

# Quick takes

## Amphibious pitcher

I'd give my right arm to be amphibious.  
— **George Markos**

The next Warren Spawn?  
— **Chris Siple**

I guess his games will never be called on account of rain!  
— **EmptyNest**

Well, it makes sense. Can't pitchers hold water?  
— **Lynn Point**

And someday, when the moon is right and the wine is flowing, I'll tell you about the time the T-Shirt (minus the "r") got through our crack copy desk.  
— **RevDodd**

## Bill would allow for pot bans

I think that those counties that pass bans should also not receive any of the new cannabis tax revenue.  
— **Micah Engum**

Who cares about shops when you can grown your own legally?  
— **Kristopher Stiefel**

Just wait a few years. The young will replace the old ways of thinking and make things right.  
— **Ian Patrick**

Good! Enough dum-dum young adults on the road.  
— **Ko-Ko Lalonde**

*One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim\_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.*

# Mad Max rides into the American West

By **BEN GOLDFARB**  
*High Country News*

Last Thursday, I emerged from a movie theatre weak-kneed and sweaty-pitted, nerves fried and brain buzzing, simultaneously terrified and exhilarated by the sight of my own car in the parking lot. I had just seen "Mad Max: Fury Road," George Miller's deranged ode to vehicles, explosions, and maybe, just maybe, the importance of environmental advocacy.

Most of the commentary around Mad Max, including some ranting from the delusional "men's rights" movement, has focused on the film's feminist leanings. (Max himself plays second fiddle to the movie's true hero, Charlize Theron's Furiosa, who's seeking to free a group of female sex slaves from their vile master.)

But Mad Max is more of an environmental flick, one set during a time in which humankind has abandoned its collective land ethic. Nuclear waste has ruined the soil, political elites duel over vanishing water supplies, and gangs of angry motorheads ride roughshod over the land in direct violation of law and order. Oops, my bad — I started talking about the present-day Southwest.

So what did I learn from the anarchic hellscape across which Max and his antagonists run their rusty deathtraps? Here are three lessons from this cinematic masterpiece that we can apply right here in the American West:

**Not a drop to spare:** Most Westerners probably don't need me to remind them that the West's gone awful dry. Still, if you think Lake Mead looks bad now, you should see post-apocalyptic Australia, where Fury Road is set. I felt parched just watching the trailer.

How can we stave off Max-hood in our own region? We'll have to get creative.

Rainwater harvesting, realistic water prices, improvements in irrigation technology, xeriscaping and other home efficiency measures, and some shrewd deal-making all belong in the mix. A dose of interagency cooperation wouldn't hurt, either. Do all that, and we just might be able to avoid turning into a rabble of thirsty psychopaths.

**Return of the Dust Bowl:** OK, so Mad Max isn't explicitly a work of "cli-fi," the nascent genre in which an anthropogenically altered atmosphere provides the backdrop to a cataclysmic future. See, e.g., Paolo Bacigalupi's new book, "The Water Knife," or, if you're feeling lower-brow, the anti-geoengineering cinematic screed "Snowpiercer." And I'm fairly sure the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report doesn't mention the possibility of brainwashed young men spraying chrome on their faces and sacrificing themselves, Kamikaze-like, for a sadistic overlord. (Maybe it's in the appendix?)

Still, our once-hospitable climate has most definitely run amok in the Mad Max universe. It's all in there: the drought, the heightened violence and, most spectacularly, the extreme weather. At one point, Furiosa evades capture by piloting her 18-wheeler into the twirling eye of a towering dust storm, or haboob. Residents of Phoenix, which experienced a 2011 haboob that stretched 6,000 feet high and 100 miles wide, can probably relate. And last winter, epic dusters blew from Colorado to Oklahoma, piling up so many tumbleweeds that one town had to mobilize its snowplows. No, we can't pin any given storm on global warming, but a growing

body of evidence suggests that climate change will only make weather weirder. Anyone up for a carbon tax?

