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KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON
Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW

We need a hero

Nestled away on Page 5A of Tuesday's paper was a story headlined "Leaders gather to try to save Earth from overheating."

It's the kind of headline you might imagine seeing in a comic book or a cartoon — or at the very least splashed above the fold of *The New York Times*. Yet as the world's leaders meet in Paris to discuss climate change, here it is on the inside page of a local newspaper in Eastern Oregon.

Newspapers — still the most common vehicle for journalism — are ill-equipped to report on climate change. Our main focus is dealing with what happened today, and the bold things that our readers demand to know the next morning. Daily paper journalists are excellent at reporting on explosions and car accidents and controversial public meetings, but not as good at reporting on a steady but thus far mostly unnoticeable rise in world temperatures.

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In addition, our readers — and humans in general — are more apt to care about things with immediate impacts to their safety, their pocketbooks or their Main Street. A more complex but more dangerous issue rearing up on the horizon often gets pushed onto the brain's back burner.

Yet people and governments across the globe have been ramping up efforts to think seriously about climate change, and get it into the forefront of world discussion. And the headlines are becoming stronger and more straightforward. No longer are we discussing theories of what could happen, we are discussing what is actually happening around the world. And that visible truth crystallizes in people's minds much stronger than any series of data, no matter how troubling may look on paper.

Few are still not taking climate changes seriously.

Even the staid Economist wrote this week: "That climate change is happening, that it is very largely man-made and that it is exceedingly dangerous, are all now hard to deny. This year will all but certainly be the hottest since 1880, when NASA's records begin. If so, 2015 will break a record that was set only in 2014. Every single year so far this decade has been hotter than every single year before 1998."

That's an amazing statistic: The last 10 years have all been among the hottest in the last century. The chances of that being an anomaly are about the same as you winning the lottery, marrying your favorite model and raising your family on the moon.

Yet as the educated world unites behind climate change as a real problem, there is still plenty of division on what to do about it.

There have been a few ideas floated in Paris — and certainly more to come — but changing the habits of 7 billion human beings is near impossible. We don't see that sort of change happening until the stability of the Earth is greatly shaken — and by then it may be too late.

Climate change is a problem that requires superhero intervention, and buy-in from the rest of us. But while the politicians prattle in Paris, we aren't expecting any earth-shattering news to come from it. If this world will be saved, it won't be by a politician or a law — although they can both help and hurt.

The hero will more likely be a scientist or an engineer — or a whole mess of them —who figure out ways that humanity can continue with the lifestyle to which it has grown accustomed. Their contribution must be a new way to power our world.

We have to figure out how to be less wasteful and less dependent on carbon-based fuels. And when we do (call us optimists!) you better believe it'll be on the front page.

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

Oregon falling behind on ethics, public records issues

The (Albany) Democrat-Herald

A recent ranking suggests Oregon has plenty of work ahead of it to ensure that government officials are accountable to the public.

A report released earlier this month by the Center for Public Integrity ranked Oregon 44th out of the 50 states in terms of its ethics and public records laws. The overall grade Oregon earned in the report: F. (The state received a C-minus grade in the center's last report, in 2012, although the center says the grades are not directly comparable.)

The report says Oregon lawmakers have done little to address weaknesses in how the state can deal with ethical issues such as the ones that forced Gov. John Kitzhaber to resign in February.

To quote the report: "The scandal that ensnared the former governor highlighted a wobbly legal framework in Oregon's government, where good behavior is taken for granted rather than enforced."

We've written recently about the sorry state of Oregon's public records laws, so we won't spend much time now rehashing those — other than to note again that the willingness of Gov. Kate Brown to push for real reforms to those through a task force will offer a test of her leadership skills.

But the report, written by Lee van der Voo, a freelancer for *The New York Times* who covered Kitzhaber's resignation, covers other bases as well. For instance, it rips into how the Oregon Government Ethics Commission dealt with allegations that Kitzhaber and his fiancee, Cylvia Hayes, might have used their public roles to benefit Hayes' private consulting business.

