

OUR VIEW

# State's water challenges need to be addressed

The Oregon Legislature has hit on a winner with the Irrigation District Temporary Transfers Pilot Project.

While the name sounds a bit off-putting, the project is effective. It allows some irrigation districts to internally make temporary transfers between water users. The project has been in operation 18 years. During that time it has been extended and expanded to 15 of the state's 40 or so irrigation districts.

The beauty of the project is its simplicity. A farmer or rancher within an irrigation district with an unused water allocation can transfer it temporarily to someone who needs it.

This not only addresses some of the water shortages that have arisen over the years, but it helps farmers and ranchers hold on to water allocations that otherwise might be lost, courtesy of the state's "use it or lose it" law.

While not perfect — nothing is — the project brings out the best in cooperative spirit among farmers in addition to getting water to where it's needed.

It is time for the Legislature to expand the program to all Oregon irrigation districts and make it permanent.

While they're tackling water issues, legislators should take a close look at the Oregon Water Resources Department, which appears to be chronically underfunded and understaffed. The department has a national reputation for its sluggish performance. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska has found the state has an unnecessarily complex and bureaucratic water transfer system.

Year after year, the department also reports that it is behind in its work, in part because of red tape and in part because the Legislature does not provide enough money from the general fund.

Some believe water users should provide most of the department's funding, but since the state owns the water, all citizens should pony up adequate funding to manage it. After all, everyone eats the food grown with that water.

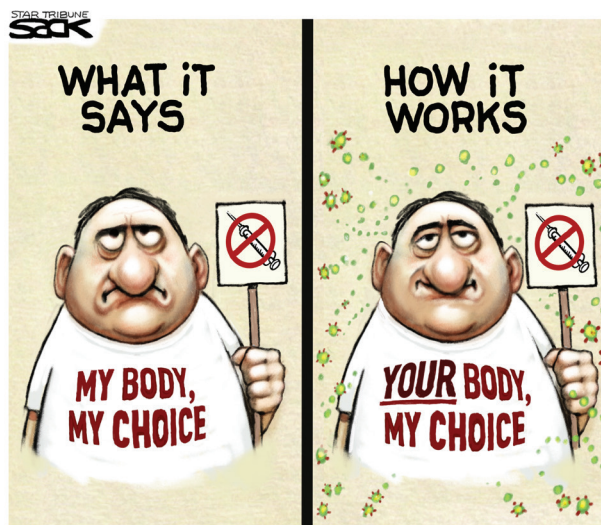
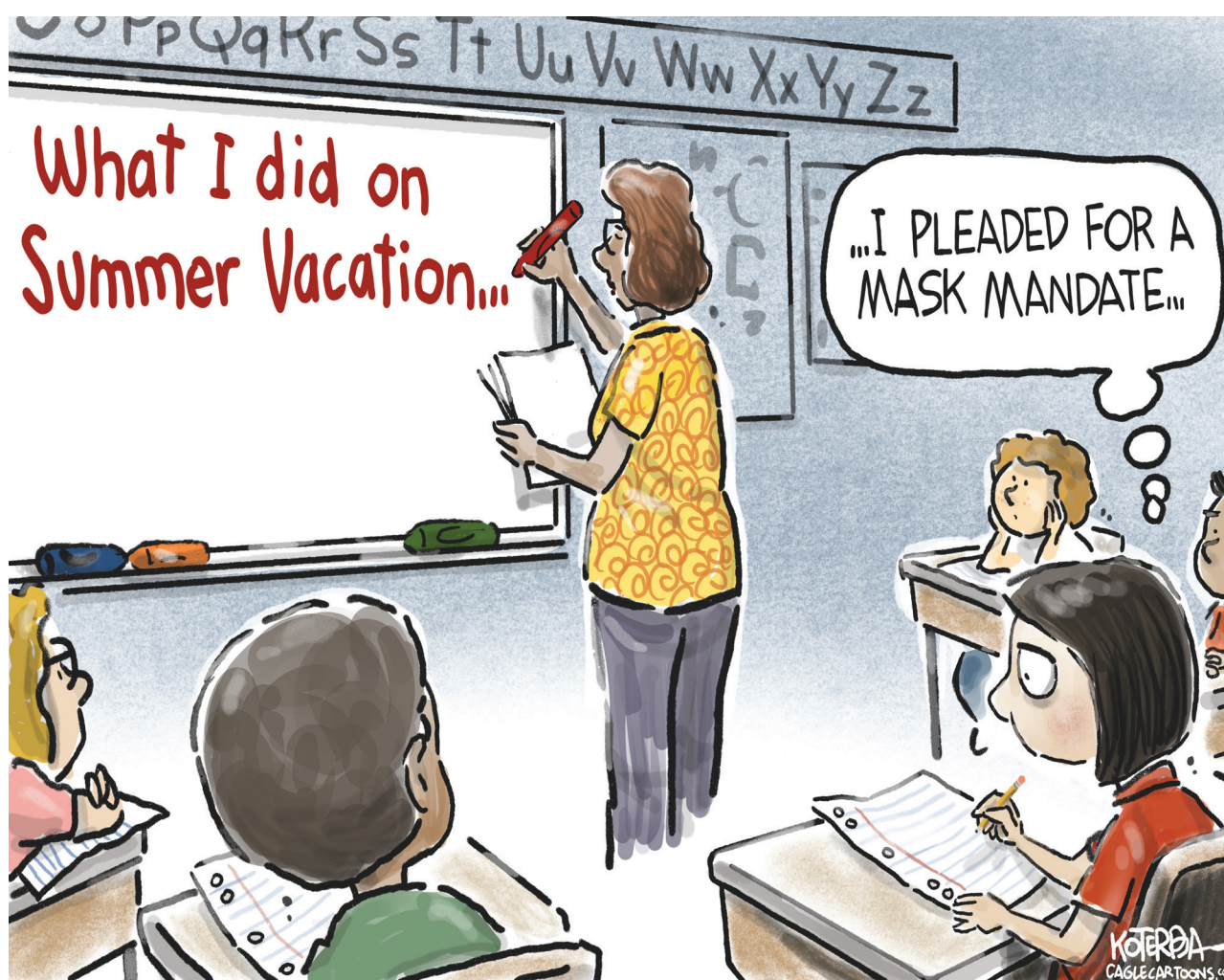
More also needs to be done.

