

OUR VIEW

Fair project deserves full funding

Funding for a sewer project at the Union County Fairgrounds is thankfully a priority for local officials, but the region's state representatives at the Legislature need to step up and find a way to get the project funded.

Now, the Union County Fair Board and the Union County Board of Commissioners are searching for funds for the project that would connect the sewage from the fairgrounds to the city system.

Now, there are no working restrooms at the fairgrounds and needed money is spent on portable toilets for events.

The situation is, frankly, deeply troubling and should be unacceptable to every voter living in Union County. That's because the fairgrounds represent more than just a patch of grass and some barns and other buildings. The fairgrounds should be a critical pillar in the county's tourism toolbelt. The yearly fair is, in many respects, a big deal for 4H and FFA students and for the public. The fair marks a final celebration before the advent of fall and the start of school and is a time of celebration.

For this facility to be without proper restrooms because of a lack of funding is not only tragic but food for thought as to how this situation developed in the first place and why the facility apparently has had to beg for funding.

But those are questions for a later time. The good news now is local officials see the problem and are doing what they can to fix it. Preliminary estimates show the sewer line project will cost approximately \$2 million. There is the possibility that the Oregon Legislature will distribute \$10 million to fairs among all 36 Oregon counties. Union County's cut of that money would be about \$270,000.

Of course, that isn't going to accomplish the goal of getting the sewer system fixed by itself, and that is where our state representatives need to step in. They can — and should — advocate at the state level to find more money for this important project. There are no guarantees they will be successful, but no one will know until they try.

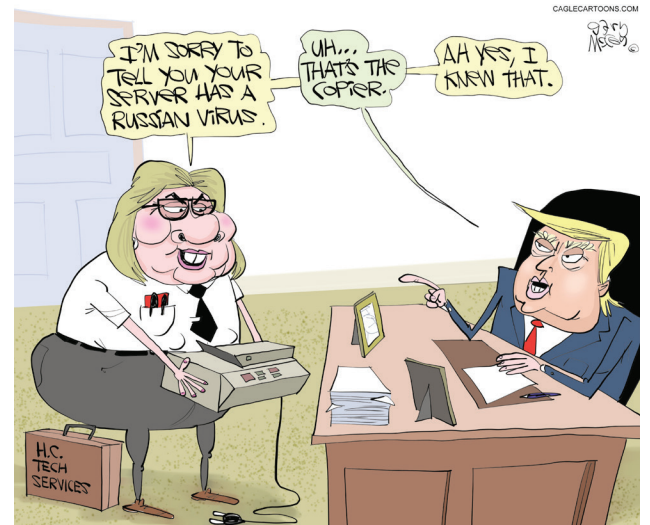
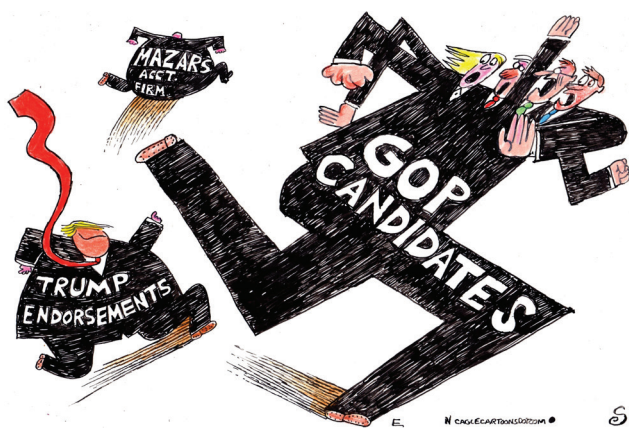
The sewer project at the fairgrounds needs to be going as soon as possible. The voters of Union County deserve to have a fairground that is functional in all aspects.

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OTHER VIEWS

Why winter matters to us



MARC AUSTIN
EYE TO THE SKY

Winter weather can be very inconvenient. The intrusion of cold air, coupled with either fog or low clouds, makes for dreary outdoor weather, which isn't optimal for being outside.

When storm systems sweep in, whether it's cold enough for snow to fall in the low elevations or not, there are frequently major travel impacts through the mountain passes, and if snow happens to impact any of the airports in the region, these travel impacts can have a domino effect. No matter how you slice it, winter weather can be downright annoying at times.

It can also present some great recreation opportunities if you happen to enjoy winter sports like skiing, snowboarding or snowmobiling, but that's for another article. We often hear the statement "keep the snow up in the mountains where it belongs" for that very reason.

As frustrating as it may be trying to plan outdoor events or slipping and sliding as you make your way through town, winter is critical for the stability of our climate in the Inland Northwest. Unlike areas west of the Cascades that

regularly receive precipitation into the spring and summer months, areas east of the Cascades struggle to get much beneficial rainfall after mid-June, leaving multiple consecutive months of hot dry weather.

While this is a normal seasonal cycle, if we don't get enough precipitation (rain, snow, ice, etc.) during the winter, we find ourselves experiencing unusually hot dry summers and worsening drought conditions. This can also lead to longer, more active wildfire seasons.

The western U.S. has been in the midst of a multi-year drought. Drought is no stranger to the region, largely due to the dry continental nature of our climate and the rain shadow (area that receives little rain due to blocking by mountains) east of the Cascades. Despite these influences, extreme to exceptional drought year after year is rare, and it has a number of negative effects on the region.

For one, drought is profoundly impactful on agriculture, including crops, livestock and farmers and ranchers and their families. These directly impact the regional and national economy, especially items the Inland Northwest is known for, such as wheat, peas, apples and potatoes. Another more short-term aspect of lacking precipitation in the winter months deals with wildfires and their

frequency during the summer and autumn months. With little soil moisture, the vegetation that fuels wildfires, such as grasses, shrubs and even trees, dry out and cure much more rapidly.

This leads to an earlier onset of conditions favoring the spread and maintenance of wildfires, meaning the fire season is longer than it otherwise might be given a wetter winter. Those who live in fire-prone areas are at a greater risk of experiencing fire near their homes. Even those who may not be directly impacted by fire are likely to see indirect impacts to air quality due to expansive smoke, as many in the Pacific Northwest have experienced over the last few years.

So the next time you're itching to head outside and catch some sun, but instead find yourself facing fog and low clouds, or snowy icy conditions, take a minute to appreciate the winter weather. It really is our water-supply lifeline, aiding our agricultural interests, alleviating or regulating drought and preventing our fire and smoke seasons from becoming so severe.

Marc Austin is a warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Pendleton. He leads outreach and weather preparedness programs and engages the media, emergency management and public safety communities.

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

GOVERNOR

Kate Brown
160 State Capitol
900 Court St.
Salem, OR 97301-4047
503-378-4582

REPRESENTATIVES

Bobby Levy, District 58
900 Court St. NE, H-376
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1458
Rep.BobbyLevy@state.or.us

Greg Smith, District 57
900 Court St. NE, H-482
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1457
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

SENATOR

Bill Hansell, District 29
900 Court St. NE, S-415
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1729
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

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Phone:
541-963-3161

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

Email:
news@lagrandeobserver.com

POSTMASTER
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The Observer,
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