

# OPINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Today's EPA is profoundly disruptive

**M**aking sure Americans now and in the future have clean air, water and land is so uncontroversial that pro-business President Richard Nixon enthusiastically created the Environmental Protection Agency nearly 50 years ago.

But judging by the actions and words of today's EPA leaders, you'd think voters were clamoring to return to the Industrial Revolution's 19th-century heyday, when coal cinders choked the sky, rivers were used by industry as free toxin-disposal sewers and life expectancies were about half what they are today.

Scott Pruitt, who resigned the EPA administratorship on July 5, brought renewed meaning to the word scandalous. He had no ethical compass but instead a divining rod closely attuned to the dark desires of some in the fossil-fuel industry. Lacking any meaningful experience in large-agency management or federal environmental law, he would hardly have qualified for a janitorial position in Nixon's EPA. More than a dozen ethics probes will continue beyond his resignation.

And yet Pruitt and his likely successor, coal-industry lobbyist Andrew Wheeler, are both true to a certain antediluvian vision of the U.S. — one in which failing smokestack corporations should call all the shots. Hewing to President Trump's idea that national success can be measured in tons of coal and steel, his EPA appointees aren't just trying to negate the 10-year-old legacy of President Obama, but the 110-year-old legacy of Theodore Roosevelt.



AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler speaks to EPA staff last week.

There are many problems with this approach, but it isn't even very effective at achieving its own goals. Most U.S. industrial leaders, while sometimes bridle at cumbersome or overreaching environmental regulations, nevertheless value pure water and air. They understand the harsh costs of bad publicity when there are oil spills, cancer-causing contaminants, or mining permits issued in pristine settings. Perhaps most of all, they value predictable long-term policies that can be factored into decisions about investments and other matters. There is nothing quite so damaging to business as wild swings from one extreme to another.

Did the Obama administration take environmental regulations beyond statutory limits, inviting the backlash evident

in everything Trump does? Defenders of Obama EPA policies would say that a decision like regulating greenhouse gas emissions under existing air pollution rules is a logical step made vital by congressional malpractice — the stated goal of GOP leaders to stall and block everything the Democrat tried to do. An overwhelming majority of the scientific community believes there is no more urgent problem facing the world than figuring out how to pull the planet back from climate catastrophe. There are many citizens who believe if this isn't a proper function of the EPA, what is?

Objectively, however, the Constitution gives Congress alone the power to make laws. Presidential administrations routinely write rules to implement those laws, but stretching

rule-making too far invites the kind of counterrevolution initiated by Trump. Such expansion of rules into new areas is likely to be hobbled for decades to come by a more conservative Supreme Court. This means it is increasingly essential for our three branches of government to begin working together with the same sense of compromise that served our democracy so well in the mid-20th century.

This give and take has included executive department agencies like EPA. Beyond the pressing global emergency of climate change, in Oregon there are any number of locally important issues that demand intelligent ongoing involvement by the agency. These include everything from enforcing the clean-water standards that recently disrupted municipal water supplies in Salem to requiring higher fuel-efficiency standards for cars and trucks. Neither the state nor all the companies that do business here can easily afford to gyrate between Trump's vision of unfettered capitalism and the nearly inevitable repudiation of Trump policies by a new administration in 2020 or 2024.

Conservation of the natural world is literally conservative — consisting of cherishing what is good about our world and keeping it that way. The Trump EPA isn't conservative, but profoundly disruptive. Our nation needs stable, common-sense, constitutionally defensible environmental rules, not a radical rejection of fundamental principles established during decades of previous Republican and Democratic presidencies.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Up to legislature to change bad laws

Regarding judicial appointments, I fail to understand how anyone can have a problem with a jurist who finds it necessary to interpret a law as written, or as it applies to the Constitution. Could it be that one hopes a judge would have the law interpreted to fit a particular point of view?

Writing laws is the job of the legislature, not judges. If a law is bad, it is up to the legislature to change it. And, that can only be accomplished fairly on a bipartisan basis.

