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OUR VIEW



People kayak in the Animas River near Durango, Colo., on Aug. 6 in water colored from a mine waste spill. Jerry McBride/The Durango Herald via AP

When EPA pollutes, usual critics remain silent

Imagine the poor dairy farmer who accidentally breaches his manure lagoon, sending its contents down the nearby creek.

Environmentalists would want his head on a platter, and state and federal agencies would land on him with both feet with fines and potential criminal prosecution. If it were bad enough, and politically advantageous, there might be comment from the White House.

But what happens when the polluter is the Environmental Protection Agency?

Last week EPA contractors working to stabilize an abandoned gold mine in Southern Colorado caused 3 million gallons of mine water contaminated with lead, arsenic, cadmium, aluminum, copper and calcium to flow into the Animas River 60 miles north of Durango.

A mustard-yellow plume has now made its way into New Mexico. The previously pristine river, a huge draw for the tourists who are the lifeblood of the region's economy, has been closed to fishing, rafting and kayaking. Irrigation pumps

have been shut down. The long-term impact of the disaster is unknown.

For its part, the EPA has taken blame and has promised to clean up the mess.

Outside local outrage — which has been considerable — the

reaction from national environmental groups and the political class that usually capitalizes on such events has been muted. No cries for an investigation, no calls for resignations or prosecutions. The

White House, which seldom lets a local crisis it can blame on its critics go unnoticed, has been surprisingly silent.

Accidents, after all, happen. As we say, the locals are a bit more outspoken.

"If a mining operator or other private business caused the spill to occur, the EPA would be all over them," U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton, R-Cortez, said in a statement. "The EPA admits fault, and as such must be accountable and held to the same standard."

Sauce for the goose.

OTHER VIEWS

Will Obama's plan to reduce carbon emissions work?

The (Medford) Mail-Tribune

When Oregon legislators were debating measures designed to reduce carbon emissions in the state, opponents of those bills frequently argued that nothing Oregon does, with a population of just 3 million people, would make any real difference in combating climate change. Solutions, critics said, needed to be national in scope.

Don't look now, but President Obama announced a plan last week that takes just such a nationwide approach. And, as a result of steps Oregon lawmakers have already taken, this state is well positioned to comply with the president's Clean Power Plan, if it survives court challenges and is fully implemented.

Oregon is not among the worst offenders among the states when it comes to greenhouse gas emissions. There is only one coal-fired power plant in Oregon, the Portland General Electric facility at Boardman, which is the state's largest emitter of CO₂. PGE already has committed to stop burning coal at that plant by 2020.

But that doesn't mean Oregon is off the hook. Pacific Power gets

approximately 60 percent of its power from coal-fired plants in other states. The utility has pledged to close 10 coal plants by 2029 or convert them to natural gas.

Carbon-reduction goals the state has set for itself are far more stringent than those in the Clean Power Plan, although slashing carbon dioxide outputs may be delayed if coal plant outputs are replaced with natural gas. Gas emits about half the carbon of coal, but methane is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, and leakage of gas into the atmosphere from plants or pipelines can increase the state's carbon footprint.

Ultimately, replacing fossil fuel power generation with renewable sources such as solar and wind — to the degree that's possible — will have the greatest impact on carbon emissions, and Oregon already requires its large utilities to get 25 percent of their power from renewables by 2025.

It's true that Oregon's efforts, laudable as they are, won't have much effect on global carbon emissions by themselves. But combined with the other West Coast states and ultimately with the entire country, our state's contribution will be part of something much larger.

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

Can we interest you in teaching?

Teaching can't compete. When the economy improves and job prospects multiply, college students turn their attention elsewhere, to professions that promise more money, more independence, more respect.

That was one takeaway from a widely discussed story in *The Times* on Sunday by Motoko Rich, who charted teacher shortages so severe in certain areas of the country that teachers are being rushed into classrooms with dubious qualifications and before they've earned their teaching credentials.

It's a sad, alarming state of affairs, and it proves that for all our lip service about improving the education of America's children, we've failed to make teaching the draw that it should be, the honor that it must be. Nationally, enrollment in teacher preparation programs dropped by 30 percent between 2010 and 2014, as Rich reported.

To make matters worse, more than 40 percent of the people who do go into teaching exit the profession within five years.

How do we make teaching more rewarding, so that it beckons to not only enough college graduates but to a robust share of the very best of them?

Better pay is a must. There's no getting around that. Many teachers in many areas can't hope to buy a house and support a family on their incomes, and college students contemplating careers know that. If those students are taking on debt, teaching isn't likely to provide a timely way to pay it off. The average salary nationally for public school teachers, including those with decades in the classroom, is under \$57,000; starting salaries in some states barely crest \$30,000.

