

Good Laws

Some legislation spurs innovation

If it hadn't been for a handful of national laws that required Eugene to pause in its headlong rush to build the West Eugene Parkway, trucks and cars would almost certainly be roaring, at this moment, on a four-lane highway through and above our rare, public wetlands in west Eugene.



But the **Endangered Species Act** required us to help two plants and a butterfly that 1) live in the path of the then-proposed highway and 2) are near extinction due to destruction of their habitat in their only home, the Willamette Valley.

The **Clean Water Act** required us to show why there were no less drastic alternatives to destroying portions of these wetlands that are among the last 0.5 percent not already destroyed in the Willamette Valley.

The **National Environmental Policy Act** required us to ask our west Eugene transportation questions broadly enough to at least consider alternatives to building the highway straight through the wetlands.

In part because these national laws were looming over the parkway idea, a two-year, collaborative effort by government, business, neighborhood and conservation representatives is now rethinking how lands can better be used to benefit west Eugene's environment, transportation, business and neighborhoods. Good laws have spurred innovation.

Would that El Paso, Texas, were so lucky. They, like Eugene, are trying to restore a fragment of wetlands. As in the Willamette Valley, wetlands have been nearly extinguished along the Rio Grande River due to farm, ranch, industrial and urban developments. Their "West Eugene Wetlands" is the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park. At 372 acres, it's much smaller than ours, but equally special to them.

Unfortunately, El Paso is a border town, and the Bush administration has been in a headlong rush to build its Berlin-type wall separating Mexico from the U.S. If the administration were following our nation's laws, much of the wall wouldn't be being built in wilderness areas, national monuments and wildlife refuges; through archaeological sites; on tribal reservations; across the path of migrating rare and endangered species ... or through El Paso's wetlands.

However, not wanting to be bothered with developing sustainable Mexico-U.S. economic and immigration policies, Congress ponied up for the Bush administration. In the Real ID Act, Congress gave one person, the secretary of Homeland Security, dictator-like authority to waive all laws that might stand in the way of erecting our nation's Berlin Wall. On April 3, 2008, Homeland Secretary Chertoff waived 35 federal laws and all related state, local and tribal laws standing in his way.

And thus it was that I came to be walking at dawn on Dec. 4 on a levee at the edge of the Rio Bosque Wetlands Park with Judy Ackerman, recently retired from her decades-long career with the National Guard. At first glance, the park doesn't look like much: It's being restored from a patch of abandoned land, as mitigation for straightening other parts of the Rio Grande River. It's got a lot of weeds. It needs to be given more water to allow the planted native riparian plants to cloak the restored creek meander and wetlands. But a park restoration plan developed by the city, University of Texas and El Paso citizens is being implemented by scientists and volunteers. Rare native birds are returning. Birdwatchers, school classes and families are walking and soaking up this special world of wetlands and riverside life. Just as in west Eugene's wetlands.

But as of December, El Paso's park and its wildlife are now being cut off from the Rio Grande River by wall construction. Immense earth-moving equipment is rumbling. A Border Patrol car drives up, asking us what we are doing. Within minutes, four more Border Patrol cars cruise by. Stephanie Herweck, an activist for alternatives to the wall elsewhere in Texas, breaks into tears of frustration at watching one more stretch of border area being torn apart by The Wall. I hear birds faintly in the wetlands below.

I also hear some of the words Barack Obama uttered in his July 24, 2008, speech in Berlin:

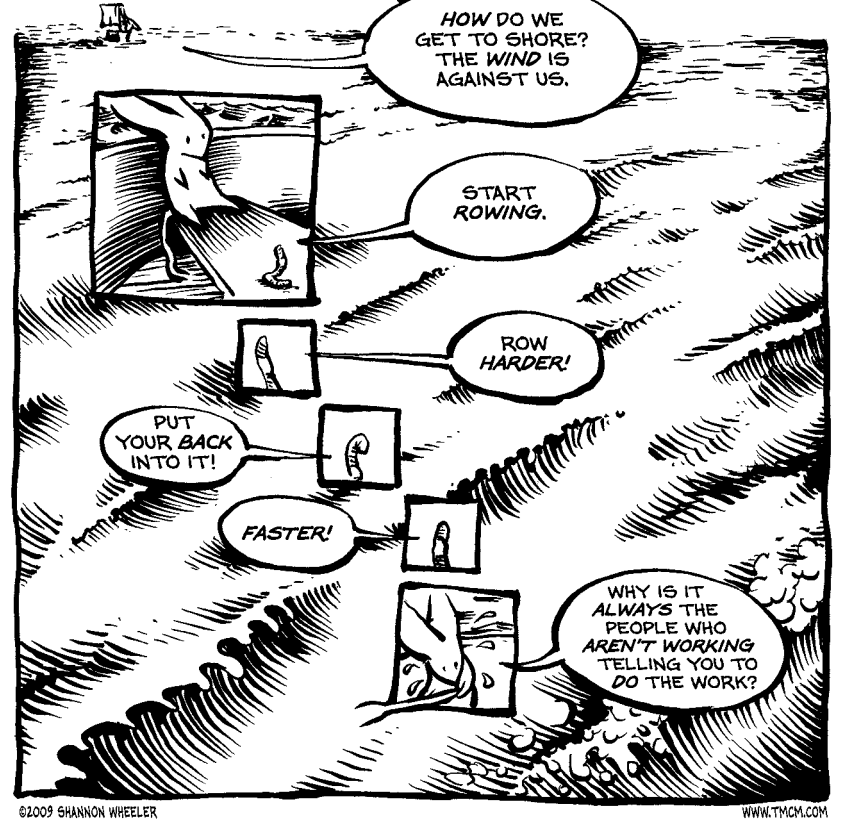
The walls between the countries with the most and those with the least cannot stand. ... The walls between ... natives and immigrants ... cannot stand. These now are the walls we must tear down.

