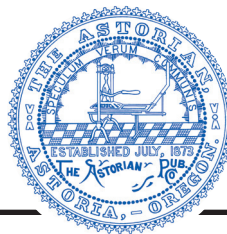


# OPINION

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# the Astorian

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## OUR VIEW

# Ban U.S. farmland sales to China, other nations

A proposal to protect a valuable strategic asset from some foreign-based actors deserves the full support of Congress and the Biden administration.

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse, a Washington state Republican, has offered legislation in Congress to prevent companies or individuals based in China, Russia, Iran and North Korea from buying U.S. farmland. The U.S. House Appropriations Committee recently added it to a funding bill on a unanimous voice vote.

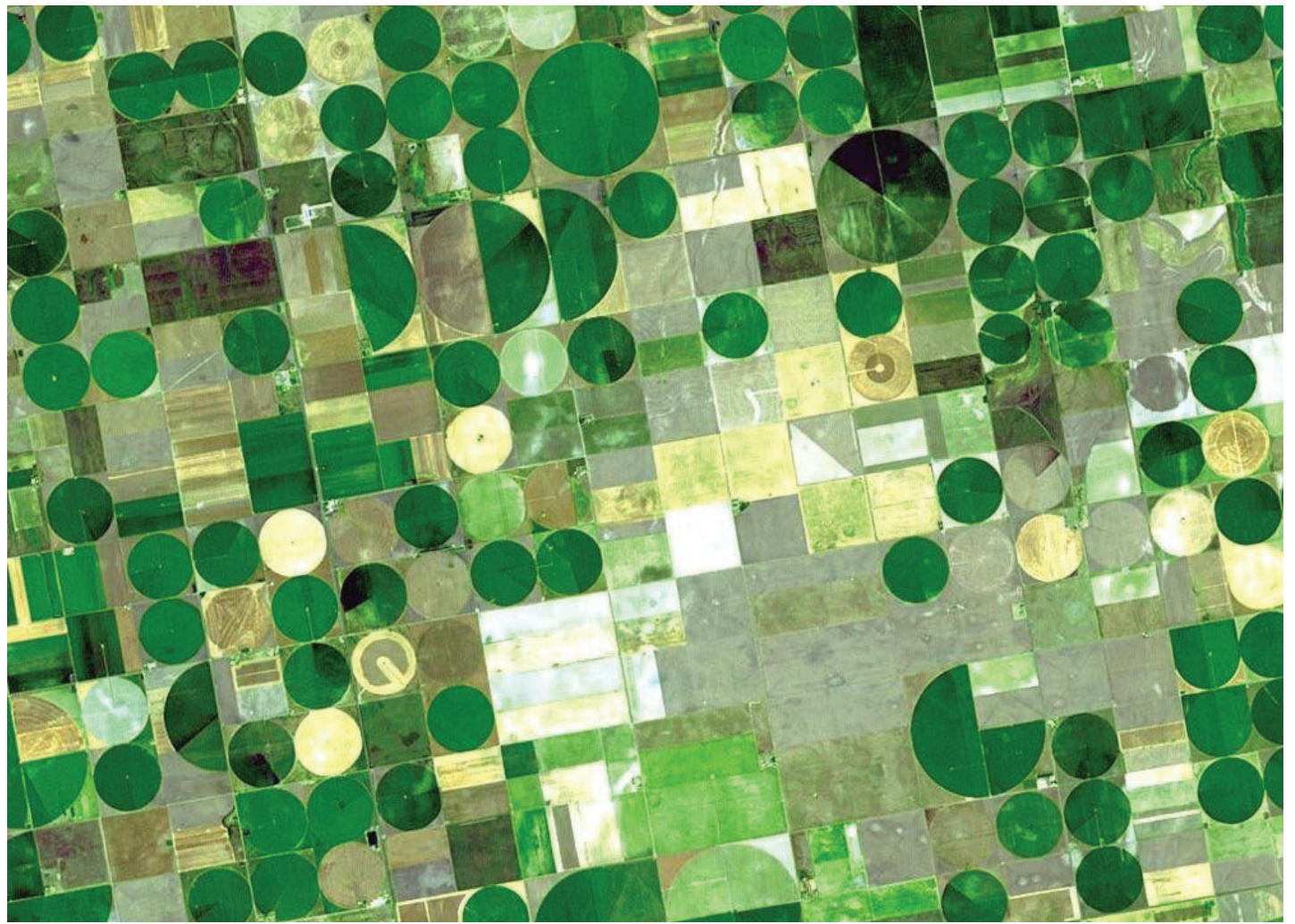
Similar measures have passed the House before, but the Senate has failed to pass them.

We all know the contempt with which the Chinese government holds U.S. technology and patents. We also have seen the contempt the government has for human rights. And we have seen the lengths to which the government will go to deny its responsibilities in the worldwide spread of COVID-19.

Now those same actors have their eyes on U.S. farmland, the most important of assets.

The stated policy of every U.S. administration has been to protect the ability of U.S. farmers to feed the nation and its friends around the globe. This policy has resulted in plentiful and affordable food. All a person has to do is walk through any grocery store and the success of that policy is obvious.

Allowing Chinese companies to buy into that policy makes no sense. Already, a Chinese government-backed company owns Smithfield Foods, the world's largest pork producer and processor. The Chinese paid \$4.7 billion — 30% more than the market value of the company —



U.S. Department of Agriculture

Legislation in Congress would block companies and individuals based in China, Russia, Iran and North Korea from buying U.S. farmland.

in 2013.

