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OUR VIEW

Stay patient, stay together on water project

Winter in northeastern Oregon is a time when our rivers swell and water is abundant. It's also a time when the growing and harvest seasons are far from top of mind.

But this winter is unique. Years and years of hard work have brought the Umatilla Basin to the precipice of major investment in the future of our region.

It took decades for the stars to align in Salem and in the farmlands. Gallons of sweat and a steady trickle of dollars have been expended on engineering plans and political lobbying and molding together disparate factions into a sometimes shaky and sometimes sturdy coalition. Right now, the coalition holds. But there is still work to be done. Pick your own cliché to explain it: This is a big winter for the Northeast Oregon Water Association and their plan to bring more water to the Umatilla Basin.

NOWA's proposal is a complex, multi-phase puzzle of engineering, water rights and environmental mitigation spread over three distinct areas from Boardman to east of Hermiston. Farmers, cities, counties and ports have all bought into the idea of more irrigation water from the Columbia River to bolster the region's high-value agricultural economy. J.R. Cook, founder and director of NOWA, has discussed a potential benefit of billions of dollars for the region.

Funding for water projects finally came through in the 2015 Legislature, including \$11 million earmarked specifically for the Umatilla Basin. But all the money

in the world doesn't mean much without a deal for the necessary water rights, certified by the state Water Resources Department.

To that end, Cook and company have racked up the miles driving into Salem and pitching their vision across the negotiating table. Any water drawn out of the Columbia must include mitigation for fish and river flows, which is where environmental groups — namely Food & Water Watch — have a keen interest. While they will never be on-the-masthead

If farms and politicians get impatient, the whole effort could come tumbling down.

supporters of the project, NOWA believes they have crafted the plan so environmental groups will not outright oppose it. Yet everyone — even NOWA — is walking on eggshells right now. The delicate balance could tip with a change in political will, a change in the climate, or a far-away rumble in the financial market.

Cook is optimistic everyone will be shaking hands soon, and one of three project areas could break ground next year. Until then, Cook said it's imperative for growers to remain patient. If farms and politicians get antsy and begin to withdraw their support now, the whole effort could come tumbling down. Cook said that would be a travesty, and the star-aligning moment would be lost — possibly forever.

Our advice: Hold steady. Stay patient but work quickly. Let's get what has been promised on paper onto the land as quickly as possible. Once that is done, we will reap the benefits in countless future harvests.

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.

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. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

U.S. can't adequately vet Syrian refugees

Responding to your view, "Two Truths and a Lie," (*East Oregonian*, Nov. 25) I don't take issue with your facts regarding the process of vetting refugees wanting to enter our country.

However, in the case of Syria it should be noted that all direct intelligence officials (including the FBI) have specifically noted it is impossible to "vet" these refugees the White House insists on accepting because there is no structural governmental operation within Syria for us to use as a reference source.

Other than the State Department interview with the individual, there is no paperwork trail, no reliable Syrian agency, no government construct within Syria that would permit intelligence vetting.

Given the past history of the current administration when it comes to immigration, are we supposed to just roll over and "assume" that all is well with these refugees and they will all want to integrate into our country? I just don't share your faith in the process.

Jim Sheffield
Hermiston

Cannot help refugees until we help our own

The author of "Two Truths and a Lie" missed the point. In Pendleton and Hermiston we have folks who need the refuge of the warming station on a cold night. There are also families who can't afford the daily meals.

Finally, there are veterans who need assistance in one form or another. Until we can take care of our own, why would we go looking for others to help, wherever they are from? It is wrong to ignore our own to help others.

Michael J. Mehren
Hermiston

Owyhee opposition misses potential benefit

Much of the local opposition to the proposed Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness or National Monument is based upon the presumed negative economic impacts that land protection might engender. This is a very common reaction to any land protection proposals.

When Yellowstone National Park was created in 1872, the papers in Bozeman and Helena, Montana predicted economic collapse of their economies. Of course, within a few years,

Bozeman was advertising itself as the gateway to Yellowstone and today Bozeman is one of the top retirement destinations in the West — in part due to its proximity to Yellowstone National Park.

When Glacier National Park was proposed, the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce opposed the idea saying the area should be left open for oil and gas development and logging. Today if you contact the Kalispell Chamber, the first thing they remind you about is how they are located next to Glacier National Park.

When Grand Teton National Park was created, locals predicted Jackson would become a ghost town. I don't know if you have been to Jackson lately, but some 18,000 ghosts live there today — all in one way or another there because of the park.

And even more recently after President Clinton created the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, locals predicted the demise of their communities.

Indeed, there are numerous studies that show that counties with substantial protected landscapes do better economically than counties without such areas. Check out Headwaters Economics for some of these studies.

Protected lands not only create new businesses that directly support tourism, but even more importantly, people like to live near protected areas. As a result what are known as "footloose" entrepreneurs will flock to communities near parks, national monuments and the like. They bring their businesses or their savings. These people provide new economic opportunities and stability to local economies.

