

Lawmaker: If set free, the Eastside would be economically strong

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It’s not surprising, or new. The issues change, but the division between Eastern and Western Washington — sometimes called the Cascade Curtain — predates statehood. As the pioneers debated how best to divvy up the Oregon Territory into states, they argued about East versus West.

More than 125 years later, some Eastside lawmakers want a re-do.

Kennewick Rep. Brad Klippert and Spokane Valley Rep. Matt Shea both introduced bills this year to study carving out a 51st state on the Eastside.

Shea said he was taking up the challenge of liberal pundits who opine the poorer Eastside holds back the Westside’s progressive agenda.

If set free, the Eastside, with its orchards, farms, ranches and minerals, would be economically strong, Shea said.

“Give us a chance to prove the naysayers wrong,” he argues.

Klippert complains the Westside has imposed such issues as gay marriage, recreational marijuana and gun control on the Eastside. For him, the last straw was the Seattle City Council dropping Columbus Day in favor of Indigenous Peoples Day.

“I have nothing against indigenous people, but that’s a rewriting of the history book,” he said.

“We constantly have to live by their principles and values, and I’m tired of it, and so are a lot of people,” Klippert said.

Neither Shea’s bill nor Klippert’s bill got a hearing.

Klippert said he won’t give up. “I’ll stand by this plan as long as I’m an elected official.”

Capital clout

The Eastside has clout in Olympia. Senate Majority Leader Mark Schoesler is a Ritzville farmer. But many state policies are determined by the governor and other statewide officeholders, elected Supreme Court justices or statewide ballot measures and initiatives promoted by Westside interests.

Adams County rancher Branden Spencer said Eastside legislators do well on issues particular to the region.

“But when it’s one of those issues that involves both sides of the state, it’s a lost cause for this side of the state,” he said.

For example, the ban on using hounds to hunt cougars was passed by initiative in 1996. Since then, lawmakers have eased the ban, but only



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Kennewick Republican Brad Klippert speaks March 3 on the Washington state House. He says he’ll stand for splitting the state as long as he’s in office.

for limited times in a few places.

Klickitat County Rancher Neil Kayser said the hound ban is an example of a Westside policy “trickling over the hill (and) we have to deal with it.”

“People on the Eastside are good stewards of the land, but we have to use the land,” he said. “If we were poor stewards ... we wouldn’t be in business.”

Kayser said he’d be for splitting the state.

“Don’t get me wrong, there are good people on the Westside,” he said. “We just have a different lifestyle and view on things.”

Howls of protest

Democratic Gov. Chris Gregoire, who didn’t carry a single Eastside county in the historically close 2004 election, adopted the state-uniting slogan. “One Washington.”

“What happened to that concept — One Washington — on the wolf issue?” asks Stevens County Commissioner Wes McCart. Ranchers in that northeastern Washington county have for years been dealing with wolf packs that attack their livestock.

McCart has pressed lawmakers to recognize that when it comes to wolves not all “stakeholders” have as much at stake.

“I think we have two categories of stakeholders: Those who want wolves and those who are living with wolves,” he told a House committee in February.

In an interview, McCart said he wished people on the Westside would “take the time to put themselves in the shoes of other folks.”

“I’d like for them to realize there’s the desire and fantasy (about wolves) and then there’s the reality. They’re living the desire and fantasy,

and we’re living the reality,” he said.

McCart has spoken in favor of taking a look at splitting the state. “It’s unfortunate we would ever have to have that conversation,” he said.

In 2005, a Senate committee held the last legislative hearing on dividing the state. The committee’s chairman, a Puyallup Democrat, said he wouldn’t move the bill along, but he wanted to give Eastside county commissioners a chance to air their grievances.

“We may entertain this bill every year,” said the chairman, Jim Kastama.

That didn’t satisfy Spokane Republican Bob McCaslin. He said Eastside residents wanted a new state, not an annual hearing.

“We’re about as serious as we can get about this bill,” he said.

‘Huge divide’

For Honeybee Awareness Day at the Capitol this month, Grant County beekeeper Tim Hiatt wore a tie, befitting someone on a business trip.

Hiatt is not a backyard beekeeper. He has 12,000 hives that pollinate California almonds in late winter before returning to Washington to pollinate tree fruit. His customers and neighbors are farmers. He’s not joining the push to ban pesticides to save bees, a position that has support among some Westside beekeepers who don’t provide pollinating services.

