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OUR VIEW

Time to refocus on the road

We manage to rationalize or gloss over the individual traffic fatalities that occur with alarming frequency in Eastern Oregon, especially the dangerous and deadly Cabbage Hill rising to our east.

But we should no longer. And local communities must make a renewed effort to be safe on our region’s roads.

An *East Oregonian* article last weekend spotlighted one piece of the puzzle, noting what a brutal year it has been for area motorcyclists. There have been 32 people killed in motorcycle crashes already this year in Oregon, compared to 27 during the same period in 2014. Four local men were seriously injured in motorcycle crashes, three of whom died. In the last week, there were three more serious motorcycle crashes on county roadways.

The mild winter combined with a hot, dry summer means there were many nice days for hitting the road. And it’s certain that cyclists of both the motorized and non-motorized varieties are spending more time on their machines this year, which leads to more accidents. But there are underlying issues at play.

Driving is as dangerous as it has ever been, according to AAA, even as engineering makes our vehicles safer and safer each year. Impaired driving, aggressive driving and

road rage are still problems. But it’s in-car distractions that continue to multiply at an astounding rate, and our performance behind the wheel suffers for it.

People are so glued to their phone for conversation and entertainment that we forget to concentrate on the asphalt in front of us. Our GPS navigation turns our brains into a passive follower of dictation instead of an active thinker and participant. Our children watch movies and television shows in the back seat and we follow along, or surf through our stash of downloaded podcasts or satellite radio stations. We can tell you things you’ve heard a million times before: Wear a seatbelt. Wear a helmet. Don’t speed. Drive defensively. Look both ways, twice. But that advice has already become a habit or it hasn’t.

We do hope, however, to remind readers that driving is an inherently dangerous act. And that it requires our utmost concentration and respect. Lives depend on it, both our own and those with whom we are sharing the road.

We’re probably a generation away from self-driving cars and fully mechanized roadways. Until then, it’s dependent on us to be focused and prudent. Especially as the speed limits ready to rise on many Eastern Oregon highways.

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

Governor’s conservation order a sign of what’s to come

The (Corvallis) Gazette-Times

The sobering thing about Gov. Kate Brown’s order to state agencies last week to step up efforts to conserve water wasn’t so much the message itself — as drought strengthens its grip on Oregon, such a message from the governor was, if anything, overdue.

No, the sobering thing about Brown’s order on Tuesday was the sense that this is another sign of what the future may well look like for all of Oregon.

In her executive order, Brown noted that the goal of the state efforts is to reduce water consumption by 15 percent or more on average across all state-owned facilities by the end of 2020. She also asked her state agencies to report their progress back to her by Nov. 1 of this year and annually thereafter.

“Water is the foundation for our economies, communities, ecosystems and quality of life,” Brown said in her order. “State government’s efforts to address climate change must include reduced consumption and other conservation measures as water shortages become the new normal.

That phrase — “the new normal” — caught us up short, but it’s worth thinking about in some detail.

“The new normal” in Southern Oregon is drought, as that region copes with its fourth straight year of drought. It’s the same story in Eastern Oregon. This new normal has been in place in California for years.

Living in the relatively lush Willamette Valley has shielded us from having to think too hard about the drought that has affected our neighbors

to the south and east.

But it looks as if the shields might be coming down, even in this neck of the woods, where we’ve long been able to find adequate water for all our needs.

When the snowpack in the Cascades that feeds water to our crops and keeps water in our streams runs empty, when our forests dry into so much tinder so much earlier than usual, when every fire season seems to be hotter and bigger than the one before — these all are signals that a “new normal” may be settling in, even here.

