

OUR VIEW

# A welcome reversal on football

**B**rad Dunten and Josh Cobb talked, and people listened. The winners are high school football players in some of Oregon's tiniest towns.

Dunten, the athletic director at Powder Valley High School in North Powder, and Cobb, the school's head football coach, were dismayed by a recent proposal from a state committee to do away with eight-man football, the format that Powder Valley and dozens of other Class 1A schools have used for decades.

The Oregon School Activities Association's (OSAA) Football Ad Hoc Committee made that recommendation on Dec. 20. The committee's plan would have switched to either a nine-man or a six-man football format for the state's smaller high schools.

The proposal prompted immediate opposition from Dunten and Cobb, who had, less than a month earlier, watched Powder Valley play Adrian in a classic Class 1A state championship game at Baker High School, a thrilling contest in which Adrian rallied to win 46-38.

Dunten dispatched a survey to 95 Class 1A schools, which are fairly evenly distributed, geographically speaking, in the state, including more than a dozen in Northeastern Oregon.

The response was overwhelmingly in favor of keeping the eight-man format. School officials who answered Dunten's survey mentioned, among other reasons for their preference, that the eight-man format is well-suited to the number of players who normally turn out for football at Class 1A schools, and that it allows schools to schedule games against teams from neighboring states that also play eight-man football rather than the nine-man format.

"Eight-man just feels right," Cobb said.

Dunten was among the Class 1A school officials who expressed their concerns during the OSAA committee's Jan. 5 meeting.

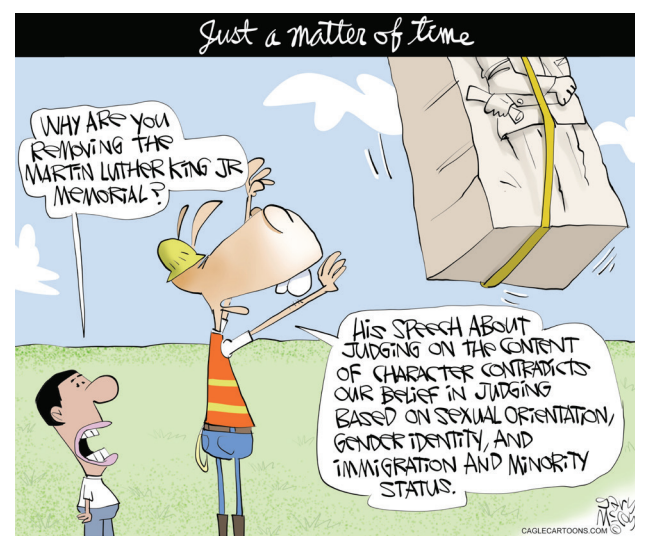
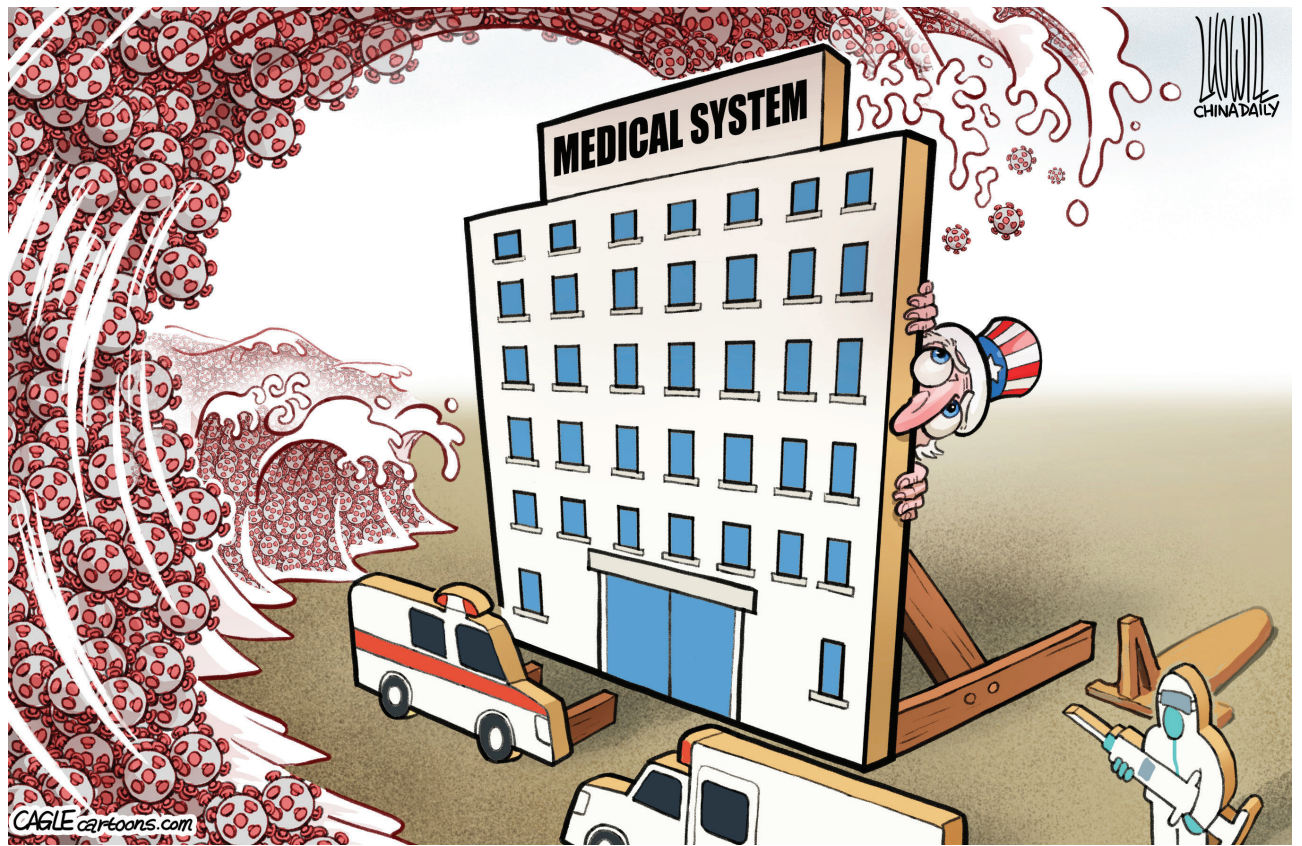
Two days later the committee announced that it supported continuing the eight-man format for Class 1A schools.