Water issues in Oregon will not go away. The state needs a flexible game plan for managing the water that grows our food and powers our economy. Leaders need to take a close look at everything from recharging aquifers in the winter to lake taps and increasing water storage behind dams. Instead of constantly talking about taking out dams, we should be looking at ways to increase their number and capacity. That's because scientists say the mountain snowpacks that serve as water storage will continue to shrink.

We should also come up with a statewide plan to transfer water from locations with plenty of water to those facing drought and other shortages. California, for example, has a massive intrastate water transfer system.

Climate change means Oregonians will have to be smarter in how they manage water.

Expanding the Irrigation District Temporary Transfers Pilot Project statewide and making it permanent is just a start.



# La Grande traditions spur wish for in-depth historical articles



**DOROTHY FLESHMAN**  
OTHER VIEWS

If this were my old "Dory's Diary" column, I'd be writing about the La Grande Fire Department's breakfast this year and how my annual enjoyment of it extends to observing the folks who line up in appreciation of the service and safety afforded by those who see to our protection in so many different ways.

It may be a silent thank-you in the guise of filling tummies with the well-prepared food, drink and general needs, but it speaks on its own with a steady line of all ages in wait to be served.

The annual fire department's breakfast once held during Crazy Days in downtown La Grande has been a tradition to which I have always tried to attend even before the meal was served in the generous fire station building on Cove Avenue.

I remember back to when the fire

and police stations were located near each other on Washington and Elm downtown in the 1960-70s when I was reporting for the daily Observer and the E.O. Review weekly newspapers.

I also remember some of the fire department employees like Lois Thurber, Ted Clausen, Ray Snider, Bob Wickam, Roland Shaw, Bruce Weimer, the Cornfords. In the police department the names of Warren Miller, Bill Grimm, David Florea, Dave Lester, Bob Price. Oh, so many more but names fly from me. The one I remember best, though, was my sister, Betty (Swart) Alexander, who became La Grande's first female police officer. It was at that time that I was covering the city council meetings up a steep narrow staircase above the two departments, the water department between.

The breakfasts were held in the crowded fire station space with a variety of tables and folding chairs and flies sometimes became unwelcome guests, but the camaraderie of the annual visitors warmed the interior with its own charm of greetings and close quarters.

But, this isn't my column and the words are fewer and many names escape me. The years intervene. The new fire department was built on Cove Avenue, and the old fire station became a museum. The old IOOF hall across the street became a parking lot; the police station moved up on the hill; the Observer crew moved to Fifth Street. The Presbyterian Church still stands by and the post office still sorts and delivers mail while my memory hops back and forth between Crazy Days and the fire department's call to breakfast.

I would like to see in-depth historical articles in The Observer about volunteer firefighter members and the Union County's Search and Rescue group. Who, what, where, when, why and how?

Thank you, La Grande Fire Department. It was a good breakfast, as usual.

*Dorothy Swart Fleshman, of La Grande, began writing for The Observer in 1944. She continued to contribute into the 21st century with her "Dory's Diary" column.*

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