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OUR VIEW

'Ag gag' laws are a mistake

Responsible farmers should have nothing to hide

Eastern Oregon is well endowed with farmers, ranchers and family foresters who their neighbors know to be among the most conscientious stewards of the land. You don't take on a life of long hours and uncertain rewards raising crops, animals and trees — or stay in these endeavors — if you hate the natural world and all that lives there.

What is true on the local scale — that farmers and foresters are natural conservationists worthy of steadfast support — is not universally true on the larger industrial scale.

There are irresponsible operators in every economic pursuit and this is also true of agriculture. Some large feedlots are cruel to animals. Some ranchers overgraze public lands. Some farmers over-apply chemicals or over-medicate animals destined for grocery stores.

Wonderful people but a little tone deaf when it comes to public relations, agricultural producers in some states are incensed by the efforts of a few activists to bring attention to instances of malpractice and misbehavior in the industry. This has led to efforts by ag groups and supportive legislators in places like Idaho to initiate "ag gag" laws, described in our sister publication *Capital Press* as prohibiting hidden-camera filming and obtaining employment under false pretenses.

A story in the *Capital Press* last Friday reported on just how big a blunder these laws have been in terms of confidence in farmers. A study of U.S. consumers by the

University of British Columbia shows that such heavy-handed efforts to keep agricultural practices under wraps has the opposite of the desired effect.

Instead of shielding squeamish consumers from agriculture's facts of life, ag gag laws evidently leave the public assuming there is something to hide. The trust rating for farmers drops 20 percent across the political spectrum among members of the public when ag gag laws are put into play, the university researchers found.

"There are reputational consequences. People are likely to be left with a bad taste in their mouths when they're made aware of them (ag gag laws)," a study author said.

No industry would be happy to be targeted by "secret agents" posing as visitors or employees, but agriculture occupies a central position in people's lives, providing sustenance for purchasers and their children. Heightened scrutiny is to be expected.

Oregon state lawmakers clearly should resist the siren call of ag gag laws. Agricultural producers in our states, who enjoy public support and positive reputations, can do far better by continuing to reach out to consumers with truthful information, while working to further enhance animal husbandry and environmentally friendly practices.

The vast majority of farmers are heroes with nothing to hide. They should act accordingly.

Oregon state lawmakers should resist the siren call of ag gag laws.

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.

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 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

Terrorists, bathtubs and snakes

Are terrorists more of a threat than slippery bathtubs? President Barack Obama, er, slipped into hot water when The Atlantic reported that he frequently suggests to his staff that fear of terrorism is overblown, with Americans more likely to die from falls in tubs than from attacks by terrorists.

The timing was awkward, coming right before the Brussels bombings, but Obama is roughly right on his facts: 464 people drowned in the U.S. in tubs, sometimes after falls, in 2013, while 17 were killed here by terrorists in 2014 (the most recent years for which I could get figures). Of course, that's not an argument for relaxing vigilance, for at some point terrorists will graduate from explosives to nuclear, chemical or biological weapons that could be far more devastating than even 9/11. But it is an argument for addressing global challenges a little more rationally.

The basic problem is this: The human brain evolved so that we systematically misjudge risks and how to respond to them.

Our visceral fear of terrorism has repeatedly led us to adopt policies that are expensive and counterproductive, such as the invasion of Iraq. We have ramped up the intelligence community so much that there are now seven times as many Americans with security clearances (4.5 million) as live in Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, Donald Trump responded to the Brussels attacks with crowd-pleasing calls for torture or barring Muslims that even Republican security experts agree are preposterous.

On the same day as the attacks, a paper by James E. Hansen and other climate experts was released arguing that carbon emissions are transforming our world far more quickly than expected, in ways that may inundate coastal cities and cause storms more horrendous than any in modern history. The response? A yawn.

Hansen is an eminent former NASA scientist, but he's also an outlier in his timing forecasts, and I'm not qualified to judge whether he's correct. Yet whatever the disagreement about the timeline, there is scientific consensus that emissions on our watch are transforming our globe for 10,000 years to come. As an important analysis in *Nature Climate Change* put it, "The next few decades offer a brief window of opportunity to minimize large-scale and potentially catastrophic climate change that will extend longer than the entire history of human civilization thus far."

To put it another way, this year's election choices may shape coastlines 10,000 years from now. Donald Trump and Ted Cruz have both mocked the idea of human-caused climate change, with Trump suggesting that it is a hoax invented by China to harm the



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

American economy (he now says that last point was a joke).

The upshot is that Brussels survived this week's terrorist attacks, but it may not survive climate change (much of the city is less than 100 feet above sea level).

Doesn't it seem prudent to invest in efforts to avert not only shoe bombers but also the drowning of the world's low-lying countries?

"We have a political system that engages quickly and powerfully in response to terrorism and security risks," notes Daniel Esty, an environment expert at Yale Law School, "but doesn't seem capable of galvanizing action on climate change and other risks that are less visible and spread over time and space."

