

OPINION

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Fire budget fix to help Oregon — eventually

The Oregonian

For five years, U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden has pushed Congress to address how U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management leaders often must divert money from other programs, including fire prevention and forest management budgets, to cover the increasingly high cost of fighting massive wildfires.

Season after season, fire spending consumed an ever-increasing percentage of the federal agencies' relatively flat budgets.

Finally, Congress listened and Oregon is likely to benefit. Eventually.

The Wildfire Disaster Funding Act was a part of the \$1.3 trillion federal spending package passed by federal lawmakers and signed by the president late last month. The act creates an emergency fund of as much as \$2.2 billion, which Forest Service and Land Management officials can access once they've tapped out firefighting budgets. That fund will increase to a maximum of \$2.9 billion by 2027. It's a common system used to pay for hurricane and floods and — as Wyden and others have long called for — finally treats wildfires as the natural disasters they are.

The Oregonian highlighted the necessity for such a change in its 2016 investigation "Burned" that delved into the devastating Canyon Creek fire in John Day. That wildfire destroyed 43 homes and burned through 171.9 million square miles of private and federal forest land — some that had been scheduled for fire-prevention work that was never completed.

Wyden, who has worked doggedly on the issue along with Republican Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho, said it finally became impossible for lawmakers to ignore as the devastating 2017 season that left 43 dead and 2,187.5 square miles destroyed in California alone.

"The summer," he said recently, "was a wake-up call of what's to come."

Firefighting agencies spent a record \$2.9 billion nationwide fighting wildfires last year alone. The destruction hit close to home again last summer, when the Eagle Creek Fire burned nearly 78.1 square miles in the Columbia River Gorge and the Chetco Bar fire burned another 298.4 square miles on the coast in southern Oregon. Both cost millions to fight.

Unfortunately, a few more fire seasons will pass before the change takes effect in 2020.

And, while the new law should stop the budget drain, no additional money has been set aside to recoup the dollars lost from needed fire prevention and habitat recovery programs. Years of so-called "fire borrowing" from those programs and nearly flat funding to those federal agencies have left many of our federal forests at risk — along with those communities that have grown up along them.

Hopefully we'll begin to see improvements from the financial stability this new law should help provide. Even better, lawmakers could continue pushing for transparency and regular audits of these federal agencies to be sure that all that firefighting money is well spent. Wyden promises he'll keep a



Tristan Fortsch/KATU-TV

The Eagle Creek Fire burns in the Columbia River Gorge above Cascade Locks in September 2017.



Tom Story/Inciweb

A wildfire near Sisters in August 2017.

close eye on that, too.

It shouldn't have taken five years for this logical fix to move forward. Yet this positive, bipartisan work should be

lauded by Oregonians who stand to benefit from the improved health and safety of the federal forests that blanket so much of our state.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Animal shelter needs donations and adoptions

Kitten season is at the very brink of starting, meaning that donations and adoptions are needed at the Clatsop County Animal Shelter during this time.

This is also a reminder to please spay and neuter your animals, which helps keep the number of animals in the shelter lower; cats can become pregnant at only 5 months old. Kitten season starts in the beginning of spring, peaks in early summer, and lasts until the fall, according to the Humane Society.

Our local animal shelter is always needing volunteers. It doesn't matter if you are a dog or cat person — there is an opportunity for you. Walking the dogs or playing with the kittens gives them the socialization with humans that they need to help them become the ideal pet.

MACKENZIE STRAIN
Astoria

Davis reaffirms faith in community

Thank you, Andy Davis, for reaffirming my faith in our little community. In effect, he told me there was no real difference between his views and George McCartin's, who's running for the same county seat. I'd hope that good people in our small community would speak warmly, respectfully and honestly (but tactfully) about those working hard everyday to keep our community a wonderful work in progress, even when that other person is seeking the same position.

I'm glad I'm not in their district, and don't have to choose between Andy Davis and George McCartin, who would both deserve my vote.

I do, however, have to cast a vote for either Tiffany Mitchell or John Orr for the House District 32 seat. I wish many of their supporters had shown the maturity Andy did in speaking about their candidate's perceived opponent.

All politicians talk about values. I value John. I value Tiffany. I deeply value all who support either of them, and form a such collective of knowledge, courage, and compassion.

What I don't value are silly divisions amongst our neighbors and friends, amongst our allies against President Trump's madness.

We need each other. Isn't that the bedrock idea of the left?

MICHAELA. "SASHA" MILLER
Astoria

Vote Mitchell for House District 32

I first met Tiffany Mitchell through North Coast Indivisible. Like me, Tiffany joined

because she knows we need to stand up for progressive policies that work for all. She always brings her passion, her smarts, and her fearlessness to the table as part of the leadership of Indivisible.

When Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke talks about trying to drill for oil off our beautiful Oregon, I know Tiffany will fight in Salem to protect our coastline.

When Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) comes into our communities and pulls apart families, I know Tiffany will stand up for those most vulnerable.

And, when the federal government strips away funding for services that so many people here depend on, I know Tiffany will ensure that Salem picks up the slack.

I plan on voting for Tiffany Mitchell for representative of District 32 in the Democratic primary this month, and you should, too.

MARIDEE FABER
Warrenton

Vote Josi for state representative

During his years as a state representative and a Tillamook County commissioner, Tim Josi has built a reputation as an informed and thoughtful representative for our North Coast communities. He has been a leader in finding collaborative solutions on dairy and other natural resource issues, and supportive of our industries, while working to protect this beautiful place we call home. I wholeheartedly support Tim Josi for state representative.

