

‘It’s hard to get your voice heard’

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are “just about fed up with Portlandia pie in the sky BS.”

“Enjoy the Trump administration, Portland, your residents are the reason Republicans are running the show.”

Islands of blue

It’s no revelation the West Coast election map looks like small islands of Democrat blue surrounded by seas of Republican red, with the votes cast in heavily populated blue cities dominating those from rural areas.

The Atlantic magazine described it after President Obama’s re-election in 2012: “The new political divide is a stark division between cities and what remains of the countryside.”

Every major U.S. city has a different outlook than the less-populous areas closest to it, the magazine declared.

“Because winning a state’s electoral votes requires only a simple majority, a single city can change the entire game,” The Atlantic concluded.

Conservative scholar Victor Davis Hanson said in a 2015 column in the Los Angeles Times that most “hot button” issues — abortion, gun control, same-sex marriage, defense spending — “break along rural or urban lines.”

Some wonder if the election might have sundered any connection that remained between the two.

Urban ‘mindbenders’

Eastern Washington cattle rancher Len McIrvin said city residents are controlled by the “mindbenders” of the media, Hollywood and conventional politics and don’t realize what’s going on in the “heartland.”

“Waters of the U.S.” proposals, the Endangered Species Act, clean air and clear water rules and “safety” laws that restrict truckers’ hours are examples of the “terrible burden” placed on producers, he said.

McIrvin said wolves, which spread into Oregon and Washington after being reintroduced in Idaho under federal wildlife policy, have killed an estimated 70 head of his cattle this year.

“Wolves do what wolves do, but the regulations say I can’t protect my cattle,” he said. “These regulations are bringing us down to our knees.”

Breese, the Central Oregon landowner, said he listens to Oregon Public Broadcasting, public radio, and is alarmed by what seems an “agenda” to “save the forests and preserve things.” Urban residents don’t understand the land needs to be managed, he said.

City people want the latest consumer items to be available at stores, but oppose the use of fossil fuels needed by delivery trucks, he said.

“They’ve got a job where they can ride a bicycle to



Laurier, Wash., rancher Len McIrvin addresses a Cattle Producers of Washington meeting. He believes city residents are controlled by the “mindbenders” of the media, Hollywood and conventional politics.



A young woman leads protesters in Portland, Ore., after Donald Trump was elected president. The election outcome appears to have widened the urban-rural divide in unexpected ways.

work,” he said. “Some of us have got to have four-wheel drive with a trailer and horses behind.

“It’s hard to get your voice heard,” Breese said. “If you go to the Legislature, you get three minutes. You drive three hours, get three minutes (to testify), and it’s three hours back.”

Breese said it was “cast in stone” that Oregon, Washington and California would align with Hillary Clinton, and he was pleased Trump won enough states elsewhere to claim the presidency.

Trump may loosen natural resource restrictions, appoint

some conservative judges and slow down the Environmental Protection Agency, he said.

He doesn’t understand why Trump opponents took to the streets to protest the result. Portland endured six nights of noisy marches. Police declared the first night’s march a riot as alleged anarchists in the crowd smashed windows and threw objects at officers. A Toyota dealership alone sustained an estimated \$200,000 damage, and police arrested at least 113 people over several days.

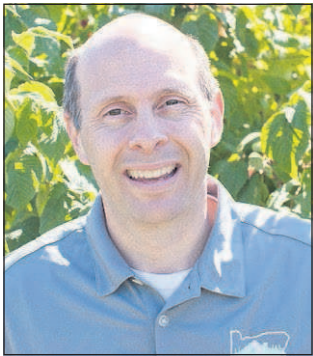
“If Hillary would have won, we wouldn’t have been rioting in our alfalfa

fields,” Breese said.

Surprised the out-of-touch

Hanson, the conservative scholar, wrote in a post-election Los Angeles Times column that Trump’s win surprised the out-of-touch.

“But was it so hard to imagine that a third-generation Mexican American might fear — more so than the gated residents of Malibu and Santa Monica — the impact of illegal immigration on his neighborhood school or community? Or that an out of work lathe operator was not a big fan of globalization?”



“If I’ve taken anything out of this election it’s that sometimes when things look the darkest is when opportunity strikes. Maybe this is the thing that sparks a real conversation.”

Geoff Horning, executive director of Oregon Aglink

The divide prevails, but some continue casting lines to the other side.

Dan Arp, dean of Oregon State University’s College of Agricultural Sciences, often says food is “the handshake between urban and rural.”

Friedman, executive director of the Seattle-based Conservation Northwest, said an overwhelming majority of Americans favor a healthy environment that provides clean air, clean water and abundant wildlife. He said his group collaborates with loggers and ranchers to find a balance between timber harvests, grazing, wolf protection and ancient forests.

“I don’t know if that’s

enough to bridge the gap that exists in America,” he said. “I know we’re committed to doing our part.

