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OTHER VIEWS

Speaking out for rural Oregon

In recent weeks, the people of Harney County have become no stranger to national headlines. On Jan. 3 a group of armed protesters overtook a federal facility in the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Two days later Dwight and Steve Hammond — father and son ranchers from Harney County who were convicted of arson for setting a backfire that burned 139 acres of federal land — reported to prison to serve the remainder of a mandatory five-year sentence.

While these stories played out across every major media outlet, it's important to understand what is driving this anger and what steps we can take to improve the situation.

The thread that ties the Hammond family's case together with the calls of those who took over the refuge is decades of frustration, arrogance and betrayal that has contributed to the mistrust of the federal government.

While I understand their passion, I cannot condone the actions of the armed protesters, led largely by people who are not from our state. They've made their point loud and clear, and local community leaders, including many ranchers, have asked them to leave. They should do so.

The day after the Hammonds went to prison, I went to the U.S. House floor intending to give a five-minute speech on what was unfolding in Harney County. But when decades of my own pent-up frustration with the federal government's treatment of rural Oregonians came to the surface, I spoke before my colleagues for nearly half an hour. (You can watch my full speech at www.walden.house.gov/speech).

In my years representing the people of Oregon's 2nd District, I have worked with local ranchers and the citizens of Eastern Oregon to resolve disputes, to find solutions and to create a more cooperative spirit and partnership with the federal agencies. After all, more than half the 2nd District is under federal management, or lack thereof.

The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act is a prime example of those cumulative efforts. But after it was signed into law in 2000, little by little, the agencies decided to reinterpret it and follow it at their own convenience, or ignore the law altogether. At the suggestion of local ranchers, the law created the first cow-free wilderness in the United States, but the tradeoff was a legal requirement for the federal government to provide the fencing. And yet bureaucrats within the Bureau of Land Management wouldn't listen and wouldn't follow the law. They told

American West as important as ever

Amazing how fast the *East Oregonian* has backed away from its bold stand, "Mr. President, free the Hammonds." Now it's "But the Hammonds — and the militia — fail to understand that the West is changing and modernizing, to the benefit of some and detriment of others." Consistent with the *EO*, bend over and get used to the new order of Manifest Destiny in the American West; they have deleted from my editorial as well as ignored Representative Greg Walden's impassioned congressional speech on behalf of the Hammonds.

According to the *EO*, "In the last half century the importance of ranching, logging, and mining have diminished dramatically in the American West." Really? Apparently the *EO* editors do not buy food or building materials in local markets, use fuels or energy mined in the American West, or appreciate the culture that made the Pendleton Round-Up famous.

The new strategy of the press is to publicly undermine the integrity of the Hammonds and their way of life and brand the protesters as armed white Christian fanatical terrorists. The Jan. 9 *EO* op-ed by Paul Larmer claims the Hammonds intentionally set fires in 2001 and 2006, "burning up thousands of acres of public land." According to court documents Steve Hammond had BLM approval for the range fire that the BLM admitted improved 143 acres of government land. According to court records the 2006 back fire saved the

ranchers they had to build the fence. When I pointed out their error, they basically told me to stuff it. When I provided them with the documentation from more than a decade before that proved the intent of Congress, they doubled down. Finally, when I got Congress to pass a restatement of the original intent, they said they'd review it.

A similar experience is taking place across the West through so-called travel management plans. Originally intended to minimize damage from off-road vehicles, it quickly became a powerful tool to close roads and shut people out of their forests.

What happened in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is a classic case in point. After years of community meetings, public workshops and incredible efforts to update the government's faulty maps, a forest supervisor decided she knew better. Her choice of a management plan was such an affront that more than 900 people

packed a meeting in La Grande in protest. I, too, was incensed and called upon the Forest Service to withdraw the plan, and they did. But the damage was done. How can people be expected to have faith in a public process when they see outcomes like these?

Meanwhile, other threats loom on these same people. From the onerous "waters of the United States" rules, to threats of more national monuments, the federal government is aggressively trying to get cattle off the range and people off their public lands.

The Hammonds were tried and convicted under a law written after the Oklahoma City bombing. The presiding judge in the case made clear that its penalties when applied to a fire on the high desert of Eastern Oregon didn't make sense. But a court found he lacked the authority to invoke a lesser sentence.

We need to revisit the 1996 law that landed the Hammonds with a punishment disproportionate to the severity of the crime. I'm working with my colleagues to do just that.

We need to have the president understand that more monuments may bring cheers from certain companies and communities, but in reality they leave behind more mistrust and mismanagement.