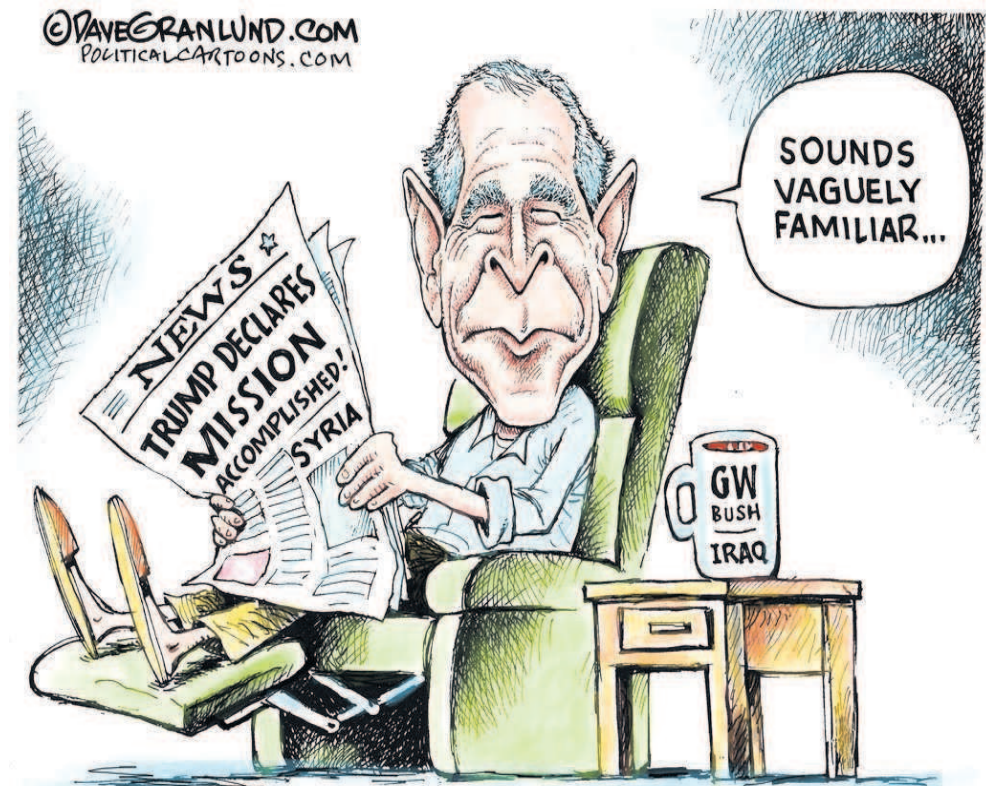
JACK MULDER
Tillamook

Vote Orr for state representative

John Orr is the best Democrat for the open state representative seat for District 32 in these turbulent times. Orr listens well, reflects well, and has a very sharp, shrewd mind. He is not shy about speaking truth to power on behalf of others, is beholden to no special interests, and is accessible to all.

He understands the value of our natural resources both for a stable source of employment and for providing clean air and water. He has accepted no donations from special interest groups, to make plain his guarantee to decide issues in favor of the people of Oregon.

As an attorney in Clatsop and Tillamook counties for the last three decades, John has worked with, and for, many hundreds of women and men, crossing cultural and economic boundaries. He knows our community, its workers, and small business owners alike. Neither of his opponents has his depth of



understanding of state law, or how changes can impact us. He will hit the ground running, an everyman dedicated to serving the public.

DAVE KRUGER
Astoria

Vote Mitchell for state representative

I have lived in Astoria for 25 years, and have made this wonderful community my home. In my time here, I have witnessed firsthand many of the trials Astorians face.

One of my closest family members has been working the same service job for years, with stagnant wages, and struggles to ensure basic needs are met.

It is heartbreaking when young, hard-working Astorians don't make enough to pay their rent and utilities. Nobody should have to choose between having a roof over their head and paying their power bill.

I didn't believe things could change until I met Tiffany Mitchell. For those of you out of the loop, Tiffany is running as a Democrat to be our representative for House District 32 in Salem. Tiffany is eager, ready to work on our behalf, and has the values to fight for folks in our community that need help. For years, Salem has been dragging its feet on passing legislation to help create affordable housing. I know Tiffany will bring the fight for affordable housing to Salem, and be the champion we need. That's why I plan on voting for her in this upcoming Democratic primary, and in the general election.

CINDY WHITTEN
Astoria

Why Astoria?

The small city of Astoria, located at the mouth of the mighty Columbia River, is the hub of coastal activity with its fishing, canning, lumber, tourism and other business enterprises.

The population swells as one takes in the nearby coastal community.

This is the area which has seduced me, a country boy from the Southwest — a country boy whose father had a grade school education, spoke three languages, knew farming/ranching, and was a good trader.

I felt he saw things concretely, was a tough man in many ways, but would give his life for me.

I was never good at farming. I regret never having acquired the necessary knowledge and skills, but I knew hard work. Thanks to my mother, a teacher,

I went to college — and became citified. Long before moving here, my wife and I accidentally stumbled into Astoria when we decided to tour the Oregon Coast. I was first impressed with this small city as I drove through it, down Marine Drive.

I felt this was a town and area of strong character. We returned several times, wanting to live in a place we thought was amazing. Astoria is a spot by the sea with its people, history, ships, climate and bars.

This is not meant to be morbid, but we have come here to live and die. To us what is important is to live life, every day, to enjoy the culture, and hopefully to contribute a little to make a better life for all.

NORM HOOGUE
Astoria