We trash our laws to erect walls at our nation's peril. Perhaps next we waive laws to extract oil from shale in our Southwest wilderness. Or to override Oregon's law restraining the construction of nuclear power plants. All in the name of anti-terrorism, or reduction of dependency on foreign oil, or perhaps for so-called "green infrastructure."

We must quit doing this. We need our laws to force us to rethink our relationship with Mexico and our planet. To remain democratic. To be civilized.
Resist.

Mary O'Brien of Eugene has worked as a public interest scientist since 1981. She can be reached at mob@efn.org

How to Be Happy UGLY ISLAND 2 of 8 by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STOP THE ATTACKS

Israeli Defense Forces have struck the Gaza Strip, killing or wounding hundreds and continuing the cycle of violence. There is limited value in debating how it began. But perspectives differ.

Israel and the U.S. claim Israel is defending its right to exist and protect itself from rocket attacks by terrorists.

Israeli peace activists claim Israel broke the truce with Hamas with a raid on the night of the U.S. elections and has continued "calculated raids and killings, whenever the shooting of missiles on Israel decreased."

Critics even charge the Israeli government is playing politics with the tragedy, calling Ehud Barak's declaration that he is stopping the elections campaign to concentrate on the Gaza offensive "a joke." "The war in Gaza is itself Barak's elections campaign," says Gush Shalom spokesperson Adam Keller, "a cynical attempt to buy votes with the blood and suffering" of Israelis in the cities targeted by rockets and of Palestinians in Gaza.

An April 2008 *Vanity Fair* article claims the U.S. plotted a coup against the democratically elected Hamas government, triggering the Hamas takeover of Gaza.

The Israeli blockade of Gaza is causing immense suffering and has been called "collective punishment," a war crime under the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

The U.S. should initiate urgent diplomacy to reinstate a cease fire, end all military operations, stop the attacks on Israel and lift the Gaza blockade. This would serve the best interests of Israel, the Palestinian people and the U.S.

Robert Roth
Eugene

SHOCKING GAZA

Valori George (letters, 12/18) raises important questions. Why have we heard

so much for so long about the Nazi genocide and so little about the brutal *Nakba* committed by Zionist terrorists against the largely helpless Palestinians in 1948, which has continued under the radar for 60 years until today's outrageous imprisonment of 1.5 million people in Gaza?

Dr. Jeff Halper, director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (www.icahd.org), who recently spoke in Eugene, describes the Israeli "warehousing" of Palestinians as a key element in "disaster capitalism" related by Naomi Klein in her book *The Shock Doctrine*. This method of containing and progressively erasing "surplus humanity" reliably produces an outlook of helplessness and hopelessness in the captive and deprived population, an outlook long noted by psychotherapists in clinical depression.

Psychologist Martin Seligman has demonstrated the development of "learned helplessness" in laboratory animals subjected to conditions where they could neither predict nor control events of importance in their environments, producing behavior in other species analogous to depression in humans.

When your lands are arbitrarily stolen, your homes arbitrarily bulldozed, your olive groves arbitrarily uprooted and your children and brothers arbitrarily murdered with no legal recourse, you will learn abject helplessness through unspeakably violent lessons. Veteran war correspondent Chris Hedges reports that in no other armed conflict has he ever witnessed snipers deliberately target unarmed children as do Israeli soldiers.

Gaza is an intentional disaster, and it is unsurprising that more than 50 percent of Gazan children under the age of 12 have been found to have no will to live.

Jack Dresser
Springfield

EDITOR'S NOTE: This letter, and the next, were submitted before the Israeli attack on Gaza.