

OUR VIEW

The River Democracy Act deserves closer look

U.S. Sen Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, will host an online town hall meeting Tuesday, Aug. 31, and if you get the chance, we urge you to listen in.

The subject of the town hall will be the River Democracy Act, a sweeping piece of new legislation pushed by Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon.

The bill is designed to greatly expand conservation protections to more than 4,000 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon, including many waterways in the eastern part of the state.

Wyden touts the legislation to expand recreation access, protect drinking water, limit wild-fire and safeguard endangered fish and wildlife.

The spirit of the bill — to protect more waterways — is a good one. Our natural resources are a finite commodity and represent national treasures that enhance us as a people and a nation.

Now, more than 2,000 river miles in the state are protected under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

As much merit as the proposed legislation has, it still needs to be explained carefully to voters. That it is why it is so important for area voters to participate in the town hall.

While protecting rivers and streams is a good idea, the fact is, there already are existing protections — such as the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act — on many waterways. Other federal laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, also help add a layer of protection to streams and rivers.

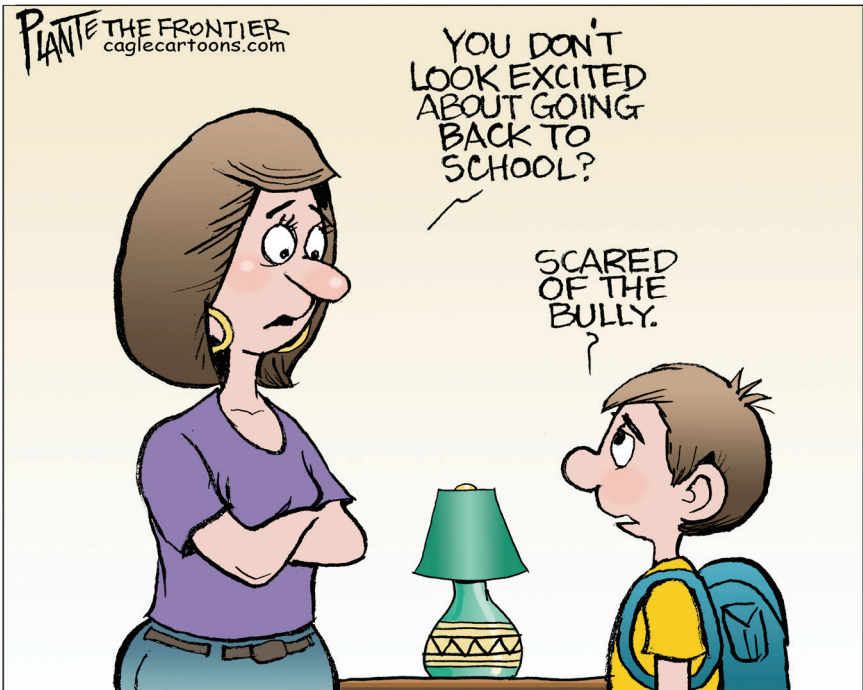
The danger in such pieces of legislation is unintended consequences. That’s why Wyden must explain how, or if, private property rights will be impacted with the legislation. He also must explain how, or if, grazing rights will be affected by the legislation.

The streams and rivers of Eastern Oregon are part of our heritage and must be safeguarded, but too often the region is seen as a kind of giant, conservation amusement park for a minority of people who have little or no connection to our unique way of life.

The natural bounty of our region isn’t something taken for granted for most of us who live in Eastern Oregon. We see it every day. No one wants to see our local natural resource treasures destroyed.

But before we go and create yet another layer of federal regulations to our region, let’s make sure we are all on the same page and working for the same results.

So, tune into the town hall and exercise your right to give feedback to your elected representative.



LETTERS

Unenrolling your students will only hurt the community

As a long-time member of this community and former La Grande School District Board member, I want to share information about the current situation in hopes of preventing unforeseen negative consequences in our community.

1. Our school board and district administrators have your children’s best interest at heart. I know firsthand that they want what is best for our kids.
2. The mask mandate is out of our control, as a school district and community.
3. By unenrolling students, you are not hurting the governor — you are hurting our community.
4. Unenrolling students will reduce jobs in our district, taking jobs away from talented educators, whose skills/experience are in high demand right now.
5. LGSD money benefits the community beyond primary wages, and by decreasing the district’s enrollment numbers you will hurt local businesses, force people to leave and decrease the number of opportunities for our children.
6. Important programs in the school district, such as music, sports, clubs, etc., will have to be cut because of decreased enrollment.
7. “Boycotting” the district will not impact the governor or the new mask mandate.

In conclusion, unenrolling your students will not force a change in policy (set by the governor in Salem). Rather, unenrolling your students will hurt our community.

If you are angry about the mask mandate and concerned about its impact on your students, take your fight to the governor. She is the only one who can change it.

Michelle Perry
La Grande

Future could be dark for Union County

I was in search of a new career with real growth potential and exceptional earnings, so I responded to an ad on a match-book cover for the Acme School of Fortune-Telling. They promised a real job after a three-month intensive course. I graduated magna cum laude and embarked on my new career. A real advantage of this business is its portability. I could set up my booth (decorated like a haunted house), two folding chairs, an old card table and a patchouli-scented candle almost anywhere.

My market research told me I would be overwhelmed with customers so I flipped a coin and determined to read only the futures of participants who were unmasked and not vaccinated for the COVID-19 virus. I knew in La Grande and Union County there

would be many takers. I had confidence that the masked and vaccinated had futures mostly so bright they’d have to wear shades.

