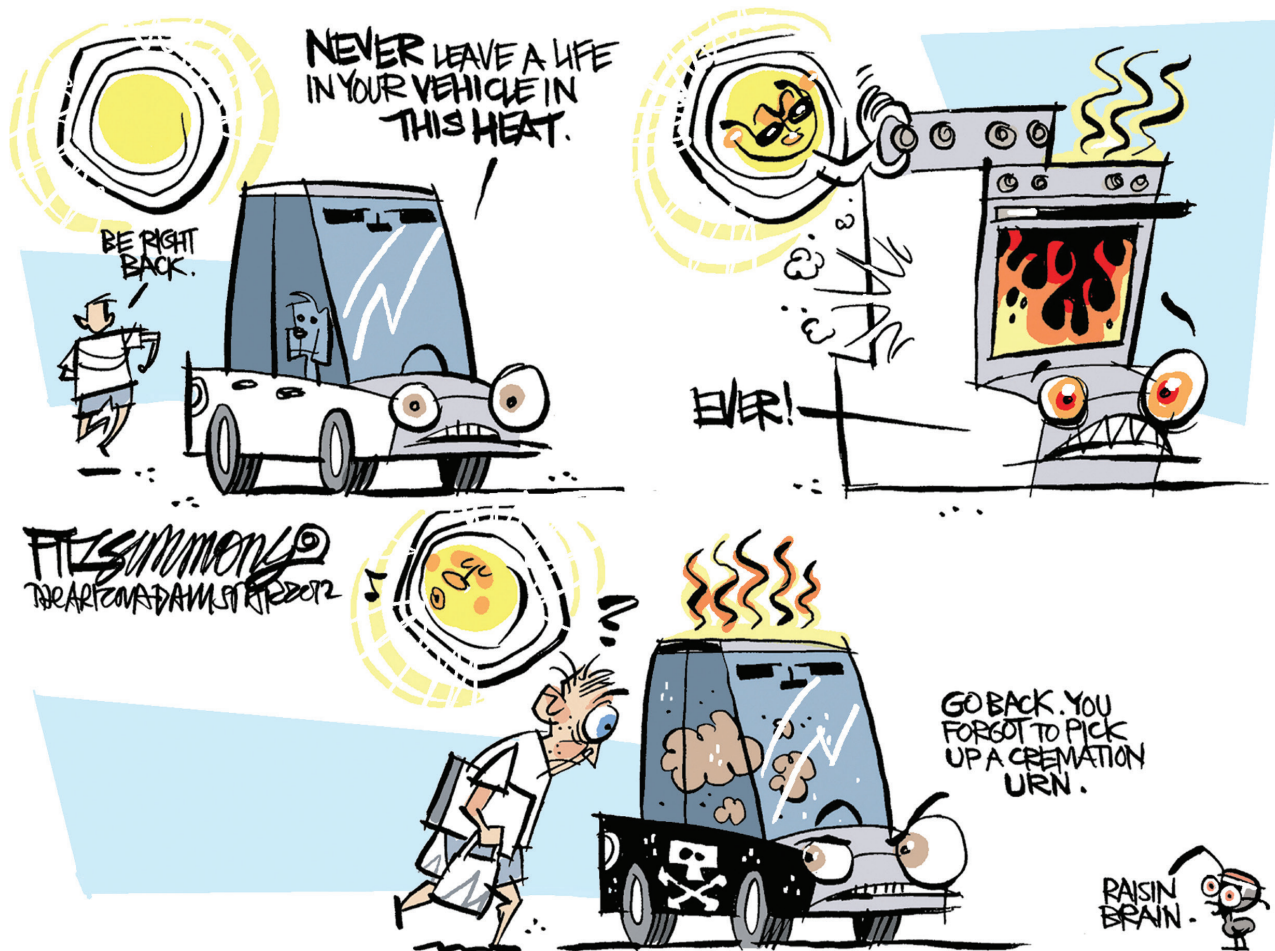
Senate Bill 500 would make it clear that the position will be more independent, too. The governor will no longer get hiring and firing authority. That will become the purview of the state's public records advisory council.