The six-man option, which has been in place for the past few years, would continue for the smallest schools or those that have too few players for eight-man competition. Baker County's three Class 1A schools — Pine Eagle, Huntington and Burnt River — already play six-man football.

The OSAA executive board has yet to approve the committee's revised recommendation. But it should be an easy choice.

Thanks to Dunten's efforts, the schools most directly affected by the committee's earlier proposal to do away with eight-man football have made explicit their feelings on the matter.

The committee acknowledged those schools' preferences, and the OSAA should make it official.



# A sense of place in the Blue Mountains



**BILL ANEY**  
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

**T**here is a place along the upper Grande Ronde River that has a hold on my heart. As a kid, I would camp there with my grandfather, him teaching me to build a fire, split kindling, play gin rummy, flip pancakes ("belly gaskets" he would call them) and fish for trout. Imagine the patience it must take to teach a 10-year-old how to cast a fly.

I was a city kid, raised in Portland and Corvallis, but every summer I would spend several weeks with my grandparents in Northeastern Oregon. I see now that these experiences and places led me to make life choices that have always brought me back to the Blue Mountains. My education, summer jobs and career moves kept returning me to this place that feels like home.

In an incredible stroke of luck, one of my first Forest Service jobs was as a fire prevention technician, patrolling an area that included the upper Grande Ronde. A campground had been developed where grandpa used to park his trailer, the lodgepole pine forest had been ravaged by pine beetles, and eventually the river was no longer stocked with native hatchery trout, but I still felt a great attachment to this landscape.

Each day I visited with campers, fishers and woodcutters and shared with them stories of my summers in the same spot, pointing out good fishing holes, access roads and spring sources — and, of course, spreading the fire prevention message.

Social scientists have a term for this special feeling I have for the upper Grande Ronde. It is called

"sense of place" and refers to the characteristics of a place that make it special or unique or that create in people a sense of attachment and belonging. My childhood experiences created for me a primal landscape, and it is common for exposure to natural landscapes to influence our preferences later in life. That certainly held true for me.

Have you ever driven by a house where you lived as a kid and felt a rush of memories, sights and sounds? That's sense of place. Do you choose to camp in the same location every hunting season, perhaps your grandparents' hunting campsite, even when the hunting success doesn't live up to the memories of your youth? That tug is your sense of place, and it's important. During my career I was sometimes frustrated by my agencies' inability to close roads, even when the roads were reducing the value of wildlife habitat or damaging soil and water quality. It seemed like every two-track road in the forest led to someone's traditional family hunting camp.

Some elements of the sense of place are cultural, referring to the attachment of a people or culture to an environment or homeland. I don't compare my own feelings of sense of place with the connections that Native people have to their ancestral lands, as my connection only runs one or two generations deep and doesn't include the land providing for the needs of my ancestors — nor was it ever taken from them. But I do respect that Native people have a long and spiritual connection to the land, and I appreciate the significance of their work to restore the capacity of the land and waters to provide for them. It must be a powerful emotional experience to see salmon return to a stream that one's ancestors used to fish, or to

pick huckleberries in areas known through family oral history.

We spend plenty of time in inauthentic locations, places that could be put anywhere. Strip malls, fast food restaurants, large box stores and downtown areas that have been converted to tourist traps or heavy commercial use all lose their ability to connect to people with a sense of place. Gertrude Stein visited the site where her childhood home and farm once stood, and upon seeing that the land had been converted to housing developments, summarized her feelings by saying "there is no there there." This certainly is the antithesis of the sense of place; I sense in her writing a mourning for the loss of part of her own identity.

To be sure, the upper Grande Ronde is not the only place that evokes strong feelings for me. There is a lake in the Wallows I call "spread your ashes worthy" because of its sheer beauty. Hayward Field in Eugene is a place that holds special memories for me as a track and field athlete, coach and spectator. Even the sidewalk in front of the Great Pacific has a special place in my heart because of the many summer Friday evenings I have spent there with good friends.

As an adult, I have visited and fished the upper Grande Ronde with my own family. The day is coming soon when I will be able to take my grandchildren to the same place, and I look forward to setting up a camp, cooking belly gaskets, building a campfire, playing in the river, and helping them catch trout on a fly.

I suspect these experiences will bring a tear or two to my eye; such is the power of sense of place.

*Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.*

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