“If the core of environmental laws went away, would people in the timber and ag communities that have collaborated, would they still be with us?” Friedman said. “I don’t know. I want to believe most would.”

Trump listened

Russ Vaagen, who represents the third-generation of family ownership in Vaagen Brothers Lumber Inc., of Colville, Wash., said Trump won because he appeared willing to listen to rural concerns.

Vaagen voted for Trump — “I’m not ashamed of it, over 60 million people did” — but serves on the board of directors for Sustainable Northwest, a Portland nonprofit that seeks collaboration on natural resource issues.

“This election was about rural America standing up and wanting to be heard,” he said.

Geoff Horning, executive director of Oregon Aglink, an advocacy group, said people in agriculture have to continue explaining themselves and their practices to urbanites. Even residents of liberal hotbeds like Portland and Eugene are “just people,” he said. “They would be really supportive if they knew more.

“If I’ve taken anything out of this election it’s that sometimes when things look the darkest is when opportunity strikes,” Horning said. “Maybe this is the thing that sparks a real conversation.”

With interest rates expected to rise, it’s likely to impact land values

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said. “We don’t expect anything remotely resembling a crisis.”

For a “crisis level of concern,” multiple sectors would have to tank in “confluence” with a general economy recession that affects timber and other crops, he said.

Despite lower commodity prices, property values for farmland have been stable due to the “saving grace” of continued low interest rates, he said.

Low interest rates have put a “floor” on land values be-

Select U.S. grain prices					
(Dollars per bushel, by marketing year)					
Crop	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17*
Corn	\$6.89	\$4.46	\$3.70	\$3.60	\$3.20
Soybeans	14.40	13	10.10	8.95	9.05
Wheat	7.77	6.87	5.99	4.89	3.60

cause people can still afford to buy property and alternative investments aren’t particularly enticing, Gabriel said.

With interest rates expected to rise, though, it’s likely to impact land values — particularly if the hikes are significant, he said.

There’s a spectrum of financial health among farmers: Some have preserved working capital while others haven’t been as disciplined, Gabriel said.

Those who have unnecessarily blown money on machinery and vacations are more likely to face trouble, he said. “They’re the ones who will be hit first by these low prices.”

Institutions within the Farm Credit System required a lot of collateral for farmland bought at peak prices, because they realized the trend wasn’t sustainable, said Doug Alford, deputy chief examiner at FCA.

For that reason, land values can fall but Farm Credit System lenders will still have

adequate collateral for their loans, he said.

Borrowers who fall behind on their loans are assessed on their financial health, and lenders take the lowest-cost approach to recovering debt, Alford said.

Charging off bad debt as a loss is the last step in this process, which is why charge-offs tend to lag downturns in the farm economy, he said.

For example, Farm Credit System lenders charged off \$51 million worth of debt so far in 2016, compared to \$71 million at this point last year.

Meanwhile, the volume of loans among system lenders has grown to \$242 billion, up from \$227 billion at this time in 2015.

As farmers who previously relied on their own cash for operating expenses experience lower returns, they may actually come to rely more on borrowed money, said Roger Paulsen, FCA’s deputy director.

On the other hand, other growers who are stressed may need to liquidate collateral or restructure loans, which would reduce loan volumes, Paulsen said.

Some uncertainty among various forecasts over what a La Nina pattern will mean

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“A lot of records were set,” he said. “It was a really good start to the water year.”

Although November has gotten off to a dry start that could change starting the middle of next week, as a new weather pattern is expected to bring more precipitation to the Northwest.

Lindquist said there is a 70 per-

cent chance of La Nina conditions developing during the fall and continuing through the winter.

La Nina conditions typically mean cooler and wetter conditions than normal in the Northwest, he said. Stream runoff is also typically above normal during a La Nina, he added.

The not-so-great news for irrigators who depend on a good water supply is there “wasn’t a lot of carry-

over in some of the major reservoirs, so we need to wait for winter to play out,” Dello said.

“I hope La Nina comes through for us,” said Brian Sauer, a water operations manager for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

There is some uncertainty among various forecasts over what a La Nina pattern will mean to the region and that is a little concerning, said Jay Chamberlin, manager of the

Owyhee Irrigation District, which provides water for 1,800 farms and 118,000 acres in Eastern Oregon and part of southwestern Idaho.

But the general forecast for cooler weather and above-normal precipitation is encouraging, he added.

The Owyhee reservoir hasn’t filled since 2011. This year was the first time since then that OID patrons have received their full allotment of 4 acre-feet of water.

The reservoir ended this water year with 166,000 acre-feet of carryover water, much less than normal but much more than the previous three years.

“The cards are still out there but the potential for the 2017 water season I think is better for us,” Chamberlin said. “We’re carrying some extra water over and the (forecast for) cooler, wetter weather certainly feels a lot better.”