The public records advocate is part of government, but it also must push government to adhere to the law and encourage improvements in the law. It's not an easy path to walk. And it's even more complicated if the governor controls your hiring and firing and may have different priorities for openness.

Ginger McCall, Oregon's first public records advocate, resigned in 2019 because she felt she was getting undue pressure from the governor's office. Maybe nobody did anything technically wrong. But it did make it clear that a change in the law would be a good idea.

The advocate can hold government accountable for how it complies with the law. The advocate can help educate the public and government about the law. And the advocate can point out where changes are necessary in the law. But to do all that right, the office does need to be independent.

S.B. 500 surely seems on its way to be signed by Gov. Kate Brown. That's just what should be happening.



We need to improve our approach to fires



ROB KLAVINS
OTHER VIEWS

Fresh off the Labor Day fires, and in the midst of a drought, I imagine many of us shared a feeling of dread when we heard of early June wildfires. Thanks to breathless reporting, west-siders were fearful of coming to a "disaster area." With very real impacts to our local economy, some began canceling planned visits. After taking a few deep breaths of cool, clean mountain air, I began to process things a little more calmly.

The Joseph and Dry Creek fires burned in a fire-dependent landscape miles from the nearest paved road. It's part of a landscape that we are spending millions of dollars to "restore."

There is consensus that a primary cause of that restoration need is previous logging and a fire deficit. That is to say — most serious experts agree we need more fire and less fire suppression.

Fire addresses the root causes — rather than just the symptoms — of decades of mismanagement. With rain on the way, these fires could have done even more restoration work. For free.

They could have improved more wildlife habitat, created more snags, renewed more systems and left more money for real emergencies. Where these fires were allowed to burn, they increased the heterogeneity of the landscape and will affect how future fires burn. This is the antidote to a century of fire suppressions and makes forests more resilient to future fire and drought.

Like most wildfires, much of the fire footprint was in fire-evolved grasslands. Not surprisingly though, it led to reflexive calls for more "management" (aka logging) of our forests. It may not be what some want to hear, but in an age of undeniable climate change, we need more fire, not more logging.

Scientists around the world, and here at Oregon State University, have demonstrated that logged forests emit 10 times more carbon than wildfire, beetles and other natural disturbances that we futilely try to suppress with chain saw restoration. Only about 3% of a tree's carbon is burned in a fire. Meanwhile, logging is Oregon's No. 1 emitter of carbon.

Ecological and economic concerns aside, we likely shared another immediate thought — "I hope everyone stays safe."

In a press release, our own Oregon Department of Forestry administrator Matt Howard told the media "this is probably one of the most difficult places to fight fire in Oregon."

In addition to spending huge amounts of money, the decision to fight fire risks lives. The best way to keep those brave folks safe is to keep them out of harm's way. I know many wildland firefighters who resent being sent out to these sorts of fires.

In the end — and as is usually the case — weather ultimately stopped the fire.

Make no mistake, some fires are dangerous, destructive and should be fought. Drought, a fire deficit and man-made climate change are all realities. But fighting fire is a choice, and we need to start making better ones.

Uncommon bedfellows celebrated

Editor's Note
Do you have a point you'd like to make or an issue you feel strongly about? Submit a letter to the editor or a guest column.

the Forest Service's decision to let the Granite Gulch Fire burn in 2019. That breakthrough won't mean much if it's just a one-off.

So, other than throwing out piles of money and risking lives to put out fires, what other choices do we have?

For starters, we can reduce the risk of inevitable wildfires by better managing new development and improving the fire resistance of existing homes and structures. We should thin small trees starting in the structure-ignition zone and work our way out from there. We should retain large and old trees across the landscape. And we must let some fires burn.

The last part of that requires fire-use planning — something that many are still reluctant to contemplate, even as they are eager to encourage spending millions of taxpayer dollars to create expensive, destructive and counterproductive plans that only double down on past mistakes.

A fire deficit coupled with past logging of large trees, man-made climate change, overgrazing and increasing development means we do have a problem. But it's not one we can solve with more logging, grazing, climate denial and fire suppression.

We really do know better. Now we just need to start doing better.

Rob Klavins is the Northeast Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild. He lives near Enterprise and helps run the family farm and business.

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