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Opinion

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OUR VIEW



Andrew Harnik/Associated Press
Donald Trump is sworn in as the 45th president of the United States Jan. 20, as Melania Trump looks on at the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

A strong, steady hand is what U.S. needs

When Donald Trump took the oath of office about a week ago, he reminded us of two things — we are all Americans under God, and we must push back the tide of government that has inundated our lives.

Farmers and ranchers have seen the tide of regulation rise during the past eight years. Overwrought and underthought policies ranging from the Waters of the U.S. to the Food Safety Modernization Act have threatened to drown farmers in regulation.

The first would put the federal government in charge of nearly every drop of water in the U.S., and the second threatened to invent and prevent food safety problems that never before existed.

That's not all. During the past eight years ranchers have seen the wellbeing of the greater sage grouse put before their wellbeing. Even when they have agreed to help protect the bird, they were threatened with more regulation.

No farmer, no rancher would sacrifice the environment on which they depend for their livelihood, yet time and again they are portrayed as the villain in the rhetoric of environmentalists and a federal government that helps to fund their legal attacks on agriculture.

President Trump has promised to change that. He's promised to set aside dogmatic environmental anti-agriculture attacks, such as the Environmental Protection Agency-funded What's Upstream smear campaign. In its place he has promised a regulatory atmosphere that solves problems but does not impose an environmentalist-authored attack on agriculture or other industries.

Last Friday, President Trump promised to give voice to the little guy. Included are the farmers and ranchers whose voices have been drowned out during the past eight years.

As we watch the new administration take shape, we need to remind ourselves that the changes President Trump has promised will, and should, take time. Just as they didn't happen overnight, they will not all be resolved overnight.

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The federal government, with its 2.79 million employees, is not a speed boat that can make sharp turns; it is an aircraft carrier that needs time and space to turn.

Especially time. We expect that the members of the Trump administration will understand that going in. We hope the president understands that as well. He has already issued a flurry of directives that are unsettling to a nation just getting used to a new leader. We suggest he steady the ship before he tries to turn it.

President Trump needs to understand that steering a ship as massive as the United States of America is different from standing on the shore and shouting criticism, and the realities of a massively complex nation and economy may force him to diverge from some of his campaign rhetoric.

For example, fair trade and a workable immigration policy are needed now more than ever. A robust and open trade system is in many ways the lifeblood of the U.S. economy,

especially the agricultural economy. The wheat farmers of Eastern Washington know that. So do the almond growers of California, blueberry growers of Oregon and the dairy farmers of Idaho.

Trump has already exited the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a 12-nation trade agreement that included several of the biggest U.S. customers — and competitors. We urge him to act quickly to put in place a trade agreement that maintains access to foreign markets for U.S. farmers and ranchers. Without prompt follow-up, they could lose some of their biggest customers.

So, too, must immigration be reformed, and building a wall is not the top priority. In agriculture, immigrant laborers pick the apples in Washington, harvest the lettuce in California and milk the cows in Idaho. As an industry, agriculture cannot do without those farmworkers, the vast majority of whom are hard-working and good-hearted. They are part of the American dream that President Trump talks about.

An improved H-2A foreign worker visa is needed, as is a fair system that allows undocumented foreigners already in the U.S. to pay a fine, learn English and seek legal residence, as long as they have violated no other laws.

We appreciate the goals President Trump has set for himself. Four years is plenty of time to accomplish them.

But President Trump needs to know what every good ship's captain knows. A strong, steady hand on the throttle, coupled with a skilled hand on the rudder, will get our nation where we need to go.

Trump administration poised to make Western ag great again

By DAN KEPPEN
For the Capital Press

In the world of Western water, a massive flood or devastating drought is sure to get policy-makers focused on the need to update and create more effective water management policy.

The recent drought has ramped up much-needed congressional interest to enact legislation that will allow Western water providers to better manage and prepare for future dry times.

Now, the heaviest rain in a decade has overwhelmed parts of the West Coast, underscoring the critical importance of having modernized infrastructure in place to optimize water resources management.

Water a priority

The Trump administration will need to address how Western water resources development is hamstrung by the implementation of federal environmental laws and regulations. Unfortunately, it's hard to shine the light on these issues when energy issues, repealing and/or replacing Obamacare and tax reform are all center stage in Washington.

It's time to make Western irrigated agriculture one of the priorities for the incoming Trump administration.

Americans are spending, on average, less than 8 percent of their disposable income on food. To put this into perspective, just 70 years ago, that figure was more than 25 percent. While more, better and safer food is being produced by our American farmers, these same farmers are under attack — and it won't be long before this translates back to the supermarket.

For farmers to survive, and for food to continue to be produced here in America, a stable water supply is a must. In many areas of the West, water resources are available and projects are waiting to be developed.

However, the policies of the federal government make development of these stabilizing water supplies nearly impossible.

