

OUR VIEW

Next governor must have plan for education

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Let's repeat that.

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Plenty of goals, plans, programs and initiatives are out there. Almost every legislative session, something new and different gets passed. State employees and school district officials then go off to add the latest churn on top of the churn.

Having a broad, statewide plan is no guarantee of success. But Oregon does need a long-term approach to education goals. It needs measurements. It needs reporting requirements. It needs specifics about how funding gets us to goals and how new initiatives fit in.

Much of that exists. What is missing is how it all fits together in a detailed road map for the future. Any state plan should be heavy on goals and providing performance data and easy on district flexibility to reach goals. There would also need to be a mechanism for accountability.

What are our candidates for governor going to do? They can reflect parental dissatisfaction easily enough. What are their plans for statewide improvement? Do they believe Oregon needs a statewide education road map?

Oregon's public education is far from a mess in every classroom in every school district. It succeeds for many students. And not every education problem is directly related to bad teachers, bad curriculum or poor education investments.

But Oregon's public education system does have problems. Here are some facts from a new state audit of public education:

- Less than 25% of Oregon students meet proficiency standards in math in 11th grade.
- Oregon's graduation rate may be improving, but it is still near the bottom in the nation.
- A statewide review in 2020 found only a third of Oregon children eligible for early intervention special education programs had access to them.
- Many of the students who are performing poorly in the system are minorities or low income.

Oregon is getting its level of performance with more recent investment in education. Measure 98 was passed in 2016 to increase graduation rates and career readiness. It was essentially another \$800 per high school student per year. Oregon also established a corporate activity tax in 2019 to bring in what was hoped to be an extra \$1 billion a year to improve education in early childhood and K-12.

We are going to have that new governor in not so very many months. It looks like Oregonians will have three major candidates to choose from: Democrat Tina Kotek, independent Betsy Johnson and Republican Christine Dragan. Which one would be the most likely to deliver a plan for improving K-12 education and pull it off? We don't see anything like that on their campaign websites. Should it be?

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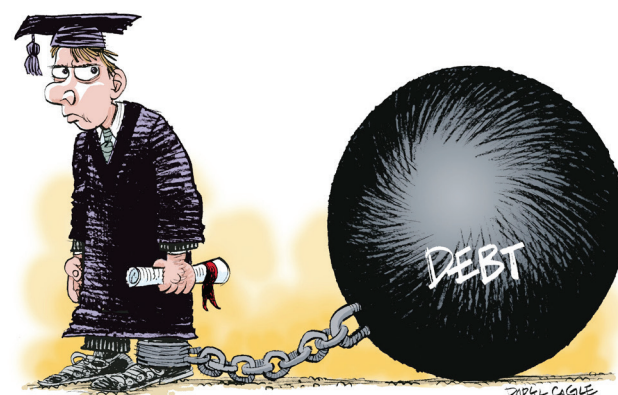
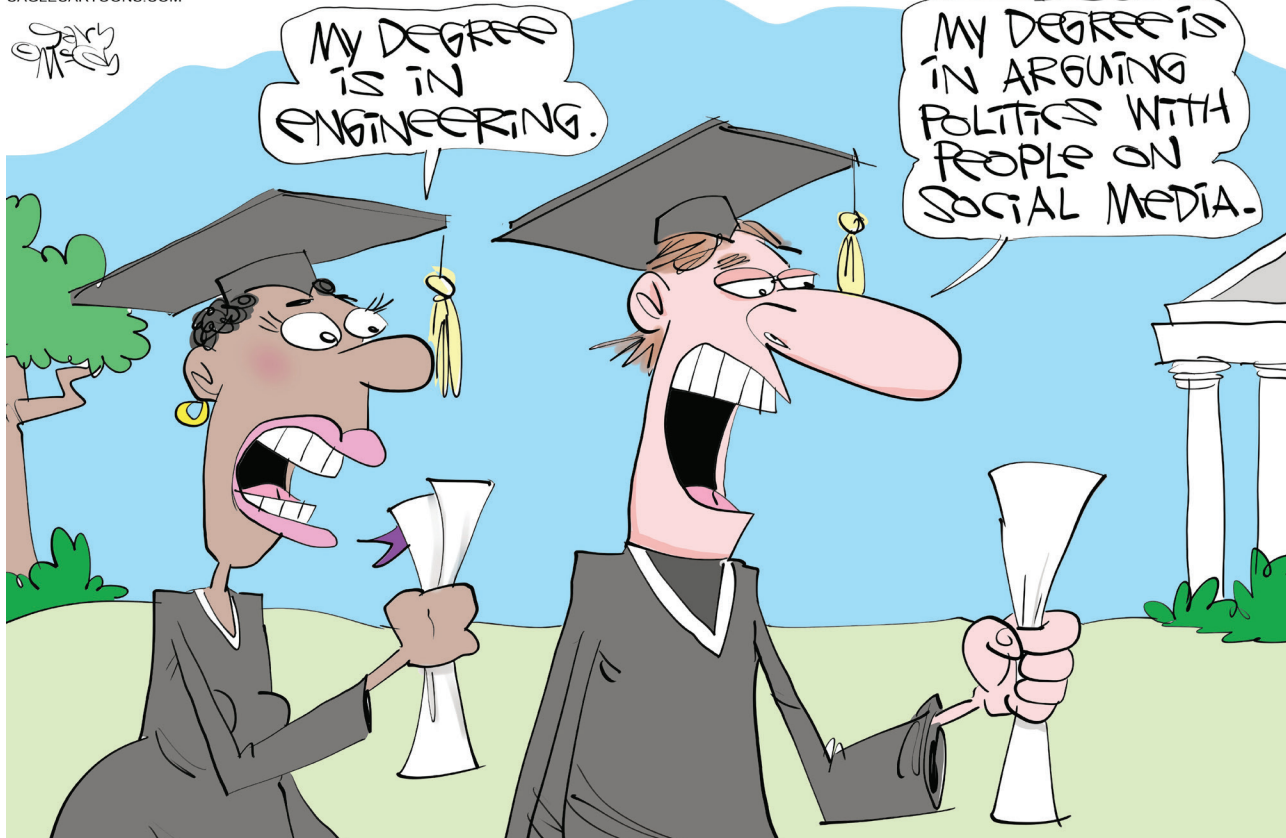
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State's forest collaborations are a sham



