

Opinion

— EDITORIAL —

It pays to track newly introduced bills and resolutions

Hundreds of bills were introduced in Congress last-minute in December. From there, in 2016, these bills are sent to committee, and if they make it through that step, they go to the house and then the senate (or vice versa, depending upon their origin) for vote. Assuming they make it past those votes, they head toward the President's desk for a signature.

Most of these bills will blessedly fall by the wayside.

Many of these bills are useless at best, but several of them would be horrifically damaging to the Constitutional rights of Americans if passed.

Take, for example, H.R. 4269: Assault Weapons Ban of 2015, introduced December 16. The purpose of this bill as stated is, "To regulate assault weapons, to ensure that the right to keep and bear arms is not unlimited, and for other purposes."

You read that right. This Democrat-sponsored, 124-page bill's purpose is to limit the Second Amendment. The Committee on the Judiciary was assigned to this one, where it has an estimated 6% chance of survival. And an estimated 2% chance of ever being enacted.

We hope.

The text of the bill goes on to place a ban on many of the shotguns, rifles and handguns common to Baker County and most other areas, and outlines which firearms people will be allowed to own. The rest of the bill is the standard rhetoric. Pistol grips are bad. (Yeah, we don't get that one, either.) More than ten bullets would be a crime. How if a family member simply passes a rifle down to you, that's illegal, too. And so on.

Another bit of legislation—H.Res.

569—also caught our eye; it was introduced December 17. H.Res. 569: Condemning violence, bigotry, and hateful rhetoric towards Muslims in the United States attempts to limit First Amendment Rights by telling elected officials in the House Chamber who they can and can't express an opinion about. In a representative republic, we view this the same as limiting the rights of the citizens those officials represent.

Prognosis: 9% chance of getting past committee. 8% chance of being agreed to.

The 82 Democrat co-sponsors of this resolution say they hope to expand this resolution to an eventual vote in both chambers so that it will have the force of law. Under that scenario, if we're Christian or Buddhist or Jewish and you call us names and hurt our feelings, it's fine. But if we convert to Islam and you provide the same "verbal abuse," your case will be prosecuted as a federal hate crime. Bye-bye First Amendment.

Several other resolutions and introduced bills beg the questions: We elect these people to come up with these? These folks get paid?!

There are resolutions in the works or that have passed in the last year that range from honoring the Portland Timbers as the champions of Major League Soccer in 2015, to honoring singer Lena Horne. There's the Grand Canyon Bison Management Act. The Polar Bear Fairness Act. A resolution declaring "Dia de los ninos." Because Spanish-speaking youngsters need a day?

Hot bills include: S. 2033: Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2015, S. 1014: Personal Care Products Safety Act and S. 2425: Patient Access and Medicare Protection Act.

H.R. 1599: Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act of 2015, H.R. 1735: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, and S. 2123: Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015 are among the most tracked bills by citizens.

Bills can be monitored and tracked online at www.govtrack.us. Thomas.loc.gov, the Library of Congress's bill tracking section, is the primary source for this site.

Browsers can search or browse by sponsor, by subject or by specific bill.

The point is, it's easy to stay informed.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

Health vs. access

To the Editor:

A new process is working its way throughout eastern Oregon that pits locals against each other; it is the concept of "forest health vs. motorized access." The model has been seen in the West before. Idahoans and Montanans have seen forests build to unsafe fuel loads with eager "conservationists" willing to plan projects that will relieve the burden of the excessive fuels, if only we are willing destroy roads after the projects are completed. The work is done through service contracts that equate to lawn care services on our public lands. Companies bid on these contracts to implement prescriptions for treatment that are written by the Forest Service, along with road destruction.

Two examples playing out in eastern Oregon that show this process are the Grant County Stewardship Contract, a massive multi-million-dollar, single-source contract to Iron Triangle that will treat vegetation, and restricts motorized access to thousands of acres of land, and the East Face Project between La Grande and Baker, which is planning 38 miles of road closures.

Both equate to nothing more than lawn care service contracts, except in this case, once mowing the lawn and weeding the flower garden are complete, they tear out your driveway so you cannot access them anymore.

Timber sales do not have to equate to road closures, jobs for our families do not have to mean loss of motorized access. Roads were built to harvest these lands, for them stay the productive resources we were promised they would be when set aside in the early 1900s. Not the multi-billion dollar drains they have become over the last 30-plus years under the failed leadership of the Forest Service, who no longer serve the people, but serve their own personal agendas.

I support vegetative treatments. I support logging/mill jobs, and all the services that come with them. But I do not believe you have to destroy motorized access to have jobs or a healthy forest.

I ask that if you don't support these restrictions, you become active in these projects to speak out against them.