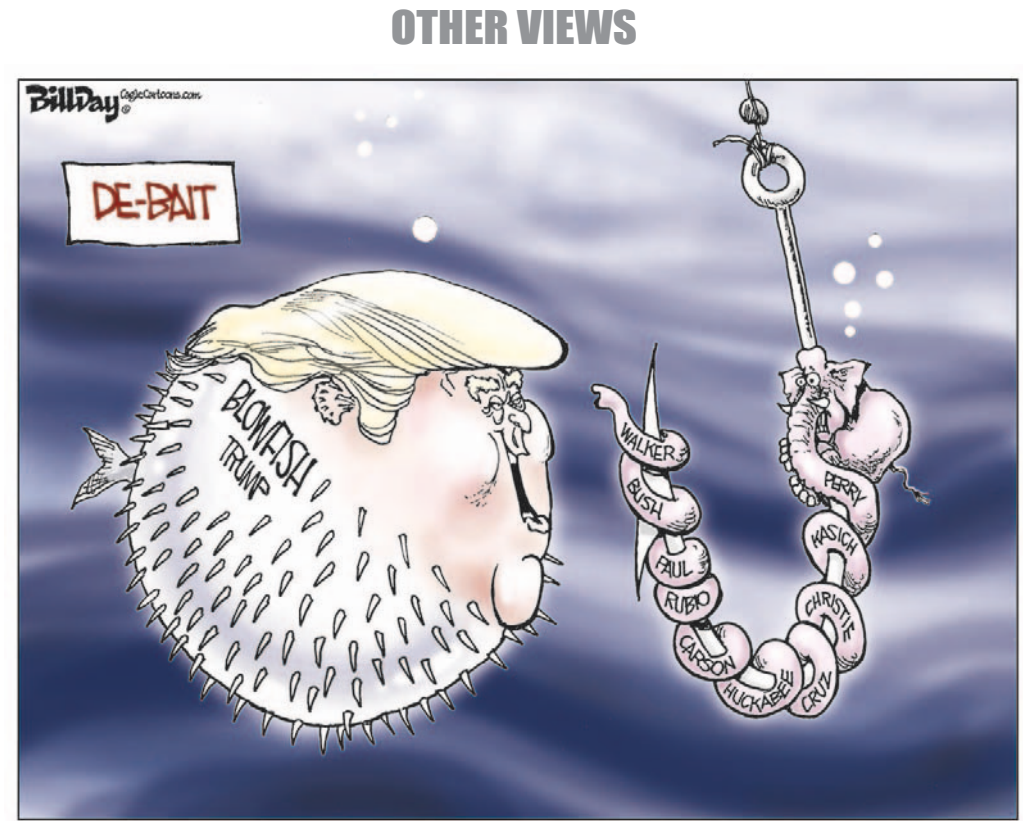
Brown’s order also directed state agencies to update the state’s overall planning for drought, including potential new tools to help communities deal with the impacts of water shortages. And, indeed, this is an area in which the state could help communities with new approaches.

It’s also an area in which Brown — who is widely expected to run for governor in 2016 — could reach out to rural Oregon, where voters still are taking the measure of the new governor.

But it would be a mistake to view this issue solely through a political prism, although water is at the core of so many political issues in the West. Water, of course, runs deeper than that. As Brown herself noted in her order, it’s the foundation for our quality of life. We’ve been fortunate here to be able to count on a ready supply of water.

Now, it looks as if the foundation is shifting underneath us. Such a fundamental shift requires more than just hoping that the drought finally will break next year. It requires serious thought — and, more than likely, some serious change.

“Water is the foundation for our economies, communities, ecosystems and quality of life.”
— Kate Brown, Governor of Oregon



Trump’s allure: ego as ideology

When America is growing and happy, the country is sort of like a sprinter’s track. As Robert H. Wiebe put it in his classic book “The Segmented Society,” when things were going well the diverse country comprised “countless isolated lanes where Americans, singly or in groups, dashed like rows of racers toward their goals.”

In times of scarcity and alienation, it’s more like bumper cars. Different groups feel their lanes are blocked, so they start crashing into one another. The cultural elites start feuding with the financial elites. The lower middle class starts feuding with the poor.

A few decades ago the sociologist Jonathan Rieder studied what was then the white working-class neighborhood of Canarsie, Brooklyn. People there were hostile both to their poorer black neighbors, who they felt threatened their community, and to the Manhattan elites, who they felt sold them out from above.

We are now living in a time of economic anxiety and political alienation. Just three in 10 Americans believe that their views are represented in Washington, according to a CNN/ORC poll. Confidence in public institutions like schools, banks and churches is near historic lows, according to Gallup. Only 29 percent of Americans think the nation is on the right track, according to Rasmussen.