There's also the issue of autonomy. "The No. 1 thing is giving teachers a voice, a real voice," Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, said to me this week.

Education leaders disagree over how much of a voice and in what. Weingarten emphasizes teacher involvement in policy, and a survey of some 30,000 teachers and other school workers done by the AFT and the Badass Teachers Association in late April showed that one large source of stress was being left out of such decisions.

Others focus on primarily letting teachers chart the day-by-day path to the goals laid out for them, so that they're not just obedient vessels for a one-size-fits-all script. Hold them accountable, but give them discretion.

The political battles over education, along with the shifting vogues about what's best, have left many teachers feeling like pawns and punching bags. And while that's no



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

reason not to implement promising new approaches or to shrink from experimentation, it puts an onus on policymakers and administrators to bring generous measures of training, support and patience to the task.

Teachers crave better opportunities for career growth. Evan Stone, one of the chief executives of Educators 4 Excellence, which represents about 17,000 teachers nationwide, called for "career ladders for teachers to move into specialist roles, master-teacher roles."

"They're worried that they're going to be doing the same thing on day one as they'll be doing 30 years in," he told me.

He also questioned licensing laws that prevent the easy movement of an exemplary teacher from one state to another. Minnesota recently relaxed such requirements; if other states followed suit, it might build a desirable new flexibility into the profession.

Teaching also needs to be endowed with greater prestige. One intriguing line of thought about how to do

this is to make the requirements for becoming a teacher more difficult, so that a teaching credential has luster.

In the book "The Smartest Kids in the World," Amanda Ripley noted that Finland's teachers are revered in part because they're the survivors of selective screening and rigorous training.

Kate Walsh, the president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, told me that in this country, "It's pretty firmly rooted in college students that education is a fairly easy major." Too often, it's also "a major of last resort," she said.

Dan Brown, a co-director of Educators Rising, which encourages teenagers to contemplate careers in the classroom, said that teaching might be ready for its own Flexner Report, an early 1900s document that revolutionized medical schools and raised the bar for American medicine, contributing to the aura that surrounds physicians today.

He also asked why, in the intensifying political discussions about making college more affordable, there's not more talk of methods "to recognize and incentivize future public servants," foremost among them teachers.

There should be. The health of our democracy and the perpetuation of our prosperity depend on teaching no less than they do on Wall Street's machinations or Silicon Valley's innovations. So let's make the classroom a destination as sensible, exciting and fulfilling as any other.

Frank Bruni has been a columnist for *The New York Times* since 2011.

YOUR VIEWS

Council not responsible for Pendleton's roads problems

Reading the editorial of Aug. 6 makes me wonder where is the honesty you so blatantly demand of the city council. The paragraph you select as the reason for our present situation — "It took decades of mismanagement, poor budgeting and bad leadership to get us to this position" — leads me to ask, is that really an honest appraisal of this council or is there something else going on?

I read that the great city of Portland is looking for \$1.3 billion to fix its street problems; that the city of Bend has postponed its vote on a gas tax to fix its streets; that cities all over Oregon are trying to fix, pave and patch their city streets and nobody seems to have the money to fix the problem.

How is it possible that so many cities suffer from the same fate? Surely not all of the councils in Oregon are guilty of the same folly of mismanagement, etc. Perhaps we should look elsewhere for answers to how we got here. Some of the standard reasons for the situation in Pendleton and most other cities were never even mentioned in the editorial, such as a lot more cars and many miles more driven, greater mileage per gallon, much less revenue distributed from the state gas tax fund and the much greater cost of materials and maintenance, to note a few. The opinion quite dishonestly offers a public flogging for a crime not committed. You unjustly attribute the local problem to many councils past and present when in fact the problem is systemic

to most of the cities in Oregon, the U.S. and exacerbated by inaction on the local, state and national level, and is growing worse.

And in the same editorial we find the words "We're going to tax you an egregious amount." Does the editorial crowd understand that the council doesn't tax without the consent of the taxed? That's us. The council only sets the rate. We the citizens of the city approve or not approve the tax. It is our collective responsibility to tax ourselves to pay for the services we want. If a gas tax levy fails, you can hardly blame the council if the citizens of the city who keep crying "fix our streets" turn down a 5 cent gas tax levy designed to do just that.

Larry O'Rourke
Pendleton

Walking tour a reminder of Pendleton's interesting history

Anyone interested in Pendleton's history or curious as to why tourists come to Pendleton should go on the walking tour "Robbers, Reprobates and the Red-Light District." The one-hour tour is every Saturday at 10:30 a.m. and starts at MaySon's Old Fashion General Store at the corner of Main and Emigrant in Pendleton.

The tour is led by Keith May and is insightful, fun and real. I highly recommend it. Pendletonians, we live in an extremely interesting town.

Fritz Hill
Pendleton