**Road rage:** You might not know this about Mad Max, but it contains cars. Lots and lots of cars. It's practically Los Angeles, only with even angrier drivers. Oil, in Max's world, has become scarce and more precious than blood, and the tyrant's henchmen, called War Boys, will kill and die to secure gasoline. The original 1979 film, in fact, was partly inspired by the 1973 oil crisis, during which American motorists rioted against gas station owners.

## Most Westerners don't need to be reminded that the West has gone awful dry.

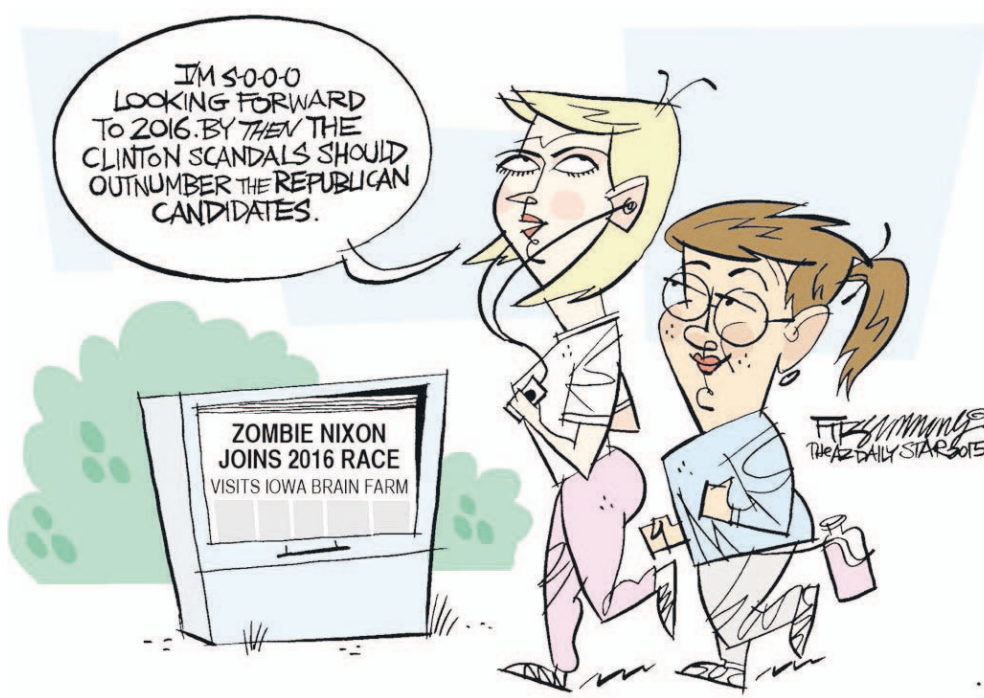
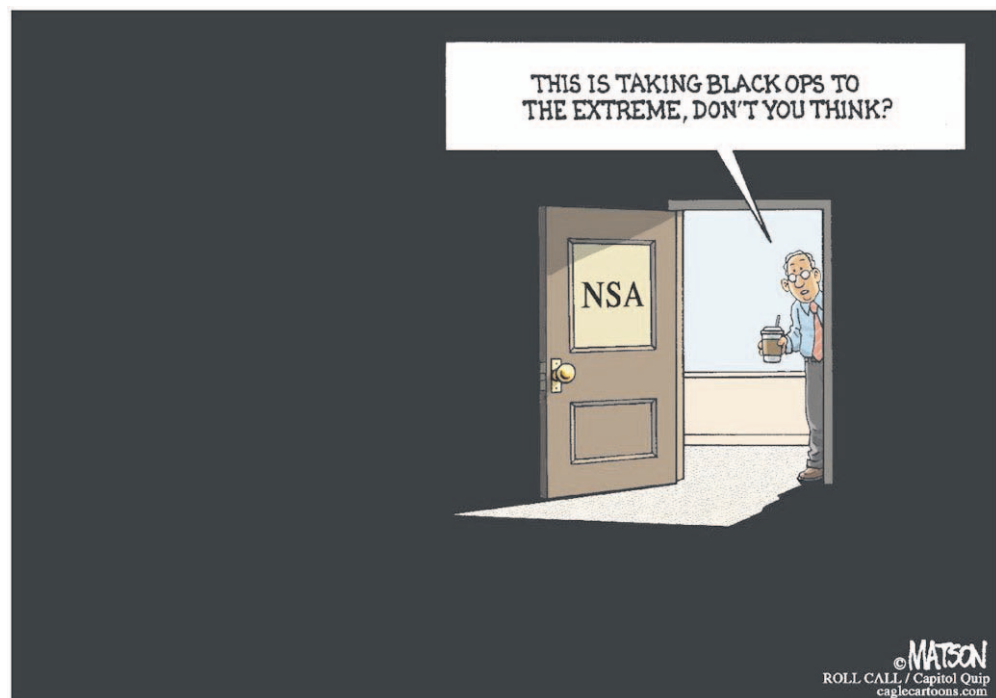
More than 40 years later, however, Peak Oil remains as distant as ever, thanks to fracking, offshore drilling and other advances in fossil fuel technology. Oil prices have plummeted in the past year, and driving rates are again on the rise. But even if the pumps aren't about to run dry, there are plenty

