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OUR VIEW

With no facts, can't support trade deal

The American people have been kept in the dark about the Trans Pacific Partnership, or TPP, and that is by design.

The text of the proposed agreement is hidden away under lock and key. And while government officials and advisors have read it, they are not allowed to talk publicly about specifics of the deal.

That's the way trade deals always work, but it does make public debate impossible. And it requires the ignorant public to at least be firm in the knowledge that robust debate has gone on behind closed doors, and that parties with differing views have hashed out all sides of the deal.

But from the scant information we know about the proposed trade pact, that remains another unknown. Many of the authors — and now proponents — are heavy on the corporate side of the ledger. Environmental, labor, small business and human development voices did not have as big a hand in the crafting, and due to the legal requirements of not divulging specifics of the deal have been unable to properly list their objections.

The political lines drawn here are interesting. President Obama is pushing hard for the ability to put the trade pact into law. He is joined by Oregon Democratic Senator Ron Wyden and many Congressional Republicans. On the flip side of the debate, liberal Democrats are opposed to the plan, including Oregon's other Democratic senator Jeff Merkley. But also opposed are your traditional isolationists and protectionists and those who are against government at every turn. Who would imagine an issue that the president and John Boehner would

be on the same side of, and Elizabeth Warren and Rush Limbaugh would be united in opposition?

President Obama's line in support of the trade pact is a simple one and a good one: that we'd rather make the rules than have to follow China's. This deal includes 12 Pacific Rim countries, including Canada and Mexico, with China being glaringly left out.

It's hard to forget the many brutal effects NAFTA had on the American worker, though Obama is begging the public to debate this trade deal on its own merits and not be judged by past sins. To do so, we must have reason to believe this deal is different, though nothing concrete says that it is.

Knowing what we know, it's impossible to be against the TPP. But it's impossible to be for it, too.

For this shady trade deal to have public support, the American government would need a long track record of doing what is in the best interest of its constituents. Judging by the brutal approval ratings of Congress and the president, we don't think many people believe that. We think they're right: This deal reeks of catering to the big-money interests that have bought the right to access the inner-workings of our government. The average American citizen doesn't have that access, not to mention how far the average Malaysian worker or Peruvian forest is from the avenues of power.

Free trade makes sense. In a perfect world, it would be the fair playing field for all economic activity. But this is no perfect world. And knowing that, we have a hard time entrusting people to create a deal we cannot discuss until it's too late.

The political lines drawn here include President Obama and John Boehner united in support, Elizabeth Warren and Rush Limbaugh united in opposition.

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

Speed limit should rise on rural Oregon highways

The (Bend) Bulletin

Oregon lawmakers are considering a measure, House Bill 3402, which would raise speed limits on Interstate 84 east of The Dalles and several other highways east of the Cascades. It should be approved.

The new limit would be 70 miles per hour for most vehicles on Interstate 84 and on U.S. Highway 95 from the Idaho border to the Nevada border. In this area, U.S. Highway 97 from its junction with U.S. 197 in Wasco County to Klamath Falls and U.S. 20 from Bend to Ontario would see speed limits raised to 65 miles per hour for most drivers.

Speed limits also would increase to 65 mph on highways from La Pine to southern Lake County, from Burns Junction in southern Malheur County northwest to Burns, from John Day to Burns and Riley to the California border, from Burns to Frenchglen and, finally, from John Day east to Vale.

The Oregon Department of Transportation does not support the bill, in part, it says, because it will make highways more dangerous. That may

be true, but only if one assumes most motorists are obeying the current 55 mph speed limit.