Since then, a lot has happened between China and the U.S. China continues to threaten to take over Taiwan, an independent nation off the coast of the mainland, apparently hoping to emulate Russia's invasion of Crimea and Ukraine.

In each instance, China has put the interests of itself over those of everyone else.

Then there's Russia, where Vladimir Putin is taking over independent foreign nations. He even threatened

the president of Finland after that nation opted to join NATO, calling the move "a mistake."

At the same time, Putin has trashed Russia's economy. Note that the Russian ruble is worth less than a few pennies.

Iran and North Korea, both sworn enemies of the U.S., continue to seek nuclear arsenals and the intercontinental missiles to deliver them.

Considering these factors, Congress should block any efforts of companies in any way associated with China, Russia, Iran and

North Korea from ever buying U.S. farmland.

Chinese companies or individuals already own 352,140 acres of U.S. agricultural land. Much of that land is tied to Smithfield Foods. Iranians own 4,324 acres of U.S. farmland, and Russians own 834 acres. North Korea owns none.

That does not seem like a lot, but in our eyes, it's too much.

U.S. farmland is the keystone of our nation's security. Selling it to those who wish us ill is folly.

## GUEST COLUMN

# Newspapers remain a foundation for the great town square

This is the story of Max Monda, a mummified orange, and, idiosyncratic as it might sound, the role of the opinion press.

Longtime PR executive and political insider Pat McCormick recently came across a black-and-white photo with the inscription, "Dear Pat. Thank for the help. Max Monda 4-29-83."

"Max Monda" was the alter ego of the late Salem Statesman Journal columnist Ron Blankenbaker. The photo shows Blankenbaker beside his newsroom desk, which was piled several feet high with press releases, assorted papers, newspaper clippings and what-have-you spilling

onto the floor. A calculation written on the adjacent blackboard says, "15 cubic feet of total Mess."

Editors feared someone might get hurt if Blankenbaker's desk unleashed an avalanche of debris on an unwitting passerby. It also was a fire hazard, especially with smoking prevalent in the 1980s newsroom. So he enlisted McCormick's help for a cleanup.

Blankenbaker spent as little time as possible at that desk, preferring the basement press room of the Oregon State Capitol. Anyone could stroll into the wide-open press room — and they did — to pass tidbits to reporters.

Even more critical to Blankenbaker's style of reporting was the coffee shop at the other end of the basement, where he held court as lobbyists, politicians and staffers dropped by. Gov. Vic Atiyeh was among the many officials who routinely lunched there.

Over time, Blankenbaker's newsroom desk in downtown Salem turned into impromptu museum of an opinion columnist's life. As he recounted in a column detailing his undirying deed, the cleaning revealed a dried wreath, a table cloth with flashing lights, a white striped muffler, a clipping of a story he'd written 14 years earlier about trumpeter Harry James, and mounds of phone messages he'd probably never returned or even seen.

And yes, a mummified orange once existed beneath those 40 or 50 pounds of



Bound archives from The Astorian are housed at the Clatsop County Historical Society.

## 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

paper.

In a profession that encompasses both the organized journalist and the disordered, Blankenbaker was in a class by himself. I can attest. My desk was around the corner from his. A few weeks after that photo was taken, I too moved down the street and joined him in the Capitol as the newbie covering the Legislature and state government. A few years later, I became — to his consternation — his editor.

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.

"R.B." was both a local and statewide institution, fully invested in the public's right to know. His political columns were "must reads" — enlightening or aggravating, topical or tiresome, depending on one's point of view. They certainly got the readers' attention, and the politicians'.

During the week of Independence Day, I've been thinking about Blankenbaker and others of his ilk — local columnists who know their community so well that they

become part of its character, who write fearlessly but thoughtfully, and who keep the readers' interests at heart.

The founders of the U.S. recognized the role of newspapers. The First Amendment, which embraces freedom of the press, is the best-known example but not the only one. The Constitution authorized Congress to establish post offices and post roads, in essence granting governmental support to ensure delivery of newspapers.

The newspapers of early America primarily comprised opinion — first-hand accounts, letters, treatises. Today's newspapers, whether in print or online, remain a foundation for the great town square of public opinion and debate.

Let me stress that the role of a newspaper opinion piece is not to tell people what to think but to get them to think. Besides, readers always get the last word through letters to the editor. Letters are a window into the soul of a community.

Long ago, a letter writer upset with the tone of a Blankenbaker column called him a "pompous twit." He concurred, which eventually led to creation of Pompous Twits Anonymous.

From then, Blankenbaker annually anointed a new cast of not-so-anonymous Twits — "a politician, bureaucrat, lobbyist, journalist or other public meddler caught in an act of pomposity too outrageous to ignore." Rather than recoiling from such a barb, officials looked forward to seeing whether they made the list, though not always appreciating the accompanying description of their ineptitude or pomposity.

Each year, Blankenbaker dunned the Twits to help needy families at Christmas with gifts and children's clothing, but sometimes appliances, auto repairs, back rent — even a gravestone honoring a young sister lost in a car crash.

The Twits, who included every governor during Blankenbaker's tenure, crossed political and philosophical lines. A December 1989 news story recounts that helping deliver gifts that year were Gov. Neil Goldschmidt, State Treasurer Tony Meeker, then-Secretary of State Barbara Roberts, ex-legislator Mike Kopetski and lobbyist Ted Hughes, who annually bore a striking resemblance to Santa Claus.

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.



DICK HUGHES