

OUR VIEW

A complicated issue that needs a resolution

Recent steps by area school officials to ensure students are safe should be good news to patrons and parents in light of the recent deadly Uvalde, Texas, massacre.

It is a deeply tragic fact that school shootings have become a part of our national consciousness, and the death toll continues to rise every year.

In Texas, 19 young students — children — were gunned down in yet another senseless binge of carnage and butchery.

The school shooting phenomenon is a huge subject, rife with competing theories, views and fewer solutions but the push to increase security in schools across the region — in places like Union or Wallowa counties — should bring a degree of comfort to parents and students.

Schools have added cameras, key cards and limited access over the past few years and learning centers have established protocols to respond to an emergency situation. Annual training of staff and drills for students are also another positive feature added at area schools.

Police are also deeply involved with mitigation efforts. For example, in La Grande, the police routinely add an extra patrol to school zones during the morning drop-off period.

That school and police officials are focused on such security measures is a good sign for our great communities.

The bigger question, though, is what can be done to stop the school shooting phenomenon. Punitive gun control measures are frequently mentioned as one step to stop the massacres but that suggestion is so loaded with local, state and constitutional issues it seems like too big a leap.

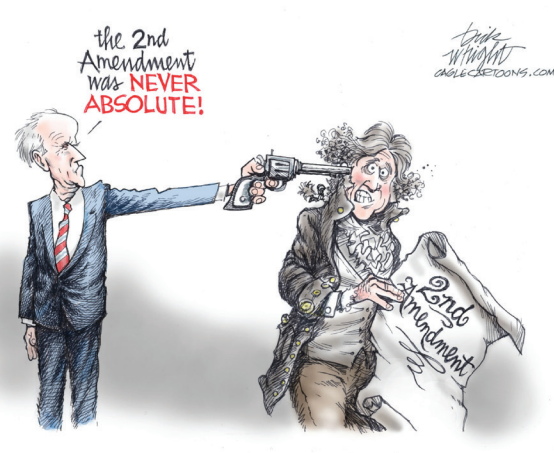
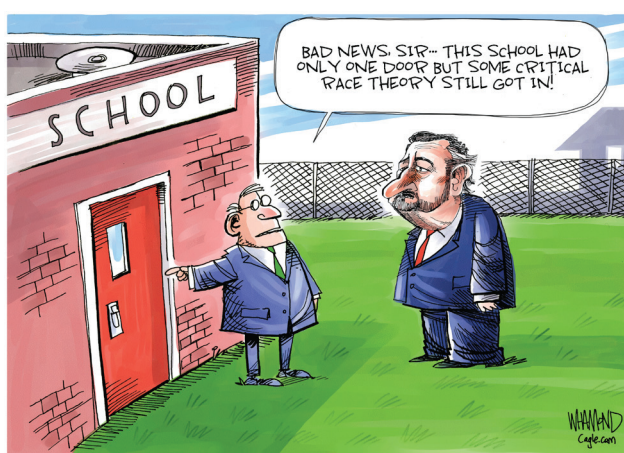
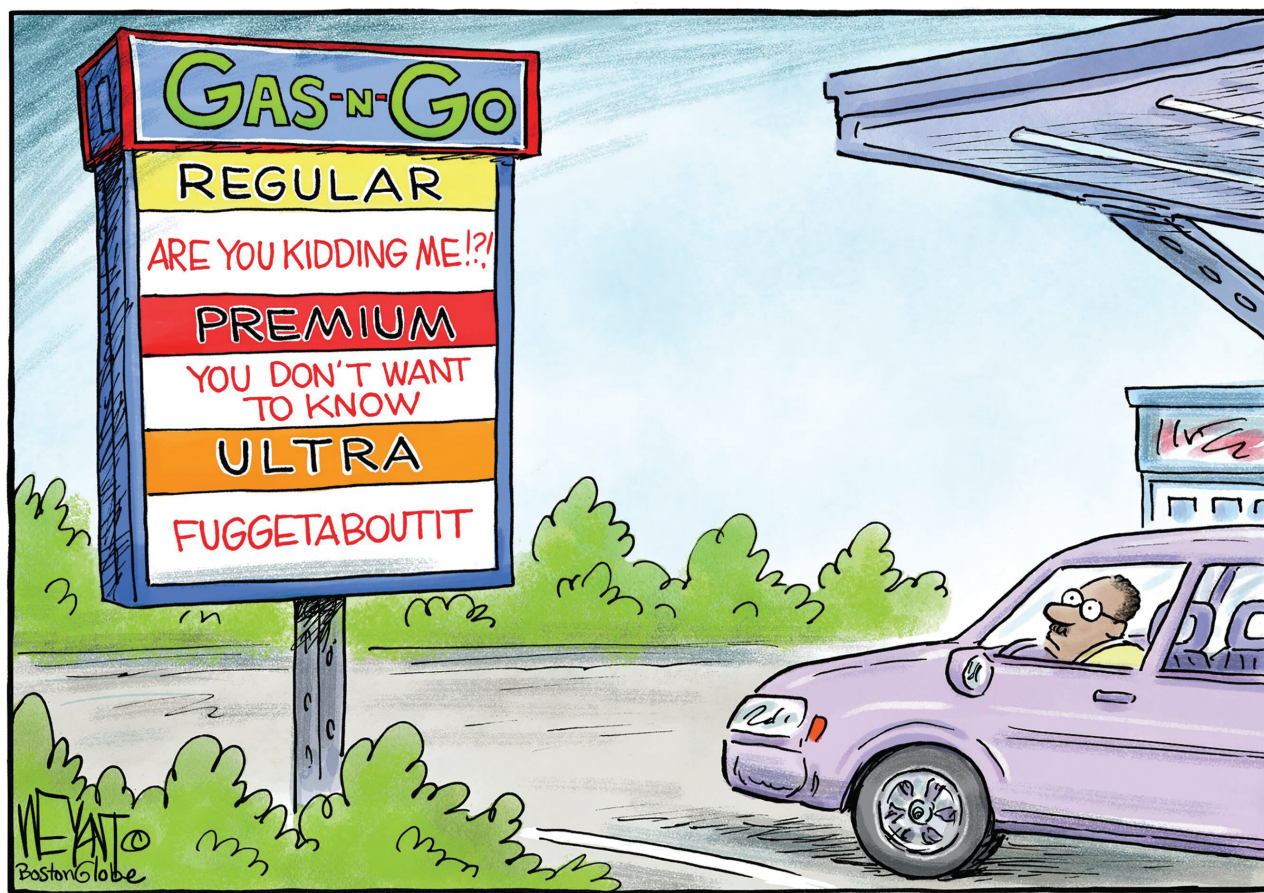
Better mental health infrastructure for youth appears to be a viable answer but, again, questions remain about how to implement such steps over a nationwide canvas.