The reason seems to be — how do I put this politely? — that we evolved in ways that leave us irrational.

When we spot a harmless garter snake, our brains light up with activity as we process the "threat." That's because as primate brains evolved over tens of millions of years, poisonous snakes were a threat that we are highly adapted to address, with special brain cells that are extremely sensitive to snake images.

Unfortunately, our brains are not well adapted to most of the biggest threats we actually face in the 21st century. Warm up that climate change is destroying our planet, and only a small part of our prefrontal cortex (which worries about the future) will glimmer; then we'll go back to worrying about snakes or their modern equivalent — terrorists.

Daniel Gilbert, a professor of psychology at Harvard, says that the kind of threats that we evolved to deal with are those that are imminent rather than gradual, and those that involve a deliberate bad actor, especially one transgressing our moral code. Explaining our lack of concern for global warming, he noted, "Climate change is caused by the burning of fossil fuels, not flags."

In short, our brains are perfectly evolved for the Pleistocene, but are not as well suited for the risks we face today. If only climate change caused sharp increases in snake populations, then we'd be on top of the problem!

Yet even if our brains sometimes mislead us, they also crown us with the capacity to recognize our flaws and rectify mistakes. So maybe we can adjust for our weaknesses in risk assessment — so that we confront the possible destruction of our planet as if it were every bit as ominous and urgent a threat as, say, a passing garter snake.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. A columnist for The New York Times since 2001, he has twice won the Pulitzer Prize.

The human brain evolved so that we systematically misjudge risks and how to respond to them.

YOUR VIEWS

No more fake emergencies in Oregon

Oregon is proud of its long tradition of firsts.

In 1967 we established public ownership of our beaches. In 1971 we became the first state in the nation to adopt a bottle bill. The list of firsts in Oregon is long. Great citizens like Wayne Morse, Tom McCall, Mark Hatfield, Barbara Roberts and Vie Atiyeh worked hard to make life better for all Oregonians. During the recent short legislative session we are now first in the highest minimum wage in the nation and the first to ban coal from our power grid.

Before all these firsts in the nation we were the first to enshrine in our Constitution the initiative and referendum process. It is an elegant but often messy approach to democracy. The basic idea is all bills passed in the legislature have a 90-day waiting period before they become law. This gives the citizenry time to collect petition signatures to refer the matter to the ballot. As a safety valve there is also a provision for emergencies. It

was meant to allow the legislature to act on true emergencies. The problem is the definition of an emergency is strictly at the discretion of the majority. In this state that is Democrats.

As of late, all controversial bills are declared emergencies and codified in law on passing. The legislation is written by the beneficiaries, discussed behind closed doors, moved through the assembly and passed on a majority vote much to the displeasure of the minority. The special interest groups like labor unions, renewable energy interests and environmental groups then donate generously to the candidate directly or their political party.

No matter where you stand politically, policy that affects all Oregonians should be subject to referral to the ballot. Unlike many issues in politics, there is something we can do about this. We can by gathering 125,000 signatures to refer a No Fake Emergencies bill to the legislature. It's as simple as typing no fake emergencies into your browser, downloading the petition, signing

it, folding it and returning it to the address shown. You must be a registered voter, and if you are not that is easily remedied as well.

It's high time to take back our constitutional right to referendum and require a two-thirds majority to declare emergency status.

Bruce Staley
Pendleton

M-F school bond a golden opportunity

How can it get any better than this? We have a golden opportunity to have a new school and other upgrades in the system at a bargain price. A once in-a-lifetime offer like this, to get a new facility and other needed improvements in our other aging buildings and only need to pay approximately 40 percent out of our pockets, is a golden opportunity we can't pass up.

Our aging buildings are expensive and difficult to maintain, and the new school will actually be much more cost efficient and environmentally friendly.

I could feel a new beginning

and excitement in town when the community came together to build the Gathering Place, then almost everyone stepped forward to help with Make A Difference Day. Now let's all get together to keep the progress moving forward with a new school.

Other people have come forth with all the facts and figures for you to consider but it can't get any simpler than this: A home with a taxable value of \$150,000 will pay \$1.10 per \$1,000 or \$165 annually for 20 years, or approximately 45 cents a day, much less than a cup of coffee. Even with the passage of the new school bond, the tax rate for education in Milton-Freewater will be one of the lowest in Umatilla County

Education is the first step for a stronger community. In order to recruit good paying jobs to Milton-Freewater we need a diverse workforce, and new facilities will bring excitement and pride that is currently lacking. Investing in our education system is an investment that will not only impact our economy now but for years to come. An educated workforce and pleasing facilities that are appealing to potential businesses and people thinking about moving to our great city is important for our future.

Also, today's kids are in a technical/computer world that I, and most adults my age, don't understand. To compete in tomorrow's job market our kids need a modern, advanced education. This is possible and much easier in a modern facility with all the advanced systems built in.

This is something we must take advantage of for our kids, and our community. Let's get-r-done.

Lewis Key
Mayor, Milton-Freewater

