

OUR VIEW

# A tip of the hat to the area's graduates

We salute the host of college and high school graduates who strolled across the stage this month, clutching their diplomas.

While graduation is certainly a recognized rite of passage, it is also a time of reflection and hope. Now, more than ever, we need every area graduate.

Lofty goals and sentiments are often legion during graduation — as they should be — but the basic fact remains that the nation, the state and the local community needs every one of those graduates to step out into the adult world with a goal to make a difference.

It may appear easy to dismiss the notion that a single person can make an impact, but the truth is each young man and woman who walks off the graduation stage this month can make a difference.

And we need those who want and can make a difference.

At a time when the nation is rife with division, where discord is consumed like an energy drink, America, Oregon, Union and Wallowa counties need young people who still retain the determination of their youth. People who are ready and eager to step up and seek change.

Our greatest resource as a nation is our youth.

Our prospects, our opportunities for success as a county, state and nation rest on the hopes and desires of our young people.

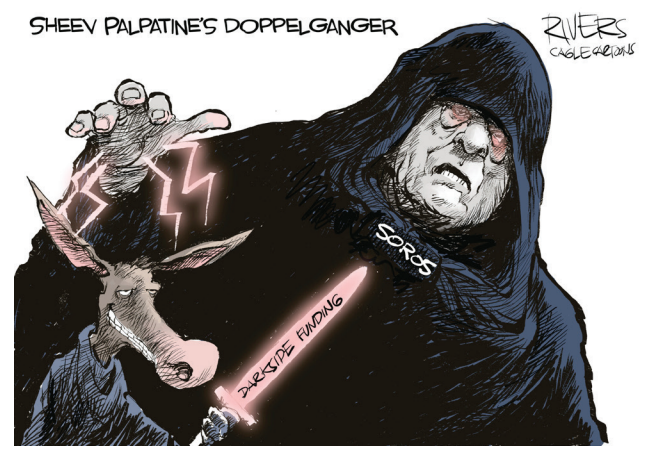
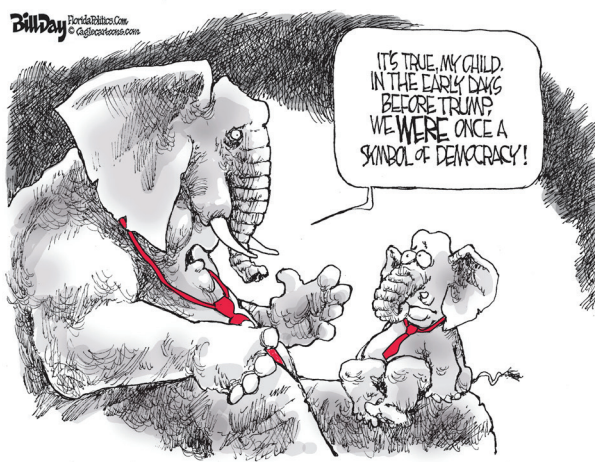
Our young are the agents of our future, and the potential they represent is as valuable as any new policy, law or idea.

Granted, we remain the greatest nation on Earth in terms of goals and values, and at no time in our shared history has chances of a happy life for our youth been more acute than now.

Yet challenges, risks, also remain for our youth. There is no way to deny that the obstacles the nation and the state face are significant. The perceived problems stack up easily, and solutions often are fleeting.

That is why the views, the ambitions, of those who have just graduated are so important to our collective prosperity. We need every one of the new graduates to feel they can make a difference, that they can help their community, their state and even their nation.

We salute every single graduate from Eastern Oregon University and all of our area high schools. We hope that they will be able to move ahead in life with a calm but steady resolve to give back to their community and spark change for the good of all.



# Anti-forestry lawsuit puts forests and communities at risk



NICK SMITH  
OTHER VIEWS

Six anti-forestry groups are suing to block a new policy that would make it a little easier for the U.S. Forest Service to reduce wildfire risks and restore forest health on national forestlands in Eastern Oregon and Washington. In doing so, their lawsuit affects several projects that would conduct hazardous fuel reduction on at least 209,000 acres of land that's vulnerable to severe fire.

The lawsuit aims to preserve an outdated and unscientific rule from the Clinton-era, known as the "Eastside Screens." It originally imposed a temporary rule prohibiting the removal of trees larger than 21 inches in diameter on national forests east of the Cascades, including the Malheur, Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Deschutes, Ochoco and Fremont-Winema.

With little public involvement and no scientific justification, this temporary and arbitrary rule became permanent when it was amended into the management plans as standards for these federally owned forests.

In theory, the rule was intended to protect and improve forest conditions associated with old and mature forest habitat. But in practice, it

made it harder for the Forest Service to remove tree species that compete with native pine and are less resilient to fire such as grand fir or white fir. This compelled the national forests in Eastern Oregon to pursue dozens of project-specific amendments to the 21-inch rule over the past 20 years in order to meet desired forest conditions.

This arbitrary rule created an expensive and time-consuming process, and as a result, the Forest Service has struggled to keep pace with the growing risks and restoration needs of these forests, which places a variety of forest values and uses at risk.

During the 30 years of this temporary rule, anti-forestry groups enjoyed the status quo because it tied the hands of our public lands managers. They could also use it to block restoration projects they did not like, even if the science-based treatments were supported by collaboratives with diverse interests.

Rather than accelerate the trajectory of forests toward a late-seral structure, as sound forest management would help accomplish, this temporary, arbitrary and unscientific rule created forest conditions that are unnaturally dense and exacerbate risk to wildfire, insect and disease infestations, and drought.

Rather than lifting this rule completely, the Forest Service made only modest changes to its policy. In January 2021, the agency adopted the

"Old Tree and Large Tree Guidelines," which includes diameter limits for tree removal ranging from 21 to 30 inches, depending on tree species, and an overarching age limit on tree removal of 150 years.

In announcing their lawsuit, anti-forestry groups labeled this modest change as a "Trump-era" rule allowing wholesale "logging of old growth." Yet the new guideline has given our public lands managers some flexibility to restore unhealthy forests by implementing science-based treatments that are appropriate to the landscape.

The Forest Service is using this new guideline to develop several projects on six national forests. One thing all of these projects have in common is their primary objective is not necessarily timber harvest, but hazardous fuels reduction and forest resiliency. Some projects are located in areas identified as Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) where the wildfire threat to communities is heightened.

It's unfortunate these groups would sue to block projects that would improve the health of our forests and reduce the risks to our public lands and nearby communities. As climate change continues to impact our forests, the Forest Service should be doing everything possible to prevent large-scale, carbon-emitting wildfires, while maximizing the ability of our forests to sequester more carbon and store more carbon in both healthy trees and wood products.

Nick Smith is the executive director of Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supporting active forest management on federal lands.

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