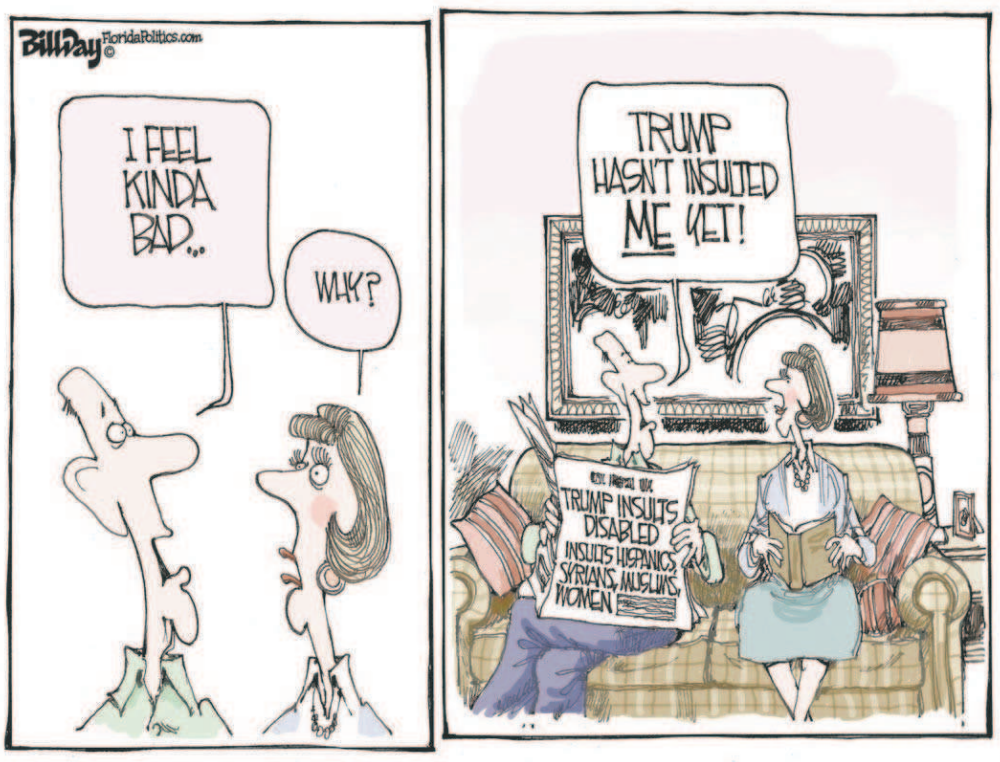
You might recall some of the details of how the commission floundered in its investigation of Hayes: It struggled for months, for example, with legal wrangling to determine even if Hayes qualified as a public official who would be covered by state ethics laws. (A change in the law pushed through the Legislature by Brown makes it clear, as it should have been all along, that the governor's spouse is a public official.)

Another of the Brown-sponsored reforms changed the way that the members of the commission are appointed to the panel; before the change, the governor either appointed the directors or gave names to the Legislature for nomination by party leaders. (The report suggests that this might be one of the reasons why the commission was sluggish about investigating Kitzhaber, a Democrat.)

Despite the changes, the report still is skeptical about the commission's ability to do its work: The report says the commission "still lacks budget protections and the staffing and technical support to see its mission through."

The report also found that the commission never audits the asset-disclosure forms it collects. "Enforcement has been so lax that political leaders have been able to fudge on specifics in their disclosure forms or simply fail to provide significant information," the report says, adding that the forms aren't available online for examination.

As the report notes, Oregon politics has been relatively free of scandal. But it's clear that the credit for that goes to the state's overall culture — and a good dose of luck. We need to take luck out of the equation, and enforce ethical safeguards that will help to support that culture.



OTHER VIEWS

The green tech solution

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

I've been confused about this Paris climate conference and how the world should move forward to ameliorate climate change, so I séanced up my hero Alexander Hamilton to see what he thought. I was sad to be reminded that he doesn't actually talk in hip-hop, but he still had some interesting things to say.

First, he was struck by the fact that on this issue the GOP has come to resemble a Soviet dictatorship — a vast majority of Republican politicians can't publicly say what they know about the truth of climate change because they're afraid the thought police will knock on their door and drag them off to an AM radio interrogation.

This week's Paris conference, I observed, seems like a giant Weight Watchers meeting. A bunch of national leaders get together and make some resolutions to cut their carbon emissions over the next few decades. You hope some sort of peer pressure will kick in and they will actually follow through.

I'm afraid Hamilton snorted.

The co-author of the Federalist papers is the opposite of naïve about human nature. He said the conference is nothing like a Weight Watchers meeting. Unlike weight loss, the pain in reducing carbon emissions is individual but the good is only achieved collectively.

