

# OPINION



# the Astorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

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KARI BORGEN  
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE  
Editor

SHANNON ARLINT  
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN  
Production Manager

CARL EARL  
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## OUR VIEW

# A uniquely American miracle

During the past few weeks, Capital Press reporter Sierra Dawn McClain took a close look at how food gets from the farm to the grocery store.

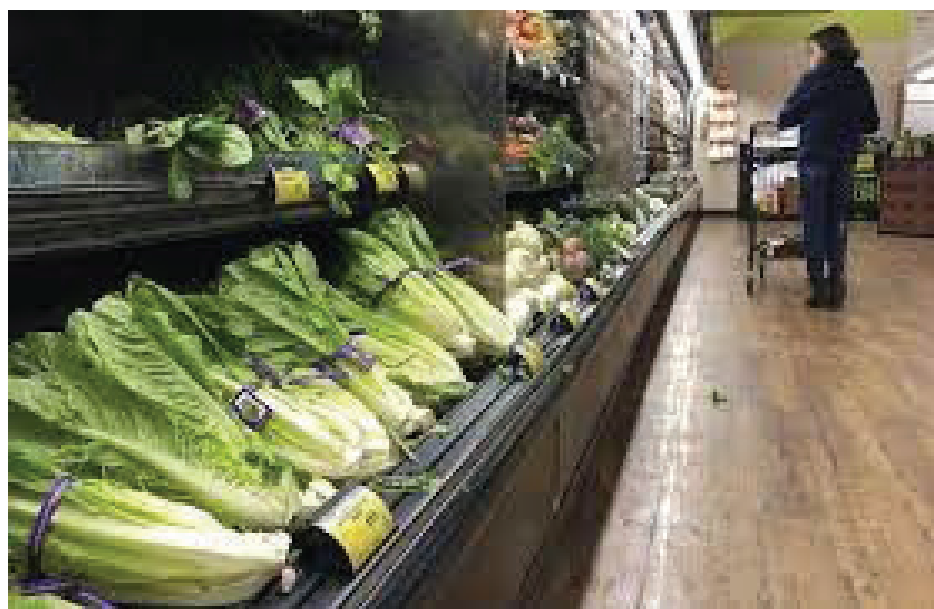
The food system she wrote about is as intricate as a clockwork, but it works fabulously well. Every day of every year, 331 million people directly benefit from this system, which provides them with a vast selection of food — and lots of it — at affordable prices.

And it's resilient.

Last year, when politicians closed restaurants, schools, businesses and other public institutions in an effort to curb the spread of COVID-19, the food system was up to the challenge. Farmers, ranchers, processors, distributors and retailers all pivoted to make sure food was available. It was a truly heroic effort.

Today, the nation is emerging from those COVID-provoked shut-downs and every link in the food chain is pivoting back to normalcy.

From time to time, some folks get together to try to figure out how to improve the food system. No doubt those discussions take place



Associated Press

America's food system continues to be a point of pride.

around well-stocked lunch or dinner tables.

Those of us who have a little bit of gray hair remember back to our childhood when the selection and quality of food, particularly produce, was much more limited in the winter.

Today, it's a different story. Whether they are in a boutique organic store in Manhattan, a superstore in Kansas or a regional super-

market chain in the Pacific Northwest, consumers will find that the selection, freshness and affordability of produce and all other foods is astounding. In many parts of the nation, consumers don't even have to go to the store. They can order their food online and have it delivered to their house that day.

There are 40,544 grocery stores in the U.S., and all of them are well-stocked and affordable. They, and

the rest of the food system, are a uniquely American miracle.

Several decades ago, a delegation from Vladivostok in the old Soviet Union was visiting a Fred Meyer store in Juneau, Alaska, as part of a sister city exchange. As they toured the grocery section, the Soviets shook their heads in disbelief. Here, in the middle of the largest national forest, during winter, in a city with no roads to the Lower 48 — or anywhere else, for that matter — was a selection of produce that couldn't be found anywhere in the Soviet Union. Not only that, the other three grocery stores in the city were equally well-stocked.