of reasons to wean ourselves off cars, from climate change to traffic (which, let me tell you, feels pretty darn apocalyptic here in Seattle).

The best way to prevent a Max-like catastrophe? Invest in public transit! All those road-raging War Boys wouldn't be hurling exploding spears at each other if they were playing Minecraft together on a publicly funded bullet train.

Now that we're all in the mood for big-screen Western disasters, who's up for "San Andreas"?

Ben Goldfarb is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, a column service of *High Country News*. He is a Seattle-based correspondent for the magazine.



## Outdoor School a life-changing experience

One of my fondest memories as a sixth grader at Sherwood Elementary is attending Outdoor School at Kiwanis Cabins on the North Fork of the Umatilla River. This was a seminal learning experience in my life. I went on to spend nearly 20 years in the environmental field and I can attribute my love of learning for nature and the environment to my experiences at Outdoor School.



**CHUCK SAMS**  
Comment

For nearly 60 years, Outdoor School has provided high quality, placed-based science education to generations of Oregon students. Launched in 1957 by Dr. Irene Hollenbeck of the Southern Oregon College of Education, Outdoor School is an Oregon tradition and a rite of passage that has enriched and inspired over one million Oregonians. Three of my children have attended this time-honored tradition and all have come back with a deeper appreciation of our natural environment and how math and science can be applied to real world situation.

Today Outdoor School remains true to its roots, engaging thousands of fifth and sixth graders with nature and using hands-on field science to teach them about Oregon's natural resources.

Outdoor School changes lives. It give our children an opportunity to take a break from video games, television, and other electronic devices by getting outside and experiencing Oregon's natural resources first-hand. Our children develop critical thinking and social skills that has proven to help them learn better and to gain a stronger understanding of how natural systems work.

Despite the enormous success of Oregon's Outdoor School programs, budget cuts and unstable funding have created a situation where about half of our students across the state are denied the opportunity to attend and benefit from the invaluable experience of a full week learning outdoors. Here in the Pendleton School District we

have been fortunate to have Outdoor School continually since 1971. Over the past several years, Outdoor School has been in jeopardy due to lack of adequate funding. Parents and businesses have stepped up to fill the gap.

We have an opportunity, through Oregon's Senate Bill 439 and House Bill 2648 to establish a state Outdoor Education Fund to provide full and equitable access to Outdoor School for students across the state. The bills don't require schools to create programs, rather they provide \$22 million — enough funding to send every sixth grader in the state to a full week of Outdoor School — and designate Oregon State University Extension Service to administer the statewide program and ensure funding goes to high quality, science-based Outdoor School programs.

Numerous educators across the state have endorsed the bills because they understand that our children learn better, improve their test scores and pay more attention in class when they can see how their schoolwork applies to the real world. Businesses, large and small, across the state have endorsed the bills because they know how effective Outdoor School is at building leadership and team-building skills and because they employ thousands of Oregonians who credit Outdoor School with helping them choose their careers at Oregon companies.

Please take the time to contact our state legislators to show your support in making the Outdoor Education Fund a reality that ensures this generation and future generations have the opportunity to learn about Oregon's natural resources. For more information go to [www.oregonoutdoored.org](http://www.oregonoutdoored.org).