There are plenty of laws on the books regarding guns and a fair question to ask is do we need even more such edicts?

Perhaps the question is too big, the implications too complicated to be solved easily or at all.

It seems, though, that for a nation that sent men to the moon and created grand infrastructure masterpieces should be able to find a method, a way forward, to eradicate school bloodbaths. We are a nation built on the ability to use ingenuity and know-how to achieve great things, yet we seem unable to collectively solve an ongoing problem such as school shootings.

Widespread and punitive gun control measures are not the answer and unconstitutional to boot. Yet, is there no other way to solve this ongoing problem?



Spring in the Blue Mountains



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

Springtime in the Blue Mountains; I am starting to think this is my favorite time of year.

One of my goals for this spring was to see a white-headed woodpecker, the only Oregon woodpecker not on my life list. After going public with my quest for a white-headed woodpecker sighting, a couple of folks gave me a good lead. So, one day in March I headed over to Cove, in Union County, where a resident had assured me she had this species of woodpecker at her feeders year-round.

Russ Morgan, a retired Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist and another birder, joined me in La Grande and we headed out with our binoculars and bird books.

The open forest of large diameter ponderosa pine felt like the right habitat, and I was optimistic about our chances. We wandered the property for 45 minutes or so in a light snow shower, spotting nut-hatches, chickadees and even a hairy woodpecker. Eventually two larger black and white birds showed up at one of the seed feeders, each grabbing a sunflower seed and flying to a nearby perch to crack and eat the morsel.

White-headed woodpecker, check.

On a different birding mission last spring, my wife and I found and photographed nesting great gray owls and watched as the young owlets made some of their first explorations away from their nest site. This winter, we visited a nighttime roost site for several hundred gray-crowned rosy finches. I love

these kinds of expeditions.

Bird-watching is usually a benign activity, but I must admit I also enjoy more consumptive outdoor spring pursuits. Morel season is upon us by now and people have been finding them along the Umatilla River and on the Umatilla National Forest. I so much enjoy the smell of morels sauteing in butter ready for my morning egg scramble. There's just something primal about that odor.

I also enjoy turkey hunting and use my meanderings during the spring gobbler season to monitor the timing of the mushroom crop. I understand that soil temperature is an important driver of mushroom fruiting, but one can also gauge the season by more right-brained cues like blooming wildflowers and singing birds.

The early blooming plants, such as grass widow and avalanche lily, may be a bit too soon for morels, but I noticed the other day that fairy slippers had started to bloom in the same places I was finding the morels. I have also been hearing and seeing chipping sparrows and mountain bluebirds but no warblers yet.

The other day we came across fresh wolf sign in our turkey hunting area. I suspect that wolves may be hard on turkey populations, as are coyotes, skunks, raccoons and other predators. However, I don't begrudge these animals the meal provided by a turkey or their eggs. These predators are native and belong here; the turkeys do not. If it comes down to a wild predator or me getting a turkey, the wild predator should have it.

Obviously, my opinion isn't shared by everyone. East of us, some people took it upon themselves to poison an entire pack of wolves in Union County and shoot several others in Baker and Union counties. The reward for information

leading to the arrest of these miscreants is substantial, perhaps enough to buy someone a new pickup, and I am hopeful that a tip will help bring those responsible to justice. By the way, the Turn in Poachers hotline number is 800-452-7888.

Simply put, killing wildlife out of season without a permit is poaching, and putting poison bait out in the field for any animal to find is incredibly irresponsible. The same for shooting wolves everywhere and every time they are seen. Wolves are currently on the federal threatened and endangered species list, which puts the federal government in the driver's seat.

If the wolf population was healthy enough to be removed from this list, management would revert to the state of Oregon, a better situation for all of us. Poisoning an entire pack or indiscriminately killing wolves on sight in the back country only delays the recovery of wolves and keeps the federal government in control.

I agree that we need to remove those that develop a taste for domestic livestock; let's call these the bad wolves. By the same token we need to allow the good wolves, those that stay out of trouble, to survive, reproduce and pass on their genes and good habits to future generations of wolves.

How did I get here? I didn't intend this column to end with a lecture about wolf management. Instead, I encourage everyone to take a walk in the woods. Get out there — whether in search of morels, turkeys, woodpeckers or owls, or just to revive your soul, take advantage of these bright sunny spring days in our loved Blue Mountains.

This land is our land — enjoy it.

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

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