John George
Bates

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— MONTHLY GUEST COLUMN —

So I was thinking . . .

Snow Days

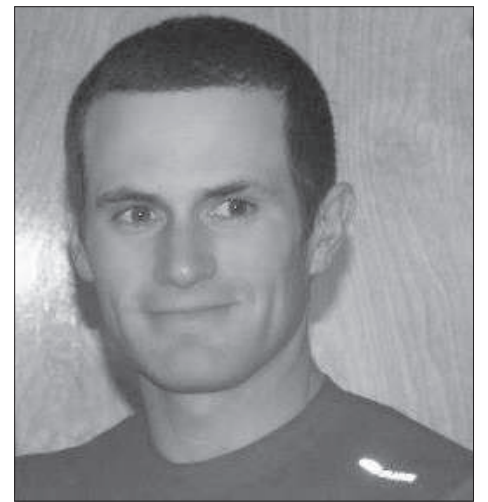
By Jimmy Ingram
Special to The Baker County Press

Eastern Oregon folk are used to snow. Most of us grew up playing in it, driving in it, enjoying winter sports and shoveling the walkway over and over and over again. And though its drawbacks like slick roads and less than ideal walking conditions, it's Mother Nature's way of making summer that much better for everyone. There are also lesser discussed benefits.

Parking. While the unwritten rules of society and those pesky painted yellow lines dictate where we can park most of the year, winter parking is a free for all. With no visible yellow lines to keep us from parking like civilized members of society, we cut loose.

Suddenly parking spots appear out of nowhere. "That looks like it could be a driveway." Not any more! It's your new VIP parking spot, a mere 3.5 feet from your destination. Nothing is out of bounds—curbs, lawns, crosswalks—if you can't see lines or barriers, it must mean they aren't there. The one foot from curb rule of thumb for parallel parking instantly becomes 2-10 feet, much to the relief of a select few drivers to whom parallel parking ranks just below landing a fighter jet on an aircraft carrier on the degree of difficulty scale. Stopping at stop signs appears to become optional, replaced with the "slide of good intentions." So while white-knuckle driving on bad roads is a headache, the guilt-free "anything goes" parking once at your destination is sweet relief. (*Keep in mind I'm not advocating the breaking of traffic laws, just poking fun at winter drivers).

Justification of your snowblower purchase. Your six-foot-wide, 40 hp snowblower is a sweet machine. It also cost \$1,200 and sits in the garage 360 days a year, begging to be set free. And once that first snow hits, the manliest of men fire up their machines like jet fueled dragsters just waiting for the green light. While neighbors labor to move 6" of snow a shovel scoop at a time, you cut it like a hot knife through butter, sending a stream of snow 20 feet in every direction—in your lawn, over the fence toward your neighbors' barking dog, toward the curb mowing down your mailbox. It doesn't matter where it goes. You just know it's gone. It's at this testosterone-filled moment that you know that \$1,200 was well spent. At least till the carburetor needs



Submitted Photo

Jimmy Ingram is a local farmer and father of two who enjoys people watching within our wonderful community and beyond.

rebuilt.

Justifiable laziness. There's few ways to justify sitting around the house on a nice weekend day. A snow day is just the opposite.

Instantly you are able to talk yourself out of things like taking out the garbage, going to the bank, or returning your neighbor's Tupperware. "It's snowing," you say, confining yourself to the warmth of your living room and the sweatpants you don't want to change out of. You are now able to justify drinking two pots of coffee before noon and watching CSI re-runs comfortably. You may even use the opportunity to clean out your attic, vacuum the house, or email your sister, but then you look out the window again. "I'd better not, it's snowing outside. I'll just sit here and make sure the couch doesn't go anywhere."

Additional style choices. How boring would life be limited to warm weather clothing? You wouldn't be able to wear that sweet jacket you bought on sale last May that has 14 pockets, hand warmers and a bottle opener on the zipper. And you'd look foolish wearing those fancy UGG boots, colorful winter hat, and polar fleece gloves in the summer. Thanks to wintertime snow, your wardrobe has grown by 25%, bumping you up one notch on the modern style chart from "not stylish at all" to "it doesn't matter because it's winter." Okay, let's face it, we all look like abominable snowmen out there. Just try and stay warm.

Appreciation for summer hobbies. Nothing gives you a better perspective on the enjoyment of warm weather hobbies than not being able do them in the winter. Bicycling, golf, fishing, softball, swimming, etc. Taking a four-month hiatus from warm(er) weather activities because of snow makes you appreciate them more when spring rolls around.

Think of it like a spouse or a sibling. You love them but you appreciate them more when you don't see them *all* the time. It always feels good to dust off the golf clubs or tune up the bike in March knowing that soon the snow will be gone. Well, maybe.

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