“For beekeepers, there’s a huge divide between east and west,” Hiatt said.

“I get frustrated with folks like the Sierra Club who want to clamp down on pesticide use,” Hiatt said. “I guess it’s a constant source of frustration. Those who want to restrict agriculture like to eat.”

Branden Spencer, the Adams County rancher, said he

felt the east-west divide in January at a meeting in Tumwater of the State Parks Commission.

The commission voted to charge agricultural producers to drive on state recreational trails that bisect their farms and ranches. Spencer has miles of trails crossing his land. Permits will come with conditions to prevent producers from getting in the way of hikers, cyclists and equestrians.

Spencer said parks commissioners didn’t “grasp how desolate the area we live in is.”

“It might as well be Egypt,” he said.

Historic splits

Before there was an east-west divide, there was a north-south divide, which was decisive in setting the Washington-Oregon border.

In 1851 and 1852, Oregon Territory residents north of the Columbia River held conventions to draw up a petition to ask Congress for their own territory. At the time the Oregon Territory included what would become the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and parts of Montana and Wyoming.

“The entire Legislative power is South of the Columbia River ... the South has no interest in common whatever with the North,” the petition stated. “The Inhabitants North of the Columbia River receive no benefit or convenience whatever from the Territorial Government as now administered.”

Northerners complained that reaching a judge took longer than traveling from Missouri to Massachusetts.

“There is now about three thousand souls North of the Columbia,” according to the petition. “They have raised a large amount of produce, wheat, oats, potatoes, on-



Central Washington beekeeper Tim Hiatt stands March 5 on the Capitol Campus in Olympia for Honeybee Awareness Day. Even beekeepers view issues differently depending on which side of the mountains they’re on, he says.

ions, etc. for exportation, but with the many abuses of their rights and neglected condition in their civil immunities as Citizens, it is impossible for them to prosper in commerce or advance one step in the improvement of Roads & Highways.”

Congress granted the petition and in 1853 broke up the Oregon Territory and formed the Washington Territory from the northern half. That settled the north-south divide. The east-west divide became an issue as Oregon sought to become a state.

A delegate to Oregon’s constitutional convention in 1857, Charles Megis of Wasco County, proposed setting the boundary at the Cascades, freeing up the east to form its own state, according to a history posted on the Oregon Secretary of State’s website.

Megis argued that it’s a “fixed fact in political science, the great natural boundaries are to be observed.” Invoking the image of a mythological demon, Megis said domination by the more populous Westside would be “hanging over us like an incubus.”

Megis said it would be tough, but the east could stand on its own. “Our country... is bordering upon Indians; danger hangs over us, but we shall try to take care of ourselves.”

The west wouldn’t have it. A Western Oregon delegate and future U.S. senator, Delazon Smith, responded: “If we are hemmed in between these ranges of mountains here, with every acre of available lands appropriated what avail it, sir? Nothing! We are left to struggle as best we may.”

Stately ideas

Klippert’s idea is to combine the western halves of Washington and Oregon into one state and the eastern halves into another state.

His legislation would have established a bi-state task force to study the economic and governmental implications of redrawing boundaries

to unite regions that are described in the bill as “remarkably conspicuous.”

Shea proposed appointing a task force to look at cutting Washington in two, leaving Oregon out of it.

His bill’s preamble was reminiscent of the settlers’ 1852 appeal to Congress:

“Since statehood, the lifestyles, culture and economics of Eastern and Western Washington have been very distinct. The urbanization and rapid growth in the western portions of Washington state have progressively heightened this divergence of cultural and economic values from that of the eastern portions of the state.”

Population growth played a defining role in Washington’s history even before statehood.

By the time Washington became the 42nd state in 1889, the transcontinental railroad had bypassed Walla Walla, shutting down its growth. By a vote of the people, Olympia was picked as the state capital over Yakima and Ellensburg.

So it was to Olympia that ranchers went in February to talk about cougars.

The bill eventually died in the Senate, lost in the crush of other legislation.

Kayser’s cousin, Keith Kreps, also a Klickitat County rancher, said he was sorely disappointed.

“They don’t understand the wildlife issues we have,” Kreps said. “They don’t understand the economic loss. ... They wonder why we’re squawking.”

Kreps was quick to acknowledge that three Westside Democrats on the natural resources committee voted to recommend the Senate pass the bill. “My hat’s off to them. They actually understand the economics we were talking about,” he said.