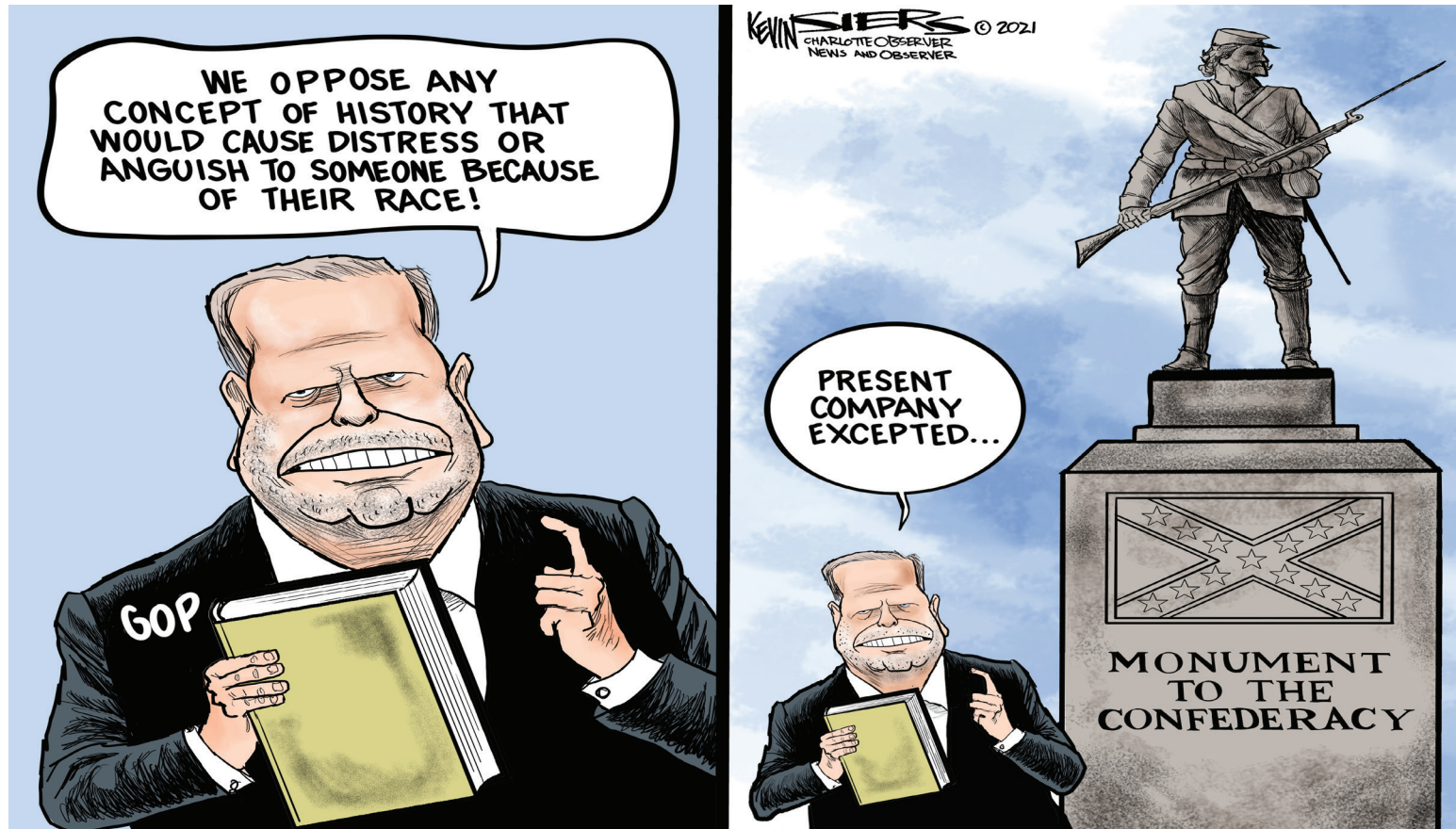
That, quite simply, shows the difference between capitalism and communism, between what freedom produces and what servitude produces.

America's food system is worth celebrating. It remains robust and continues to evolve over time to meet consumers' expectations to feed a hungry nation — and a good part of the world.

From the farm and the ranch to the dinner table, that celebration takes place three times a day.

## LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.



## GUEST COLUMN

# Wrong time to expand Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

Anyone who works the land should be wary of proposed legislation that applies federal Wild and Scenic River designations to 4,700 miles of Oregon rivers, streams, creeks, gulches, draws and unnamed tributaries.

The bill, proposed by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and promoted by environmental groups, has already received a committee hearing in the U.S. Senate, the first step toward passage.

S. 192, also known as the River Democracy Act, would apply half-mile buffer restrictions to proposed segments. If approved, it could impact public access, water resource management, forest and vegetation management, ranching and grazing, mining and other

uses on an estimated 3 million acres of public lands — a land mass nearly twice the size of Delaware.

There are over 2,000 miles of Oregon rivers designated as Wild and Scenic. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 was intended to protect rivers with “outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values in a free-flowing condition.”

Yet S. 192 only classifies 15% of the proposed segments as rivers. The bill identifies hundreds of streams, creeks, draws, gulches and unnamed tributaries for Wild and Scenic designations, even though many do not even carry water year-round.

S. 192 violates the spirit of the 1968 law because it bypasses a mechanism



U.S. Forest Service

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is intended to protect rivers and streams.

for robust study and review of proposed waterways to immediately add an additional 4,700 miles to the Wild and Scenic Rivers system. If such studies were conducted, many areas included in S. 192 would likely be found ineligible or unsuitable for designation.

Considering past use and litigation of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the bill raises a lot of questions about how it will impact future access, private property and water rights and other traditional uses of both public and private land.

Arbitrary land designations can have a chilling effect on actions taken by federal land management agencies, including actions intended to improve the land. For example, a Wild and Scenic designation could discourage efforts to stabilize riverbanks to avoid losing farm and range land to erosion. That's because federal courts have consistently upheld legal challenges by environmentalist groups against land management activities based on these designations.

For those of us concerned about severe

wildfires, we are especially troubled with how S. 192 would affect fuels reduction efforts on federal lands. Nearly half a million acres of federally managed forestland burned in western Oregon in 2020. Approximately 280,000 acres burned at moderate and high severity, meaning at least 60% of a stand's live trees were killed in a fire.

We are already frustrated with the slow pace of forest management and fuels reduction work on federal lands. Adding new restrictions and bureaucracy on 3 million acres of these lands will not repair an already-broken system. Despite claims made by proponents, S. 192 does not support wildfire mitigation.

Nothing in the bill directs or authorizes federal agencies to utilize all available land management tools — including mechanical treatments — to reduce the risk of severe wildfires, nor does it explicitly permit postfire restoration work, such as the removal of dead and dying trees, to maintain public access. Rather, the bill only allows agencies to consider prescribed fire, even though fire alone will not address heavy and unnatural fuel loads on already fire-prone landscapes.

As Oregon experiences another devastating wildfire season, this is the wrong time to add more restrictions and bureaucracy on the management of public lands. Anyone with private lands near these proposed Wild and Scenic segments should also take a close look at this bill to see how it affects them.

Nick Smith is the public affairs director for the American Forest Resource Council.