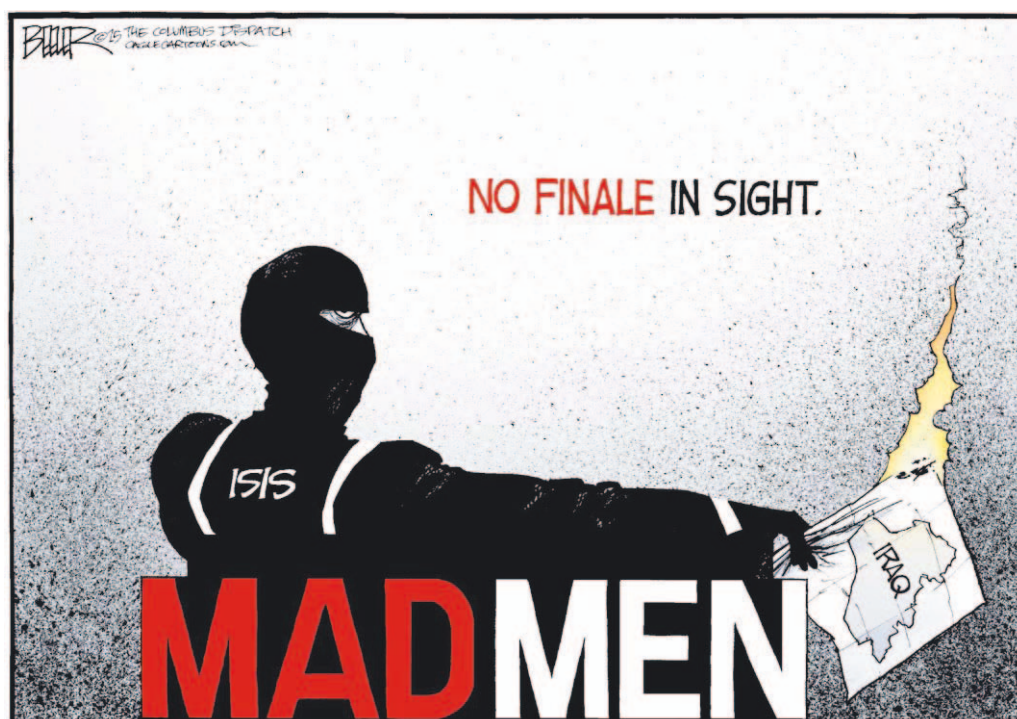
We suspect they're not. Personal experience leads us to believe that while most motorists in eastern Oregon try to keep their speed comfortably under 70, few actually spend much time at the designated 55 mph.

But there's more to ODOT's complaint than just safety. In written testimony submitted to the House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development, ODOT officials noted that they have statutory power to raise speed limits, had looked at the idea and decided not to. Nothing in the intervening 11 years has changed officials' minds.

Again, however, there's the reality of what is happening today. If most motorists are driving at 65, raising the speed limit and enforcing the higher limit would not make highways more dangerous in the future. That makes more sense than continuing to allow thousands of Oregonians to become lawbreakers every time they get behind the wheel of the family car.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

Chemo for the planet

What's the best way to reduce the chances of climate change wreaking havoc on Earth?

The most obvious answer — one we've known for years now — is to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide we're pumping into the atmosphere. This can be done, for instance, by putting a price on carbon and thus create powerful market incentives for industries to lower their carbon footprint. Or by moving to renewable energy sources. Or by changing people's behavior so that our collective actions radically reduce the amount of fossil fuel the world needs to power itself.

Despite this knowledge, however, few policies have been put in place to spur any of that. In the United States, the effective price of carbon, as Gernot Wagner and Martin Weitzman point out in their new book, "Climate Shock," is "about zero" (aside from California). Fossil fuels remain the world's default energy source, and — despite the impressive growth of global solar capacity over the past decade — that's likely to be the case for decades to come. A carbon tax on the worst emitters has gotten nowhere.

So maybe we need to start thinking about coming at the climate-change problem from a different direction. Instead of hoping that humans will start reducing their carbon use, maybe it's time to at least consider using technology to keep climate change at bay.

The deliberate use of technology to manipulate the environment — usually in the context of fighting climate change — is called geoengineering. One method is carbon capture, traditionally conceived as a process that sucks up carbon from the air and buries it in the ground. A second is called solar radiation management, which uses techniques like shooting sulfate particles into the stratosphere to reflect or divert solar radiation back into space. This very effect was illustrated after the volcanic eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991. Spewing 20 million tons of sulfur dioxide in the air, the volcano caused global temperatures to fall, temporarily, by about 0.5 of a degree Celsius, according to Wagner and Weitzman.

Somewhat to my surprise, a good portion of Wagner's and Weitzman's book is devoted to the subject of geoengineering, especially solar radiation management, which they describe as relatively inexpensive and technologically feasible, with a serious bang for the buck.