ROB KLAVINS
OTHER VIEWS

Here in Eastern Oregon, our identity and way of life are deeply connected to our public lands. Landscapes of deep canyons, snow-capped peaks, dense forests and deserts are quite literally our backyard.

They provide clean cold water, abundant wildlife, freedom and a core piece of our identity.

In post-colonial times, our relationship with the land has been based on what we can take from it. Thankfully, many of us are rethinking that relationship.

The idea of logging big old trees and intact forests runs counter to Oregonians' deepest held values. It also runs counter to science showing the irreplaceable values these forests provide. Keeping forests functioning is one of the best things we can do to slow climate change and the extinction crisis.

But change is hard. Romantic notions of Manifest Destiny persist, and many influential voices are intent on trying to move into the future with their eyes glued to the rearview mirror. The now-infamous West Bend project is an example of the conflict that creates.

When a biker noticed blue paint on some big old pines — meaning they were slated for logging — on a popular trail near Bend, the nature-loving city became embroiled in conflict. That frustration was justified.

Aggressive logging

But the West Bend project is not an isolated case, nor is it the most egregious.

Across Eastern Oregon, timber sales billed as “restoration,” “thinning,” “fuels reduction” and “collaboration” are decimating our forests. Too often, they are just labels applied to justify the same aggressive logging that many Oregonians thought we moved past long ago.

It's partly our fault. As the “timber wars” came to an

end, and environmental safeguards were put into place, we played a major role in creating forest collaboratives. These groups sought to bring interested parties together to find common ground and guide public agencies to develop projects. As a state that prides itself on our green values, and ability to get along — some call it “the Oregon Way” — it seemed like the right thing to do.

Collaboratives initially focused on restoring forests damaged by logging, fire suppression and overgrazing. They worked to protect healthy forests, clean water, old growth and wildlife habitat. Many succeeded. Fast-forward to today.

Environmental protections have been eroded and extractive interests have taken over. Most collaboratives prioritize getting to “yes” for its own sake.

Anything other than greenwashing Forest Service logging projects has become controversial. Rural politicians, timber executives and extractive interests run the agenda and marginalize those without a financial interest. Anything not involving chainsaws and bulldozers is not worth discussing.

That's why the Willowa Whitman National Forest was able to invoke collaboration to get away with logging centuries-old trees in the Lostine “safety” project. The results were lawsuits and an increased fire risk.

Now the same planners are doubling down with the Morgan Nesbitt Project, which would nearly clear-cut virgin forests from the edge of the Eagle Cap Wilderness into the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.

The Umatilla National Forest proposed logging over 27,000 acres of pristine forests and some of the biggest trees in Eastern Oregon on the Ellis Project. Next door, with no environmental analysis, they are developing Parkers Mill, which would allow more logging of roadless forests than has occurred across the lower 48 in the last two decades combined.

Last summer, we bore witness to old-growth logging in a project called Big Mosquito. The project's stated goal was to thin small trees to protect old growth from fire. It was

touted as yet another success of the Blue Mountains Forest Partners Collaborative. But once the celebrations subsided and the logging equipment rolled in, the big old trees were considered a danger, splashed with blue paint and cut down. It was only due to diligent conservation advocates that we learned of the carnage. The collaborative and agency remain silent.

These projects are like West Bend, but over tens of thousands of acres and in places farther away from the watchful eye of the public and objective media outlets.

Over the last 20 years or so, tax dollars have rained down on these logging collaboratives. With the groups always eager to tell their success stories, and silence dissent, there's been little to no oversight.

Millions of dollars

The latest round of funding for “collaborative restoration” is counted in the tens of millions of dollars. It is being celebrated by the agency, collaborators and decision makers. If folks like U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley are serious about their commitments to protecting our forests, slowing climate change and supporting healthy rural communities, they need to put sideboards in place, empower all members of the public and provide meaningful oversight and accountability. They also need to defend basic environmental protections.

One easy and concrete step would be to call on the Biden administration to restore long-standing protections for big and old trees called “the Screens” that were eliminated by the Trump administration just hours before Inauguration Day. This shouldn't be controversial.

Wyden rightly endorsed the president's Earth Day executive order to begin creating long-term protections for mature and old growth forests. He and Merkley need to do the work to ensure the Forest Service stops the bleeding now.

■ Rob Klavins is the Northeast Oregon field coordinator for Oregon Wild. He lives near Enterprise and helps run the family farm and business.

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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)

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

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