Now if people in Malheur County are opposed to economic growth and stability, they should continue to oppose any protection for the area. However, if creating opportunities for your children to find work as well as attracting new talent to your communities is a goal, then one should think about supporting protection efforts for the Owyhee.

George Wuerthner
Bend

Measure 11 not being used as it was designed

I am responding to Mr. Coffman's letter about overcrowding at the prisons. I could not agree with him more. I visit my husband there and I just want to say I have never met a guard that was not polite and

decent to me and my husband has no complaints. So for that I thank you guys.

Mr. Coffman stated that we need to revisit Measure 11 and, as you probably know, I could not agree more. But newspapers and TV stations have refused to do articles and research on this matter. Why? It so desperately needs to be done. We have kangaroo courts where the district attorneys hang everyone out to dry.

Measure 11 was for violent offenders and repeat offenders. There are 4,314 first-time offenders with no criminal background incarcerated at this time. The cost is \$137 million per year! Oregon is No. 2 in the country for spending more on prison than education.

Contact your senators, representatives, the governor; contact me and we will tell you what we are trying to do and what Measure 11 was really meant for.

Thank you Mr. Coffman.
Barbara Dickerson
Milton-Freewater

Be heard!

Comment online at
eastoregonian.com



OTHER VIEWS

Communities of character

We live in an individualistic age. As Marc J. Dunkelman documents in his book "The Vanishing Neighbor," people tend to have their close group of inner-ring family and friends and then a vast online outer-ring network of contacts, but they are less likely to be involved in middle-ring community organizations.

But occasionally I stumble across a loving, charismatic and super-tight neighborhood organization. Very often it's a really good school.

You'd think that schools would naturally nurture deep community bonds. But we live in an era and under a testing regime that emphasizes individual accomplishments, not community cohesion. Even when schools talk about values, they tend to talk about individualistic values, like grit, resilience and executive function, not the empathy, compassion and solidarity that are good for community and the heart.

Researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education asked 10,000 middle and high school students if their parents cared more about their personal achievement or whether they were kind. Eighty percent said their parents cared more about achievement — individual over the group.

But there are some schools that nurture achievement precisely by building tight communities.

The Denver School of Science and Technology has an intense values-centered culture, emphasizing values like respect and responsibility. Four days a week everybody gathers for a morning meeting. Those who contribute to the community are affirmed. When students have strained the community, by being rude to cafeteria workers, for example, the rift is recognized, discussed and healed.

Last week I visited the Leaders School in Brooklyn, New York, which is a glowing example of community cohesion. This is a school with roughly 300 students who speak between them 22 languages. Eighty-five percent are on free and reduced lunch. Last year the graduation rate was an amazing 89 percent and every single graduate went to college. The average SAT score was 411 math and 384 verbal.

The school's approach and curriculum is organized by Outward Bound.

When the students arrive at Leaders as freshmen they are assigned to a crew, a group of 12-15 students with an adviser. Right at the start they go on a wilderness adventure, and go through a process of "storming, norming and performing."

As they learn to cook for each other and deal with outdoor challenges, first they fight, then they come up with community norms, and then they perform. The crew stays together for the next four years, supporting



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

each other with family, romantic and academic issues.

Students are given tremendous responsibility, and are put in challenging social circumstances that call forth compassion, judgment, sensitivity and mercy. If one student writes something nasty about another on social media, then the two get together with two student mediators and together they work out a resolution. If there's a serious infraction that would merit a suspension at another school, the

guilty party meets with a Harm Circle, and they figure out some proper act of contrition and restorative justice.

One day each December the community gathers outside the school and the seniors march as a unit with their college application letters through cheering crowds and to a waiting mail truck.

Most classes are conducted through Socratic dialogue. Students learn to negotiate disagreements. They get academic grades, but also leadership grades that measure their character. The students lead their own parent-teacher conferences. They stand up before their parents, a teacher and other observers and they give a presentation on their successes, failures and how they might improve.

I was amazed by how well the students had been trained at group discussion, using a talking and listening method they call "Step Up/Step Back." "Let me build on what Shazzarda was saying ..." one student would say. If a member of the group had been silent for a few minutes, somebody would pull her in: "Maybe Essence is the best person to explain that ..."

Most of all I was struck by their kindness toward one another. No student could remember any racial or ethnic conflict. Many upperclassmen serve as peer mentors to the underclassmen. There's a palpable sense of being cared for. That's in part because the school has a wide definition of student achievement.

Kurt Hahn, the founder of Outward Bound, once wrote, "It is the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible denial, and above all, compassion."

All over the country there are schools and organizations trying to come up with new ways to cultivate character. The ones I've seen that do it best, so far, are those that cultivate intense, thick community. Most of the time character is not an individual accomplishment. It emerges through joined hearts and souls, and in groups.

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