Still, he made the drive over the Cascade Range for nothing.

His thoughts on splitting the state: “I’m all for it.”

Bureau of Reclamation’s forecast scheduled to be updated April 6

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DOE officials could not say exactly how much worse the drought needs to be. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in early March forecast that holders of junior water rights in the Yakima Basin will receive 73 percent of their full supply during the irrigation season. Senior water rights holders will have full supplies.

The bureau is scheduled to update the forecast April 6. A DOE water supply committee that makes recommendations to agency directors will meet the next day.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Sen. Jim Honeyford, R-Sunnyside, asks a question Tuesday during a work session on drought preparations. Honeyford, the Senate’s capital budget chairman, says \$9 million for drought relief will be in the budget.

Gov. Jay Inslee declared a drought emergency March

13 in the Yakima Basin, the Olympic Peninsula and Wal-

la Walla region, the state’s first drought declaration since 2005, when then-Gov. Chris Gregoire declared a statewide drought.

Drought relief funding will be in the budget, said Sunnyside Sen. Jim Honeyford, the Senate’s capital budget chairman.

As a first response to this year’s drought, DOE is seeking water rights to lease to increase flows in tributary streams above the confluence of the Yakima and Naches rivers.

Melting snow usually feeds the streams, but with snowpacks a fraction of normal levels, some streams may

go dry, according to DOE.

So far, the drought emergency applies to 11 of the state’s 62 watersheds. The governor could extend the declaration to other areas after the DOE water supply committee reassesses conditions.

Meanwhile, state agencies are gearing up to transfer water rights and, as a last resort, permit emergency drought wells.

Marti said officials are contacting major water users and irrigation districts to find water users willing to lease their rights.

“We will be working to facilitate transfers of water

rights from senior users with low-value crops to junior users with high-value crops,” he said.

Most of Washington has received near or above normal rainfall since last fall. Unseasonably high temperatures, however, have prevented snow from piling up in the mountains.

Early spring rains have soaked Western Washington, but weekend temperatures were expected to rise well above freezing in mountain passes.

“Any snow we get (Tuesday) or tomorrow I’m guessing would be short-lived,” Marti said.

Farmers who hope to use drones commercially can apply for a ‘Section 333’ exemption

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Even if the rules take another two years, aspiring operators can use that time to figure out which aircraft and equipment best fit their plans, he said.

The FAA isn’t regulating drones used for recreation, but the agency takes a dim view of hobbyists venturing into territory that it considers to be commercial, said Wendie Kellington, an attorney specializing in unmanned aerial vehicles.

At this point, the FAA

is taking a narrow view of “hobby.”

For example, the agency said flying a drone to check if crops need irrigation is only considered recreational if they’re “grown for personal enjoyment” and not if they’re part of a “commercial farming operation.”

Farmers and others who hope to legally use drones commercially before the FAA’s regulations are complete can apply for a “Section 333” exemption, which allows them to fly unmanned aircraft without a pilot’s license, Kellington

said.

Applicants should be ready to wait, however. Of the 640 applications received by FAA, fewer than 50 have been granted in the past six months, she said.

Drone operators who obtain an exemption must still fly the drone within the “visual line of sight,” and the same requirement is proposed in the FAA’s planned regulations, Kellington said.

The agency decided the technology isn’t mature enough to allow drones to be flown beyond the line

of sight, but those proposed regulations are still up for comment, she said.

Kellington said the FAA should at least have “placeholder” regulations authorizing such drone use, since the technology is likely to progress rapidly before the rules are final.

In reality, the FAA isn’t in the “enforcement business” of ensuring that farmers and other follow its rules for drones, but the agency would likely take action if an accident or other incident was brought to its attention, said Gretchen West, vice

president of business development and government relations with DroneDeploy, which specializes in drone operations.

“We know there are people flying commercially every single day and the FAA is not going after them,” she said.

Even in remote rural areas, drone operators must be careful not to interfere with aerial spray applicators, said John Stevens, manager of the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial System Range, where drones are tested.

“Within the industry, we

have the responsibility to make sure we’re doing it right,” he said.

As drones become more advanced, safety parameters will be incorporated into their operational systems and the issue will likely become less of a concern, said McCollough.

For example, McCollough’s cell phones relies on radio waves but that doesn’t mean he must get a ham radio operator’s license to use it.

“The rules are going to, in large part, be built into the technology,” he said.