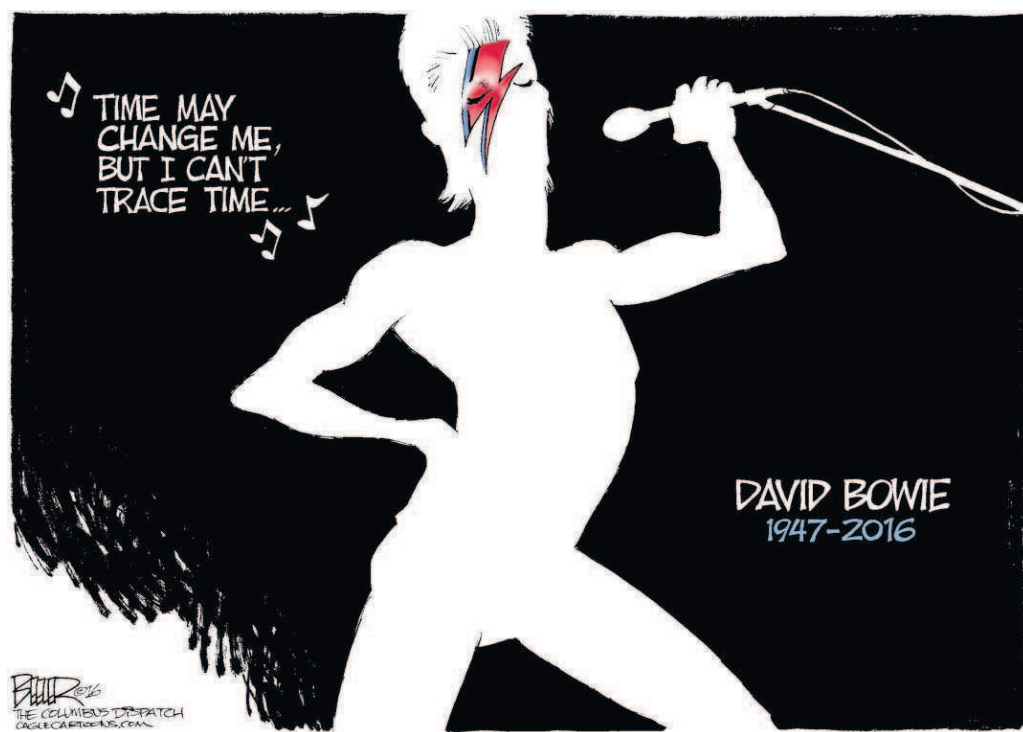
And those not familiar with the high desert of the West need to understand what we face before they quickly condemn the frustration and anger that is so evident.

■
U.S. Rep. Greg Walden represents Oregon's Second Congressional District, which includes 20 counties in central, southern, and eastern Oregon.

Decades of frustration, arrogance and betrayal that has contributed to the mistrust of the federal government



GREG WALDEN
Comment



OTHER VIEWS

Focus on illegal guns

Late Thursday a madman approached a police cruiser in Philadelphia and fired at least 11 times at the officer in the vehicle, striking him three times in the left arm.

Even with those wounds, the officer was able to get out, chase the shooter and return fire, striking him in the buttocks.

The shooter would later tell the police, according to Capt. James Clark, commander of the Police Department's homicide division: "I follow Allah and I pledge allegiance to the Islamic State. That is the reason why I did what I did."

This is a disturbing reminder of the influence of the Islamic State on individuals disposed to acts of terror, and how hard it is to identify all of them before they commit a violent act.

But the episode also highlighted something else that does not get enough discussion: the use of stolen guns in crimes.

You see, the gun used in the Philadelphia attack had been stolen, from a police officer no less, in 2013.

Our current discussion about increasing gun regulations often centers on efforts that would mostly affect people who legally buy firearms. Many of them make sense, in theory, but the truth is that they would not be likely to have a huge impact on criminal gun violence, because many of those criminals obtain their weapons illegally.

So, when the gun lobby and gun owners make this case, we must admit that they have a point.

In 2013, Samuel Bieler of the Urban Institute wrote a fascinating article about where criminals get their guns, and his findings were somewhat shocking.

Corrupt dealers supply some of the guns. According to Bieler:

"Some researchers have suggested that gun retailers divert a relatively low volume of weapons, while others have found them to be a major source."

Some come from gangs and family and friends. Specifically, "Research has put their role as a supply source at 30 to 40 percent of crime guns, but little is known about the composition of this nebulous 'friends and family' category."

And research by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives suggests that "just one percent of licensed firearms dealers sold more than half of the guns recovered in crimes, and that most gun dealers rarely have one of their guns show up in crime."

But what I found most shocking was the number of guns that are stolen each year: as many as half a million. Each year! And many of those stolen guns are used in other crimes.