I was taught to divine the fortunes of these potential unfortunates using the customary tools of the trade: a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention app on my iPhone, a Magic 8 Ball fortune-telling sphere, a magnifying glass to better read palms, a thermometer, online COVID-19 statistics for Union County and my own well-developed intuition.

It was easy for me to discern with my taught techniques members of the Union County Freedom Alliance, avid supporters of the sheriff’s arrogant letter to the governor, “died” in the wool “aunty”-vaxxers, Don’t Tread on Me flag wavers, believers in conspiracy theories and folks who just plain didn’t give a dang for the health and well-being of their neighbors and fellow community members.

I prefer to think of myself as a generally kind and thoughtful person so I resolved not to inform these individuals that they could spread the COVID-19 virus, possibly fall deathly ill themselves, maybe condemn fellow community members to a hospital stay or land an unknown person on their deathbed.

I fervently wish I could fold my fortune-teller’s tent. But in the end you don’t need a seer to tell you how it’s going to go. The future is looking pretty dark for La Grande and Union County. Please get your shots and mask up.

M.R. Rosenbaum
La Grande

Wearing a mask is a small price to pay for freedom

Local leaders have used freedom as an argument against mask mandates. While I agree that masks are unpleasant, I don’t agree that they infringe on the freedoms granted to me in the U.S. Constitution. Using that terminology in opposition to a widely accepted public health recommendation is a disservice to our community.

As Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen knows, unchecked freedom is chaos. His job is to uphold law and order, and these are achieved by limiting freedom to a narrower band in which our lives are more predictable and safe. Laws, rules and mandates provide a protected space in which we can enjoy our rights to self-expression, community and enterprise. In this country, freedom has never been carte blanche to do anything we want. We accept this limited version of freedom because, for the most part, it gives more than it takes away.

It is often said in times of war that “freedom isn’t free” — freedom costs money, human life and constant vigilance to

uphold. Here, in the war against a deadly and highly contagious virus, freedom is equally expensive. Either it will cost our community more lives, personal suffering, medical debt and stress to small business, or it will cost each of us the discomfort of wearing a mask. Either way, it won’t be free.

In America, freedom is a set of mutually beneficial limitations, and it always has a price. I hope our leaders will acknowledge that masks are the cheaper way to uphold freedom in our COVID-19 world.

Sarah West
Cove

Sheriff pledged to protect all of us

Cody Bowen, the sheriff of Union County, pledged to protect all of us when he took the oath of office. He is not protecting me, an immunocompromised citizen, when he writes a letter against a mask mandate for children in our schools. He does not get to choose which laws he enforces. The governor took the hard stance to declare the mask mandate because local officials did not have the fortitude to protect our community by declaring the mask mandate themselves.

Why this issue is a problem is beyond my understanding. We stop at stop signs, wear seat belts and obey speed limits and a host of other laws every day. Those laws were made to protect us all from accidents with possible loss of life. Wearing masks is no different. Let’s act like mature adults and protect our community from COVID-19 spread so we can get back to normal. The freedom to go maskless encroaches on my freedom to live as safely as possible.

Sharon Porter
La Grande

Opinions don’t matter to a virus

I am appalled by the conversations I am hearing in response to our current spike in coronavirus sicknesses and deaths. This virus has only one purpose: to replicate itself. And it’s very good at that.

Our only weapons to stop that attack are to wear a mask, keep physically distant and be vaccinated to lessen the impact on our bodies. There is no valid opinion that changes these biological facts.

We have proven that shouting opinions only keeps us from being safe. Opinions don’t matter to a virus, only replication. And so far the virus is winning by attacking everyone: young, old, compromised or healthy.

Our choices are clear. Talking it to death is having no effect. Mask, vaccinate, distance and sanitize. The goal is to stay alive.

Arlene Young
La Grande

LETTERS

- The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish consumer complaints against businesses, personal attacks against private individuals or comments that can incite violence. We also discourage thank-you letters.
- Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed and carry the author’s name, address and phone number (for verification only). We will not publish anonymous letters.
- Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.
- Submission does not guarantee publication, which is at the discretion of the editor.

SEND LETTERS TO:
letters@lagrandeobserver.com
or via mail to Editor, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50

You can save up to 55% off the single-copy price with home delivery.

Call 800-781-3214 to subscribe.

Subscription rates:

Monthly Autopay	\$10.75
13 weeks.....	\$37.00
26 weeks.....	\$71.00
52 weeks	\$135.00

THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

The Observer retains ownership and copyright protection of all staff-prepared news copy, advertising copy, photos and news or ad illustrations. They may not be reproduced without explicit prior approval.

COPYRIGHT © 2021

Phone: 541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Observer,
911 Jefferson Ave.,
La Grande, OR 97850

STAFF

Regional publisher.....	Karrine Brogotti	Multimedia journalist.....	Alex Wittwer
Regional circulation director	Kelli Craft	Home delivery advisor	Amanda Fredrick
Interim editor	Andrew Cutler	Advertising representative	Juli Bloodgood
News clerk	Lisa Lester Kelly	Advertising representative	Amy Horn
Reporter	Dick Mason	National accounts coordinator	Devi Mathson
Reporter	Davis Carbaugh	Graphic design.....	Dorothy Kautz
Intern	Carlos Fuentes	Page design	Martha Allen

A division of

eoMEDIA group

eomediagroup.com