The reason I was surprised is that the authors have solid environmental credentials — Weitzman is an environmental economist at Harvard, and Wagner is a senior economist at the Environmental Defense Fund — and many environmental groups object to the very



JOE NOCERA
Comment

idea of geoengineering. They even object to research into the subject, viewing the desire to manipulate nature as immoral. Ben Schreiber of Friends of the Earth, an advocacy group, recently described discussions about geoengineering as a "dangerous distraction."

"Geoengineering presumes that we can apply a dramatic technological fix to climate disruption," he said, "instead of facing the reality that we need to drastically reduce our carbon

emissions."

Schreiber was reacting to two reports by a National Academy of Sciences panel that came out just a week before "Climate Shock." The reports concluded that, while "climate intervention is no substitute for reductions in carbon dioxide emissions," the politics around carbon reduction have been so fractious that the day could well come when geoengineering was needed as part of a "portfolio" of responses to global warming. It urged further study for both methods, and, in particular, called for the establishment of a research program to examine the possible risks of solar radiation management.

Wagner and Weitzman do not deny the potential risks; indeed, they write quite cautiously about geoengineering. Wagner told me that it should be thought of as a last resort — something the world could turn to if it had to. He described it as a kind of "chemotherapy for the planet" — something you hope you don't have to use, but you are ready to use if the need arises. And that requires doing research now to prepare for the future.

David Keith, a scientist who is perhaps the foremost proponent of geoengineering, told me that he believes that solar radiation management should be used even if decent carbon policies became law.

"It has substantial benefits," he said. "That would be true whether we were cutting emissions or not."

But he also acknowledged that more research is needed.

"If you put sulfur into the atmosphere, will there be a risk of ozone loss?" he said, as an example of the kind of risk that needed to be studied.

There is another kind of risk, of course: the risk that if people thought a technological solution were available to "solve" climate change, it would make it even less likely that they would collectively agree to do what is needed to be done to reduce carbon emissions. It is yet another reason that many environmentalists object to geoengineering.

Still, if disaster is truly approaching, wouldn't you rather be safe than sorry?

Joe Nocera is an Op-Ed columnist for The New York Times.

YOUR VIEWS

Medical marijuana has helped American heroes

"American Sniper" was ranked the No. 1 movie in United States for the week of Dec. 17 through Dec. 23, 2014, when competition for this top listing is intense.

This is an excerpt from the magazine, Salon:

"In his best-selling memoir, 'American Sniper: The Autobiography of the Most Lethal Sniper in U.S. Military History,' Navy SEAL Chris Kyle writes that he was only two weeks into his first of four tours of duty in Iraq when he was confronted with a difficult choice. Through the scope of his .300 Winchester Magnum rifle, he saw a woman with a child pull a grenade from under her clothes as several Marines approached. Kyle's job was to provide 'overwatch,' meaning that he was perched in or on top of bombed-out apartment buildings and was responsible for preventing enemy fighters from ambushing U.S. troops."

When Kyle returned home, he suffered from PTSD and that led to sleepless nights and emotional distress that he tried to block out with alcohol.

Let's switch to a story about a local resident who was a sniper in Afghanistan. He left his high school sweetheart to serve in the Marines. He was trained in the same manner as Chris Kyle and his job was to also provide "overwatch" to prevent the enemy from ambushing U.S. troops.

He witnessed his friends blown up by IEDs and others violently killed standing next to him. He was exposed to one horrific scene after another during his deployment in Afghanistan.

When he returned to North Carolina, he discovered that he was always in physical pain, had insomnia, and nightmares woke him up each night. The only bright spot in his life was when he reunited with his high school sweetheart, who had left their home town and settled in Pendleton finding a job as an English teacher at BMCC.

The painkillers prescribed by the VA started to cause debilitating side effects. He discovered that only medical marijuana provided him with relief from PTSD. Unfortunately, his VA doctor wouldn't prescribe medical marijuana. The Marine doesn't want to break the law but he's faced with the responsibility of raising a young boy.

After serving his country for nine years, he relies on the medicinal qualities of marijuana to work, support his family, and cope with the physical and mental ailments caused by his military duty.

The time to make a decision about medical marijuana dispensaries cannot be delayed any longer. Local musician Jared Pennington is just one of hundreds of people in the community who relies on medical marijuana to survive.

Jerry Cronin
Pendleton