Activists' attacks

Over the past decade, we have witnessed escalated engagement by certain activist groups, at times supported by our own federal government, who cynically use fish and wildlife management to attempt to eliminate sectors of production agriculture.

It has happened in places like the Klamath Basin and California's Central Valley, where water originally developed for farms and ranches is being redirected to meet the "perceived" (i.e. unsubstantiated) needs of several species of fish protected under the Endangered Species Act.

It is happening now in the Deschutes Basin, where environmental litigants are incrementally taking water away from farmers and dedicating it to the unsubstantiated needs of the ESA-protected Oregon Spotted Frog.

President-elect Trump has vowed to honor "the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt ... one of our great environmentalists." The Family Farm Alliance and the producers and conservationists we work with are dedicated to the pragmatic implementation of actions that seek to find a sustainable balance of environmental protection and economic prosperity.

A role and a duty

There are ways that the federal government can help support Western irrigated agriculture. The federal government really has a role and a duty to reach out to these producers on critical federal water policies and work in partnership with them using available funding and federal cost-share opportunities to support their efforts to secure a stable water supply for their operations.

Irrigated agriculture not only provides a \$172 billion annual boost to our economy, it also provides important habitat for Western waterfowl and other wildlife, and its open spaces are treasured by citizens throughout the West and the nation. Family farmers and ranchers are willing to partner with constructive conservation groups and federal agencies, especially if there are opportunities to both help strengthen their productivity and improve the environment.

Still, many Western producers face significant regulatory and policy related challenges, brought on — in part — by federal agency implementation of environmental laws; destructive tactics employed by litigious, anti-farming activists; and a myriad of new rules and policies skewed toward environmental protection.

On the ground, water infrastructure that was built early in the last century is aging, and once-reliable federal grants and loan programs are a thing of the past. Meanwhile, little progress has been made towards developing new and improved water infrastructure to keep up with the growing water demands of expanding cities, energy production and environmental needs.

Daunting challenges

These challenges are daunting, and they will require innovative solutions. We must find ways to recover water supply certainty by modernizing and expanding Western water infrastructure, curbing environmental litigation against federal agencies and the rural communities they serve, and modernizing and streamlining antiquated federal environmental laws so they work to enhance the Nation's food production, ecosystems and rural communities together.

We must start trimming chapters, rather than adding new ones to a regulatory playbook that is much too voluminous, top-down and daunting.

The Family Farm Alliance has developed specific recommendations for the incoming Trump administration that can help provide solutions to meet these needs. It is our hope that the incoming administration will embrace our core philosophy: the best solutions are driven locally by real people with a grasp of "on-the-ground" reality and who are heavily invested in the success of such solutions.

Dan Keppen is executive director of the Family Farm Alliance, an advocate for family farmers, ranchers, irrigation districts and allied industries in 17 Western states. The Alliance is focused on one mission — to ensure the availability of reliable, affordable irrigation water supplies to Western farmers and ranchers.

Readers' views

A plan to avoid breaching dams

I feel we should take water out of the stream coming into the rivers above the dams (on the Columbia and Snake rivers) and divert it into a ditch that would then dump into the backwaters of the reservoir. This would help the dead water situation and provide cooler water for the salmon and steelhead to follow.

This is a better plan than breaching the dams and losing a source of electricity as well as barge traffic. The breaching would dump enormous amounts of silt into the river, destroying many kinds of fish.

Homer R. Nesbitt
Emmett, Idaho

BLM's planning rules run amok

I'm disappointed that only six Western counties and a soil conservation district filed a lawsuit over the Bureau of Land Management's new decision-making process. Western-wide support is needed to drain the swamp that has engulfed public land management.

Last summer Interior Secretary Sally Jewell toured the Soda Burn area of Malheur County, Ore., and Owyhee County, Idaho.

She announced BLM was initiating a collaboration process. Before going further, referring to Webster's dictionary sets the scene.

The prior process was known as the Three C's of cooperation, coordination and conciliation. Cooperation is defined as the "act of working together to one end, joint operation, concurrent effort of labor."

Local entities, represented by county commissioners, found the road rocky but did contribute to the process.

Political correctness has taught that words matter. Collaboration is defined as the "act of performing work of labor together; especially literary work or scientific research."

The problem is that BLM's authorized officers will determine what is scientific instead of decisions based on cooperation.

The second half of the collaboration definition gets closer to the BLM rule-making process as seen through Western eyes.

It would be difficult to find a public land permittee or county official who didn't believe BLM's perceived bias is nothing but "cooperation with the enemy."

At this writing, citizens of Malheur County and Southern Oregon await word that monuments proposed for us will clear president Obama's desk with or without a signature.

Whether designated or not, it is a classic example of collaboration and a rule-making process run amok.

Michael F. Hanley IV
Jordan Valley, Ore.