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OUR VIEW

Spring cleaning

Wednesday’s cold rain and cloud cover was a classic Oregon spring day. But the weather will get warmer and more inviting over the next few weeks, and the specter of snow and winter will recede in the rear-view mirror.

The official start of spring was March 20. Now the threat of a hard freeze is mostly over, and it’s time to throw up the sash and give the house a good scrub.

It’s also time to reclaim the yard. Before new growth begins, prune away dead and damaged branches on trees, cut back and divide perennials, gather and compost yard waste. Give that lawnmower a few tugs to make sure it remains in working order. Till the ground and consider planting summer vegetables. Or take an afternoon nap *en plein air*.

Cleaning up can be taken a step further, using that same vigor and elbow grease to clean up our communities. In Morrow County, the cities of Boardman and Irrigon sponsor garbage voucher programs that allow citizens to drop off loads of trash at the dump at no cost; Pendleton Sanitary Service also provides a voucher to its customers for one free dump load in April. In Hermiston, Sanitary Disposal is hosting a spring cleanup April 1-7 and accepting loads of up to 450

pounds of waste at no cost.

Also, a citizen advisory board and Umatilla County are gearing up to beautify some eyesores along Highway 395 between Hermiston and the city of Umatilla. Pendleton’s ever-popular Umatilla River cleanup, organized by the watershed council, is scheduled for May 16.

The *East Oregonian* regularly publishes cleanup events in our coming events calendar, so pick one out and show up with some work gloves on hand. No expertise is required, but help is always appreciated.

And for every city and organization-led event, there are myriad opportunities to take up the responsibility on your own and help beautiful your city, your neighborhood or your block. Help a neighbor with some backbreaking work. Plant a few extra flowers this year — and be sure you don’t forget to smell them later. And for heaven’s sake don’t litter, or you’ll be undoing all the wonderful work of your friends and neighbors.

Spring is a time for new beginnings. The strength and beauty of our communities is something we should be proud of. And that community pride is part of what makes Eastern Oregon a great place to live.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Need to improve Oregon ethics and transparency laws

The (Eugene) Register-Guard

As far as political scandals go, Oregon has long been a featherweight compared to other states such as Illinois. Just a few years ago, an Illinois governor was convicted of trying to sell an open seat in the U.S. Senate, and after the death of a former Illinois secretary of state, shoeboxes containing more than \$800,000 in cash bribes were found stashed in his hotel suite.

Oregon has a long way to go to catch up with the corruption-rich likes of not only Illinois, but New Jersey and others. But the allegations of influence-peddling involving former Gov. John Kitzhaber and Sylvia Hayes, the governor’s fiancée and a selfemployed environmental consultant, show that Oregon is capable of generating national headlines — and notoriety. Unfortunately, the episode is also capable of eroding Oregonians’ faith in their state government. That confidence has been further shaken by a flurry of controversies in the wake of the Kitzhaber-Hayes scandal, which remains under federal investigation.

They include the questionable award of \$12 million in state tax credits used to finance an Oregon University System solar-panel construction project, which failed to meet the state’s Business Energy Tax Credit program standards.

An investigation by *The Oregonian* newspaper found that the state Department of Energy apparently relied on phony and misleading documents in approving the tax credits in 2012. Gov. Kate Brown has asked the state Department of Justice to look into the matter, and Michael Kaplan, the director of the Department of Energy, has called for a criminal investigation.

Earlier this month, *The Oregonian* also reported that Tom Tuchmann, a forest policy adviser to Kitzhaber, collected nearly \$400,000 in fees and expenses from the state while also running a consulting business. For nearly three years, Tuchmann was both the former governor’s part-time forestry adviser and owner of Portland-based U.S. Forest Capital, a private consulting firm that helped arrange deals of the same kind that Tuchmann helped Kitzhaber promote. Brown severed the contract with Tuchmann on her first day in office — a smart and necessary down payment on her pledge that no one in her administration would earn money from outside sources.

Several other ethical hot spots have emerged in recent weeks, but these provide sufficient evidence that Oregon needs tougher ethics laws. They also suggest that the state’s scandal-lite reputation may be, much as Oregonians hate to admit it, as much the result of lax laws and enforcement than integrity.

In her inaugural address, Brown emphasized the need for ethics reform in the still-churning wake of the Kitzhaber-



Get Roundup off the market

The issues surrounding GMOs — genetically modified organisms — have never been simple. They became more complicated last week when the International Agency for Research on Cancer declared that glyphosate, the active ingredient in the widely used herbicide Roundup, probably causes cancer in humans. Two insecticides, malathion and diazinon, were also classified as “probable” carcinogens by the agency, a respected arm of the World Health Organization.



MARK BITTMAN
Comment

Roundup, made by Monsanto for both home and commercial use, is crucial in the production of genetically engineered corn and soybean crops, so it was notable that the verdict on its dangers came nearly simultaneously with an announcement by the Food and Drug Administration that new breeds of genetically engineered potato and apple are safe to eat. Which they probably are, as are the genetically engineered papayas we’ve been eating for some time. In fact, to date there’s little credible evidence that any food grown with genetic engineering techniques is dangerous to human health — unless, like much corn and soybeans, it’s turned into junk food. But, really, let’s be fair.