ROBERT FLETCHER  
Seaside

### County doesn't need a new jail

Clatsop County does not need a new jail. Clatsop County needs smarter incarceration. The plan for a new jail almost three times the current capacity is ludicrous. Our county is close to the same size population as when the current jail was built. Money would be far better spent for increased mental health programs.

If you still want to build a new jail, remember, it is the care and feeding that is the real expense. Also, a county jail needs to be located near courtrooms for frequent trial appearances from the facility.

Again, we do not need a large new jail, just better, efficient utilization of the space we have.

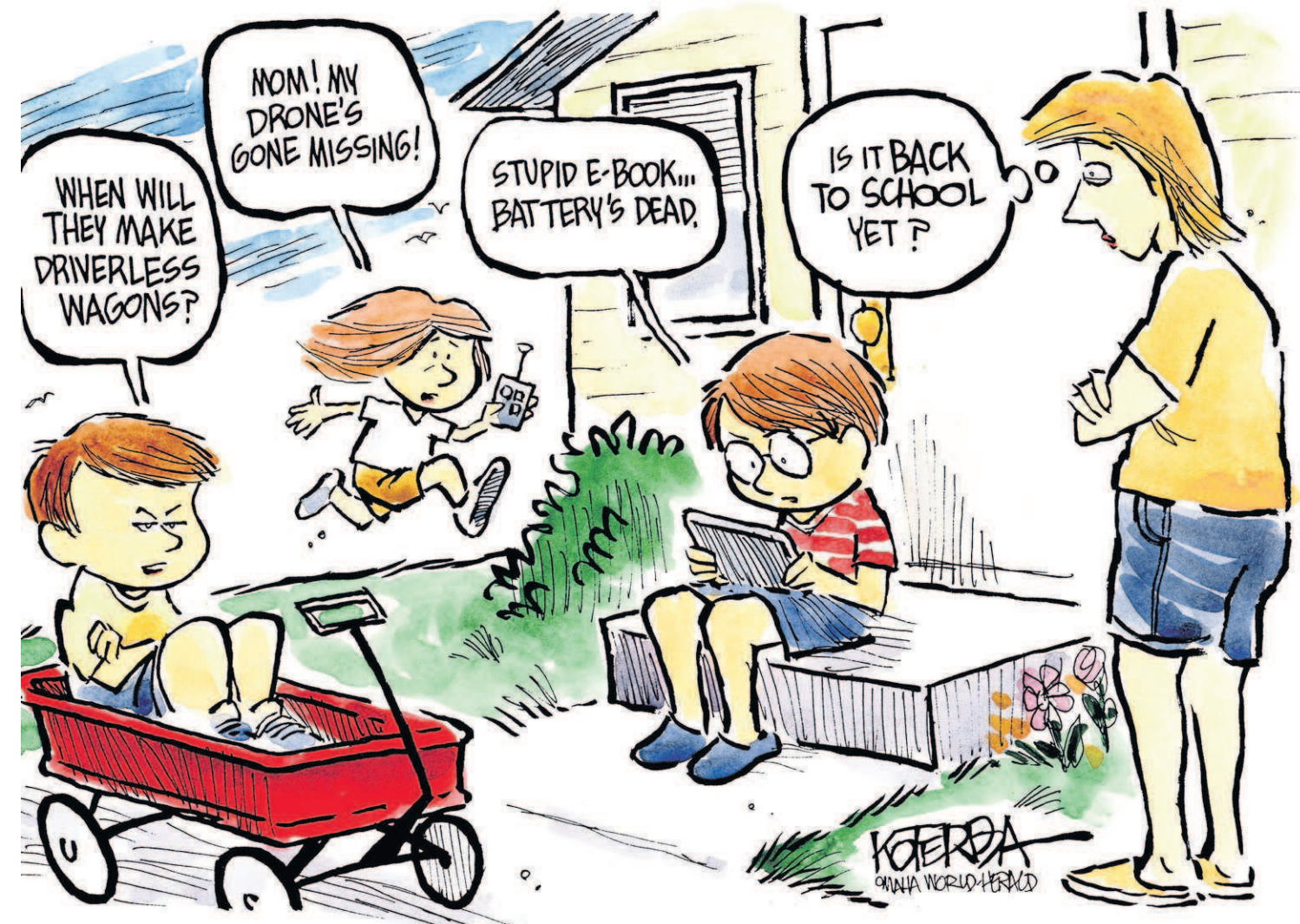
BOB WESTERBERG  
Astoria

### Oregonians do not need censorship

I read The Daily Astorian, The Oregonian and, once weekly, the New Yorker. I have been extremely proud of the Fourth Estate during this troubled political time we seem mired in. The truth seemed to abide ... until now.

On Friday, July 13, a quarter million Brits — men, women and children, carrying homemade signs — gathered in Trafalgar Square to protest President Donald Trump. It was absolutely the biggest and most significant news story of the day. It was of special interest to me, because my husband and I had joined a peace rally in Trafalgar Square in 1966, demonstrating against the Vietnam War. We were looking forward to reading this particular story in The Oregonian and seeing the wonderful photos.

On Saturday, July 14, there was nothing in the paper about the demonstration. I called



The Oregonian complaint line, and it wasn't working. No story in the Sunday edition, either. I felt the news was kept from us.

I call this "journalistic malpractice." Most of Oregon did not vote for Trump. For the most part, we are a fairly progressive population. Oregonians do not need censorship. Shame on The Oregonian.

MARY TANGUAY WEBB  
Astoria

### We need to use water more wisely

Lately, I have noticed a great deal of water use abuse. Yes, we live in the Pacific Northwest, home of the old novelty patch, "Oregon Rain Festival, Jan. 1 through Dec. 31." However, to use our brains, and not just the convenience of the assumption that water will always be available in abundance, we need to use it much more conservatively and wisely.