This climate makes it hard for the establishment candidates who normally dominate our politics. Jeb Bush is swimming upstream. Hillary Clinton may win through sheer determination, but she’s not a natural fit for this moment. A career establishment figure like Joe Biden doesn’t stand a chance. He’s a wonderful man and a great public servant, but he should not run for president this year, for the sake of his long-term reputation.

On the other hand, bumper-car politicians thrive. Bernie Sanders is swimming with the tide. He’s a conviction politician comfortable with class conflict. Many people on the left have a generalized, vague hunger for fundamental systemic change or at least the atmospherics of radical change.

The times are perfect for Donald Trump. He’s an outsider, which appeals to the alienated. He’s confrontational, which appeals to the frustrated. And, in a unique 21st-century wrinkle, he’s a narcissist who thinks he can solve every problem, which appeals to people who in challenging times don’t feel confident in their understanding of their surroundings and who crave leaders who seem to be.

Trump’s populism is pretty standard. He appeals to people who, as Walter Lippmann once put it, “feel rather like a deaf spectator



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

in the back row. ... He knows he is somehow affected by what is going on. ... [But] these public affairs are in no convincing way his affairs. They are for the most part invisible. They are managed, if they are managed at all, at distant centers, from behind the scenes by unnamed powers. ... In the cold light of experience, he knows that his sovereignty is a fiction. He reigns in theory, but in fact he does not govern.”

When Trump is striking populist chords, he appeals to people who experience this invisibility. He appeals to members of the alienated middle class (like those folks in Canarsie) who believe that neither the rich nor the poor have to play by the same rules they do. He appeals to people who are resentful of immigrants who get what they, allegedly, don’t deserve.

But Trump’s support base is weird. It skews slightly more secular and less educated than the average Republican, but he doesn’t draw from any distinctive blocs. Unlike past populisms he’s not especially rural or urban, ethnic based or class based. He draws people as individuals, not groups.

Unlike past populisms, his main argument is not that the elites are corrupt or out of touch. It is that they are morons. His announcement speech was fascinating (and compelling). “How stupid are our leaders?” he asked rhetorically. “Our president doesn’t have a clue,” he continued. “We have people

It’s not that we’re potentially a nation in decline. The problem is that we don’t have a leadership class as smart, competent, tough and successful as Donald Trump.

that are stupid,” he observed of the leadership class.

In other words, it’s not that our problems are unsolvable or even hard. It’s not that we’re potentially a nation in decline. The problem is that we don’t have a leadership class as smart, competent, tough and successful as Donald Trump.

Measured in standard political terms he is not ideologically consistent. As Peter Wehner pointed out, he’s taken so many liberal positions he makes Susan Collins look like Barry Goldwater. But ego is his ideology, and in this he is absolutely consistent. In the Trump mind the world is not divided into right and left. Instead there are winners and losers. Society is led by losers, who scorn and disrespect the people who are actually the winners.

Never before have we experienced a moment with so much public alienation and so much private, assertive and fragile self-esteem. Trump is the perfect confluence of these trends. He won’t be president, but he’s not an aberration. He is deeply rooted in the currents of our time.

■

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

YOUR VIEWS

U.S. prescription drug companies act like cartels

You don’t have to took so far as Mexico to find a huge drug cartel. It is right here in our own back yard.

In 2012, the top 11 global drug companies made about \$85 billion in net profits. Pfizer is up at the top of this list. Its CEO, Ian Read, had a pay package in 2014 that totaled \$23.3 million.

While Mr. Read swims in luxury, thousands of cancer patients are dying because they can’t afford their medications. It is common for cancer patients to be forced to pay more than \$100,000 a year to stay alive. There is another example in the news now of a man in stage 4 cancer who is faced with either selling his home or dying — all while Mr. Read and other drug CEOs can’t dream up enough ways to spend their money.

In 2012, 11 of the 12 new drugs approved by the Food & Drug Administration were priced at over \$100,000 per patient per year. Take a look at Nexium. In Spain a prescription is about \$18. In France it is \$30. In the good old U.S.A. — \$187.

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