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You're asking developing countries to forswear growth now to compensate for a legacy of pollution from richer countries that they didn't benefit from. You're asking richer countries that are facing severe economic strain to pay hundreds of billions of dollars in "reparations" to India and such places that can go on and burn mountains of coal and take away U.S. jobs. And you're asking for all this top-down coercion to last a century, without any enforcement mechanism. Are the Chinese really going to police a local coal plant efficiently?

This is perfectly designed to ensure cheating. Already, the Chinese government made a grandiose climate change announcement but then was forced to admit that its country was burning 17 percent more coal than it had previously disclosed. The cheating will create a cycle of resentment that will dissolve any sense of common purpose.

I countered by pointing out that policymakers have come up with some clever ways to make carbon reductions more efficient, like cap and trade, permit trading and carbon taxing.

The former Treasury secretary pointed out that these ideas are good in theory but haven't worked in reality. Cap and trade has not worked out so well in Europe. Overall, the Europeans have spent $280 billion on climate change with very little measurable impact on global temperatures. And as for carbon taxes, even if the U.S. imposed one on itself, it would have virtually no effect on the global climate.

Hamilton steered me to an article by James Manzi and Peter Wehner in his favorite magazine, National Affairs. The authors point out that according to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the expected economic costs of unaddressed global warming over the next century are likely to be about 3 percent of world gross domestic product. This is a big, gradual problem, but not the sort of cataclysmic immediate threat that's likely to lead people to suspend their immediate self-interest.

Well, I ventured, if you're skeptical about our own policies, Mr. Founding Father, what would you do?

Look at what you're already doing, he countered. The United States has the fastest rate of reduction of CO_2 emissions of any major nation on earth, back to pre-1996 levels.

That's in part because of fracking. Natural gas is replacing coal, and natural gas emits about half as much carbon dioxide.

The larger lesson is that innovation is the key. Green energy will beat dirty energy only when it makes technical and economic sense.

Hamilton reminded me that he often used government money to stoke innovation. Manzi and Wehner suggest that one of our great national science labs could work on geoengineering problems to remove CO_2 from the atmosphere. Another could investigate cogeneration and small-scale energy reduction systems. We could increase funding on battery and smart-grid research. If we move to mainly solar power, we'll need much more efficient national transmission methods. Maybe there's a partial answer in increased vegetation.

Hamilton pointed out that when America was just a bunch of scraggly colonies, he was already envisioning it as a great world power. He used government to incite, arouse, energize and stir up great enterprise. The global warming problem can be addressed, ineffectively, by global communiqués. Or, with the right government boost, it presents an opportunity to arouse and incite entrepreneurs, innovators and investors and foment a new technological revolution.

Sometimes like your country you got to be young, scrappy and hungry and not throw away your shot.

■

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

YOUR VIEWS

Charity is great — but the asks can be overwhelming

Merry Christmas to all, and I want your opinion please.

I am not Scrooge, but even he only donated to one charity and little Timmy's family with the hint of doing more throughout the year — and he in the story was a wealthy man of which most of us aren't.

Here is the rub: Charity is a great thing and I give when I can — and sometimes when I can't, just like you do — but the ASPCA, St. Jude and many others inundate the media around the holidays.

Then we have Toys for Tots, coat and glove drives, and shelters need money to help the homeless and keep people warm, just to name a few. Most every store asks for a donation with a bell ringer or at the counter, and sometimes both, and then gather all of our donation money and give to whichever charity that they choose then get a great big write-off with our funds. I get it!

Here it is: I have a problem when my children and grandchildren are asked to bring in food to the schools. These angels of giving and heart love without condition, and when asked to bring in canned food to win a prize it just sticks me. We all as children did this. Some of us took the food because we thought that it was important, some may have just to win the prize. But the bottom line is I think this hits below the belt. It feels to me like the kids are being used inappropriately.

I remember not knowing any better and taking commodities to school until my teacher, bless her heart, pulled me aside and the food was given back to me in a brown paper sack and I was told: "Oh honey, thank you very much but you need this worse than they do." I still obviously think about it but I didn't know why my food wasn't good enough. I wonder about some child taking something for the right reason without asking, not knowing that mom or dad needed that food for dinner that night and someone getting in trouble for helping and doing what was asked of them.

Am I off base here? If you are working at a school or on a school board, do we need to ask the kids, too? I would rather that the school sends the note home asking the parent or guardian for a donation.

Eliminate the use of our children for charity gathering, let them be kids and let us worry about the troubles of society. Can we at least wait until they are out of grammar school? So, what do you think?

Cyrus Haskett
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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