Example 1: Sprinklers that distribute the water liberally onto concrete sidewalks; I am pretty sure concrete grows nicely without hydration.

Example 2: In lieu of sweeping off a driveway or a parking lot, many folks will hose

down the entire space. While it may save a bit of time, that is a terribly wasteful abuse of water. Is it really that important that we blast all the schmutz off of all surfaces??

In the U.S., residential water use peaks during the summertime, mainly from watering lawns. Maintaining a green lawn can be a massive drain of water — irrigating a 1,000-square-foot lawn with just a half an inch of water takes about 330 gallons. Other outdoor water use includes washing the car and filling the swimming pool (watercalculator.org)

In effort to practice my preaching, I have begun to water my outside plants with water from my dehumidifier tank, when full. Honestly, I avoid watering my yard, because it makes the grass grow more, and I have to cut it more often. Who wants that? Is brown grass really that offensive in the face of wiser water use?

LYNN HADLEY  
Astoria

### Engaged citizens are contented citizens

As a candidate for District 3 commissioner, I would like to see a more robust citi-

zen-participation process in county government. Citizen input should be early and often in forming county policies and delivering programs. Two recent county initiatives illustrate my point.

There is no more important function of government than to formulate its budget. Citizens have a right to be skeptical when the budget process includes only staff analysis and input. The county's 2018-2019 budget was recently brought to the commission after one 8-hour session, where the appointed budget committee was asked to review a \$70 million budget. This is not meaningful input.

The county missed another opportunity to engage citizens in the design and operation of a new jail. When the jail proposal was unveiled to commissioners last spring, there had been zero citizen input. The jail plan would have benefited from citizen ideas, and have made the proposal a stronger sell on the November ballot.

Citizens have greater ownership of government programs when they feel they have contributed to decision-making. I believe we should do a better job of engaging our citizens on the important issues facing Clatsop County.

PAMELA WEV  
Astoria