

OUR VIEW

Oregon mired in political swamp

It is time for Oregon voters to get serious about what exactly they want represented in the governor's office.

Those of us who follow the governor's race all know who the main players are, and we all know that — for the most part — each of those candidates is firmly entrenched in the values of their party. The Democratic candidates toe the party line as do the GOP hopefuls. Some are somewhat middle of the road in their devotion to dogma and others are far to the left or far to the right. Mostly what voters hear is the same old wide-sweeping proclamations triggered by events — and concepts — first rolled out onto the national political stage.

Yet there is a barely detectible undercurrent of discomfort out there among voters. A sense that the old ways of doing business are beginning to falter. A feeling that party politics are fine but only as far as they can go and now they are not going far enough.

From our standpoint the avenue of party politics doesn't seem to answer the pressing questions of our day but, instead, create more division and more strife. Now, much of that we concede is front-loaded into the very nature of our political system, which is based on a competitive template. Also, the primaries in Oregon are set firmly within party bounds.

We recognize those factors, but it seems to be more and more evident that voters are growing weary of the same old dogma and venom spat between lawmakers. Instead of careful political compromise — a hallmark of our system — for the past decade, the norm has been for lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to die on every single political hill they encounter. There is no cooperation on the big issues but only a war to the knife.

That means voters are not served well.

Lawmakers surely would disagree and point to countless successes and examples of bipartisanship. Again, there is some validity to the notion lawmakers do often work together. But "often" isn't good enough anymore. Voters — except for those on the lunatic fringe of both parties — are weary of the same old fighting with little getting done. Perhaps that feeling by many is simply a perception but in this case perception is reality.

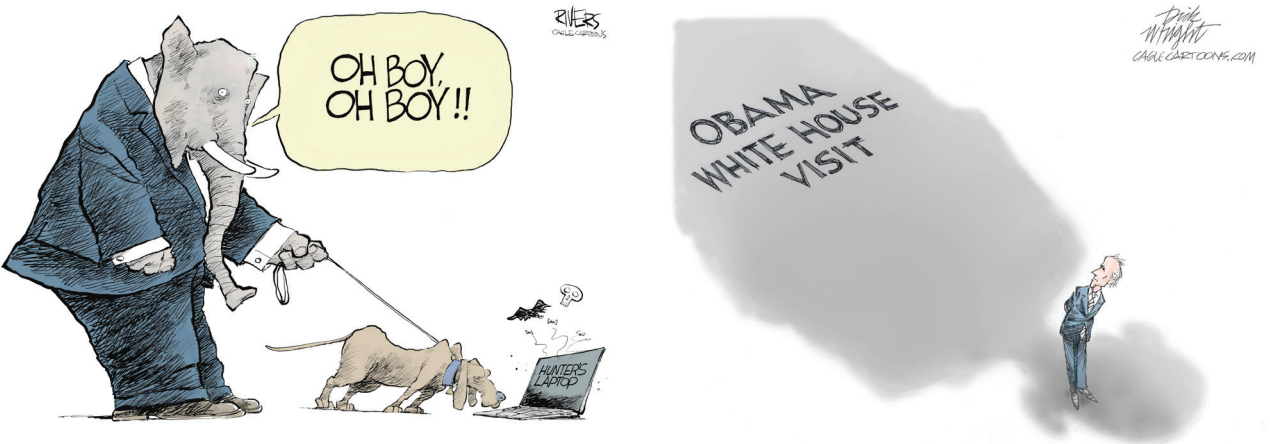
Oregon needs a middle-of-the-road governor who isn't beholden to a party, who will get things done, who sees all sides. That, we realize, is going to be a tall order. But we believe it is the only way forward for a state mired in a political swamp.

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How to get a deer across the road



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

Life as a deer or elk in the Blue Mountains can't be easy. Imagine you are part of a herd that is on a traditional migration route from Mount Emily summer habitat to winter range in the foothills of the Blue Mountains.

As your herd moves south toward the Meacham area, you are faced with a gauntlet: railroad tracks, multiple fences, 100 feet of a four-lane freeway with speeding vehicles, guardrails and a high concrete median barrier.

Eons of natural selection and evolution have not equipped your herd to handle these obstacles. Panic sets in as the innate drive to move south and downhill pushes you to negotiate the hazards. Potential catastrophe looms; your herd is no match for the herd of 40-ton semi-trucks moving at 60 mph.

Wild free-ranging animals encounter this type of dangerous dilemma every day. Unlike the challenges of finding food, water and shelter, avoiding predators, successfully breeding and tending for their young, the challenges of railroads and highways are entirely man-made.

In a rare show of bipartisanship and partnership between rural and urban Oregon, and with the help of science, conservation and government groups, Oregonians are beginning to address this problem. This past month the state Legislature identified \$7 million for the Oregon Department of Transportation to create safe highway crossings for wildlife in priority areas identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The projects can be expensive, and the state funds will likely be used as seed money to match federal dollars available from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to get more crossings completed.

This work is broadly supported by Oregonians, with more than 80% of rural citizens and 98% of urban folks agreeing that installing safe wildlife crossings is a good idea. There's no urban/rural divide on this question.

The crossings pay for themselves. It is estimated that there are 7,000 collisions between vehicles and deer in Oregon each year, causing an annual average of \$44 million in damages, 700 human injuries and two deaths. A recently completed wildlife underpass project on Highway 97 near Sunriver reduced deer/vehicle collisions by 85% in the area, a migration corridor between the Cascades and the high desert winter range. At an average economic cost of \$6,500 for each deer/vehicle collision (\$8,500 for elk), the \$1.6 million crossing project seems like a wise use of taxpayer dollars.

I also found it tremendously refreshing to see how the expertise of different entities came together to solve this problem. To help set priorities for wildlife crossings, ODFW collared and tracked 1,000 deer in Northeastern Oregon since 2015. This data was used to learn how deer are migrating in the Blues, how they respond to two- and four-lane highways, and the locations of the most important crossing areas.

For their part, ODOT is tracking wildlife collisions and monitoring the effectiveness of constructed crossings.

A collaborative group called the Oregon Action Team on Ungulate Migration has helped prioritize needed crossing projects and pro-

vided credible public information about this work.

As a result of this cooperation and collaboration, the Meacham area is among those in the state identified as a high priority for work. ODFW data shows a wildlife migration corridor crossing Interstate 84, and ODOT has identified this as a collision hot spot in the Blues. Other migration corridors cross Highway 395 south of Pendleton, Highway 26/395 in the John Day valley and locations on I-84 between La Grande and Baker City.

Wildlife crossing projects won't eliminate the risk of collision with deer and elk, and drivers bear some responsibility to reduce the risk. According to an ODOT campaign, drivers should recognize the peak times of deer movement (early mornings and evenings in spring and fall), remain alert for eye-shine, expect every animal crossing the road to be followed by more, and use a long blast on the horn to warn animals you see.

(By the way, those bumper-mounted deer whistles are evidently useless, according to separate research projects conducted in Georgia and Utah.) If an animal is on the road, don't swerve to avoid it but instead brake firmly. And of course, wear your seat belt.

There is no way to have a highway system that doesn't bisect traditional migration routes. If we want to have thriving deer and elk herds, it's on us to figure out a way to reduce the impact of roads on wildlife, including the risk of collision. We should be applauding the collaborative work of Oregonians, agencies, politicians and nongovernmental organizations to give wildlife a safe way across these barriers.

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

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