Charles F. Sams III is an Oregon Outdoor Education coalition member and the communications director for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

## From Caitlyn Jenner to a Brooklyn high school

People all over the world have been following the emergence of Caitlyn Jenner, but few as enthusiastically as Spencer and Joshua, two students at a New York City high school who see her as an inspiring role model.

Spencer, 16, was born a girl and given a girl's name, but he says it never felt right. On the first day of kindergarten, his mom dressed him in a skirt — the school uniform — and he cried.

"That's for the girls," he remembers protesting tearfully. "But you are a girl," his mom responded, baffled.

Still, he resisted so vociferously that for the rest of the year he was allowed to wear pants rather than the girls' uniform.

"I knew I felt different from age 4, but I didn't have a word for it," he remembers. "In my mind, I kept thinking, 'Why can't I be a boy, even though I don't have boy parts?' It confused me."

In third grade, he announced he was lesbian, but he said that didn't feel right either. Finally, at age 12, after Google searches, he found the word that fit: transgender.

That didn't make life easier. Spencer says he was bullied and mocked in middle school, and, at 13, he tried to hang himself. But he couldn't manage to tie the right knot or reach the ceiling fan, and he finally cried himself to sleep in frustration.

Caitlyn Jenner has started an important national conversation, but this must go beyond what she wore on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. Too often we as a society become distracted in transgender discussions by questions of



**NICHOLAS KRISTOF**  
Comment

surgery or of which restroom a person's going to use. In fact, as Spencer's story suggests, the fundamental challenge is simply acceptance.

I visited Spencer at his high school, the Academy for Young Writers, in a gritty neighborhood in Brooklyn. It has provided that accepting home, and it offers some lessons

for other institutions across the country.

These are complex issues. When a child born a boy comes to identify as a girl, it may be humiliating or dangerous for her to use the boy's bathroom; it may also be distressing for other girls if a classmate with male anatomy uses their bathroom. And does such a child play on the boys' sports team, or the girls' team?

Yet these are issues that we will have to confront. One rough estimate suggests that perhaps one-third of 1 percent of people identify as transgender. That means that in a high school of 1,000 students, a few may well be transgender.

As topics become less taboo, examples become more visible. Miley Cyrus has now been quoted as saying that she regards her sexuality and gender identification as fluid. "I don't relate to being boy or girl," she said.

The Academy for Young Writers became a model because of a lapse. In 2011, one of the brightest girls in school, Tiara, seemingly headed for a great university, suddenly seemed poised to drop out. It turned out that the student was now identifying as a boy calling himself Seth — and the school had been oblivious. Seth ended up barely graduating and never went

to college at all.

Courtney Winkfield, the principal, resolved that this wouldn't happen again. She brought in a teacher to mentor students with such issues and to help students craft an anti-bullying policy.

Meanwhile, Spencer showed up and asked to use the boys' bathroom and to be referred to as "he" and "him." The school accommodated his request.

Some parents, teachers and students were upset, but the fuss seems to have calmed. Spencer says that thoughts of suicide linger but are now manageable. The school, he says, "saved my life."

A classmate, Joshua, 15, is still figuring out gender. He uses the male pronoun and often wears boys' clothing, but, when I visited, he was wearing lipstick, a wig and a dress. (For a photo, he reverted to boys' clothing.)

"I have thoughts of being female, but not every day," Joshua said. "I don't want to put a label on me yet."

Joshua, who says "you can call me both genders," recounts a history much like Spencer's: bullying beginning in kindergarten, and thoughts of suicide starting in fifth grade.

Today, both are on the honor roll. Indeed, with summer vacation looming, they worry about losing school as a safe space.

"It's very, very scary, summer is," Joshua said. "I don't want to be on my own."

I asked Winkfield what she would say to principals leery of sensitive gender issues. High school isn't just about getting students college-ready, she said, but also about getting them world-ready.

"It's easy to make this a granular issue about bathrooms or sexuality," she said. "It's really about preparing young people for the incredibly messy and complex world we live in."

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. Kristof, a columnist for *The New York Times* since 2001, won the Pulitzer Prize two times.

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