In a 2003 book, "The Challenge of Crime," published by Harvard University Press, authors

quoted researchers who found the following:

"They learned that 32 percent of the felons had acquired their most recent weapon through their own theft; an additional 14 percent knew that their friend, family, or street source had stolen the weapon before conveying it; and an additional 24 percent thought that the weapon probably had been stolen by his source. At least 46 percent, then, and possibly as many as 70 percent of felons' most recently

owned firearms had been stolen either by the offender himself or by the source from whom he acquired the weapon. In addition, 47 percent of the respondents quizzed as to whether they had ever stolen a firearm during a crime admitted to so doing and 86 percent of the felons who admitted prior stealing of firearms reported multiple thefts."

Rather than focusing on all guns, the vast, vast majority of which are owned by responsible people and are never used in the commission of a crime, we have to focus on keeping guns out of the hands of this relatively small number of criminals.

People, including the president in his speech and town hall meeting last week, like to compare increasing gun regulations to the way cars are regulated. But they didn't simply get safer due to regulations. They also got safer because the market desired more safety, as well as anti-theft features. Many of the innovations, carmakers came up with on their own. The gun market doesn't behave that way.

Furthermore, cars are required to be licensed, registered, insured and periodically inspected. Also, you can't hide a car the way you can hide a gun. Cars are operated on public roads.

If we want to truly put a dent in gun violence, we must take some incredibly unpopular steps in some pockets. Safety features — including smart guns that can only be fired by the owner — are going to have to be added to the market. That will be hard to sell because no one wants a gun to fail to because it lacks a charge or due to a technology glitch. One of benefits of traditional guns is that, technologically, they are simple and ancient. There are no batteries or chips.

We are also likely to have to register guns and require insurance. This would be almost impossible, given the gun lobby's and many gun owners' current stance and the paranoid fears of confiscation, a fear some liberals feed.

Making guns safer and keeping more of them out of the hands of criminals and in the hands of responsible owners can be done, but not as long as many responsible owners are also unreasonable ones.

■
Charles M. Blow is The New York Times's weekly Op-Ed columnist. His column appears in The Times on Saturday.

YOUR VIEWS

Hammond ranch and no evidence was established that any government land was burned.

EO "Your Views" writer George Wuerthuer claims "the Hammonds were convicted of poaching at least seven deer, a fact they tried to hide by starting a fire." This slander should have been edited out of letter, something the *EO* is very good at. The only "crime" the Hammonds were found guilty of was starting two fires, something they readily admitted from the start. The jury had no idea these ranchers would be convicted as terrorists and under the dictates of the 1996 Anti-Terrorism Act and sent to prison in what presiding Judge Hogan called "a sentence that would shock the conscience."

Stand with your original conviction, *East Oregonian*! Free the Hammonds and stop the assault on our American and Christian heritage and way of life. Our forefathers, in particular the Whitmans, sacrificed their lives so that the great Northwest, Old Oregon, would be the heritage of the American people.

Stuart Dick
Irrigon

Schools should stay out of health care business

Dear parents of 8th and 11th grade students in Hermiston School District:

Please remember that you have the right and duty to know what is directed at your child while at school. Yes, you know and trust the teacher(s); yet, have you asked the school whether they will administer the

Healthy Teens Survey promoted and pushed by OHA across Oregon? Who has access to this information and what is it being used for?

Talk to a school official to make sure that your child is not subject to this.

Compose an "Opt-Out" letter with your signature advising that you be personally consulted before your child is submitted to any survey.

Ask for access information on the school website.

Parents need to continually remind the school that their job is education, not health care.

We citizens of Hermiston care about who decides personal issues for our youth.

Marge Rolan
Hermiston

A victory for cancer patients and their families

Everyone is only One Degree from cancer; whether it's a friend, family or ourselves directly, it affects all of us. My "One Degree" is my brother-in-law and best friend Rich, who died from cancer three years ago. That's why I'm so grateful that

Congress passed the largest funding increase for cancer research in more than a decade.

Thousands of cancer survivors, patients and advocates shared their One Degree stories with Congress, urging them to commit to a disease that's expected to kill roughly 590,000 Americans this year — including approximately 7,940 Oregonians.

Each year, roughly 22,410 Oregon residents will hear the dreaded words, "You have cancer." By ensuring necessary funding is available, Congress put lifesaving research back on track to help restore resources that are critical to the development of early detection tests and cutting-edge therapies. Together, we can save more lives from cancer.

As an American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network volunteer for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District, I'd like to thank U.S. Rep. Greg Walden for supporting cancer research and giving us the gift of hope this year. There is still more work to be done in the fight against cancer, but I am grateful for the support of my member of Congress against a disease that has greatly impacted my family.

Karen Malcolm
Pendleton

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.