Fair, too, is a guess that few people are surprised that an herbicide in widespread use is probably toxic at high doses or with prolonged exposure, circumstances that may be common among farmers and farmworkers. Nor is it surprising that it took so long — Roundup has been used since the 1970s — to discover its likely carcinogenic properties. There is a sad history of us acting as guinea pigs for the novel chemicals that industry develops. For this we have all too often paid with our damaged health.

Rarely is that damage instantaneous, but it’s safe to say that novel biotechnologies broadly deployed may well have unexpected consequences. Yet unlike Europeans, Canadians, Australians and others, we don’t subscribe to the precautionary principle, which maintains that it’s better to prevent damage than repair it.

We ask not whether a given chemical might cause cancer but whether we’re certain that it does. Since it’s unethical to test the effects of new chemicals and food additives on humans, we rely on the indirect expedient of extensive and expensive animal testing. But the job of the FDA should be to guarantee a reasonable expectation of protection from danger, not to wait until people become sick before taking products off the market. (You might have thought that government’s job was to make sure products were safe before they were marketed. You’d have been wrong — Rezulin, thalidomide or phthalates, anyone?)

Even now, when it’s clear that more research must be done to determine to what degree glyphosate may be carcinogenic, it’s not clear whose responsibility it is to conduct that research. The public health agencies of other countries? Independent researchers who just happen to be interested in the causes of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, the cancer with which glyphosate is associated, according to the IARC?

Or — here’s an idea — how about Monsanto, which has made billions of dollars selling glyphosate and the associated seed technology. (The company produces crop seeds that are resistant to glyphosate, which can thus be freely sprayed onto fields, in theory killing all plants but the crop. This scheme isn’t working as well as it once did for weed control, because many weeds have become glyphosate-tolerant. But that’s another story.)

Now that the safety of glyphosate is clearly in question, perhaps it’s time to mandate that the corporation — not the taxpaying public — bear the brunt of determining whether it should still be sold. Since the Environmental Protection Agency doesn’t have the resources to test, let Monsanto pay for the necessary, and independent, research.

While we’re at it, let’s finally start labeling products made with genetically engineered food. Right now, the only way we can be sure to avoid them is to buy organic food. If GMOs were largely beneficial to eaters, manufacturers would proudly boast of products containing them. The fact is that they have not. To date, GMOs and other forms of biotech have done nothing but enrich their manufacturers and promote a system of agriculture that’s neither sustainable nor for the most part beneficial.

We don’t need better, smarter chemicals along with crops that can tolerate them; we need fewer chemicals. And it’s been adequately demonstrated that crop rotation, the use of organic fertilizers, interplanting of varieties of crops, and other ecologically informed techniques commonly grouped together under the term “agroecology” can effectively reduce the use of chemicals.

Meanwhile, how about getting glyphosate off the market until Monsanto can prove that it’s safe to use? There’s no reason to put the general population, and particularly the farming population, at risk for the sake of industry profits.

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Mark Bittman writes (mostly) about food for the Times Opinion pages, and is The Magazine’s lead food columnist. He is the author of “VB6: Eat Vegan Before 6:00” and “How To Cook Everything.” Follow Mark Bittman on Twitter and Facebook.

YOUR VIEWS

Real March madness is the big money won and lost

As we get excited about the NCAA tournament starting up, people should realize there is much more madness here than you might imagine.

Those businesses who want to use the NCAA logo pay \$10 million to be “corporate partners.” To move up to the high status of “corporate champions,” however, the cost is between \$30-35 million. Can you imagine the genuine good things that could be accomplished in this country with that kind of money?

NCAA fans will wager about \$9 billion on the tournament, which is roughly double that waged on the Super Bowl. The NCAA makes a profit of about \$900 million for broadcast rights from CBS. The average price of a 30-second ad for the tournament was \$1.5 million in 2014. Overall expenditure for ads during the 2014 tournament was \$1.13 billion — twice that of 2005.

How about the teams? Each team that appears receives \$1.6 million even if they lose. They get \$5 million to make it to the Sweet 16 and \$8.3 million for the Final Four. Even so, most college basketball programs lose money. Only 3 percent of college teams actually turn a profit and not a single woman’s program makes a profit. The average loss for all college basketball programs is \$811,000.

Now that is March Madness on a grand scale.

David Burns
Pendleton

Support Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement

I urge Oregonians to encourage our congressional delegation to support adoption of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement.

TPP boosts made-in-America exports to some of the fastest growing countries in the world, eliminates trade barriers, creates a level playing field and establishes rules stopping unfair trade.

In 2013 Oregon exported \$2.3 billion in raw agricultural products, as well as other value-added products. Oregon’s agricultural exports boosted farm income and supported about 17,400 jobs that can pay 20 percent more than jobs not connected to the international economy.

Foreign trade is crucial for Oregon’s urban and rural businesses. Standing still on the TPP is not an option.

With Oregon’s strategic Pacific Rim location the TPP is vitally necessary. For Oregon companies with products garnering international demand, Asia is essential for our growth.

The TPP will grow Oregon’s economy, add family-wage jobs, and support industry throughout Oregon.

Stan Baker, president
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