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OUR VIEW

A forest plan we can live with

The Blue Mountains Forest Plan is the overarching management document that guides decisions on millions of acres of public land in Eastern Oregon.

Land managers on the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur national forests have been working under that plan, which has not been updated since 1990. That was two Bush presidents ago, and about eight years before Google was founded.

The plan is long overdue for an update, but the public and land owners (the federal government and we the people) have, as of yet, been unable to make headway on what that should look like.

After a long, arduous process to collect and collate public comment, the Forest Service released six possibilities for what an updated plan could look like. They call those *alternatives*. The public didn't like any of the six, and the Forest Service decided to go back to the drawing board and consider more alternatives. It was another delay for a new forest plan, but perhaps it will allow for an outcome that more people will be happy with.

It's hard to do. Forest users come in all different stripes, and they want different and sometimes opposite things from the forest plan. Lumber industries want more board feet. Environmental groups want more trees in the ground. Recreationalists want great hunting opportunities and easy access to their favorite spots. Tribal groups want to conserve resources and preserve traditional culture.

It's impossible to perfectly please everyone. But as we saw in other Eastern Oregon public lands

debates that got out of hand, it is important for local organizations and individuals to take part in the process, and provide accountability for its outcome. How can we expect our government to know what we want, if we don't tell them? And not in all caps social media swearing, but in reasoned public testimony.

At the same time, we need our government to listen. We cannot be so selfish as to think we will get everything we want, but we are all stakeholders and we deserve to have our voices heard and considered.

The public has had many opportunities to chime in and be considered, and now you have one more right here in Umatilla County.

The *East Oregonian* and Oregon Public Broadcasting, as noted in our front page story today, have teamed up to bring the OPB show Think Out Loud to Pendleton to discuss the plan. Representatives from the Forest Service will answer questions and discuss the difficulty of the process and members with industrial, recreational environmental and tribal concerns will make their case for how they want the woods to look and feel. The forum is Wednesday from 7-8 p.m. at Blue Mountain Community College's main lecture hall. Please arrive by 6:30 p.m. so you'll be in your seat by the time the audio engineers hit the record button.

This forest plan revision has been a long (too-long), expensive (too-expensive) complex (too-complex) process. But as we enter another stage, Oregonians have the opportunity to listen and learn. That is the best way to feel involved and invested.

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 VIEW

Voter law motors into closed primaries

The Oregonian

The idea behind Oregon's new "motor voter" program, signed into law last year by Gov. Kate Brown, was all about removing barriers to voting, real or imagined.

By tapping Oregon's Driver and Motor Vehicle Services database of people seeking driver's licenses or ID cards, the state could automatically add to the voter rolls those eligible Oregonians who had not previously registered.

According to the Oregon secretary of state's office, more than 24,500 new voters have been added since the program began less than three months ago — far outperforming the typical 2,000-voter-a-month pace of the past. It would seem that "motor voter" is doing what backers wanted it to do: Enfranchising many who might not otherwise have bothered to register.

Except, there's one problem: Oregon's experiment to eliminate barriers is about to meet the immovable object that is Oregon's closed primary system.

More than 86 percent of the new voters added so far this year are registered as unaffiliated with any political party. That's the default setting in "motor voter" for those who don't return a mailer designating a party affiliation or indicating they want to be kept off voter rolls completely.

But under Oregon law, major political parties can restrict participation in their primaries to only those voters who are registered with their party.

Both the state's Democratic and Republican parties have opted to keep their primaries closed in this way to outsiders. Such exclusivity affects not just races for state legislative positions but carry over to the presidential race as

well.

That means that a nonaffiliated voter who may want to cast a ballot for Bernie Sanders or Donald Trump in May's primary may not do so, because both candidates will appear only on their respective parties' ballots.

The irony that nearly all new registrants added under "motor voter" would be barred from voting in the most prominent races this May is not lost on those who run the program. Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins announced last week that elections officials are sending notices to all of the state's nearly 540,000 nonaffiliated voters reminding them that they cannot vote in the Democratic or Republican primary unless they change their voter registration to designate the appropriate party as their political affiliation.

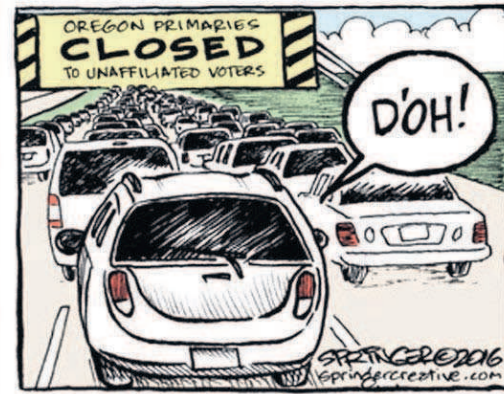
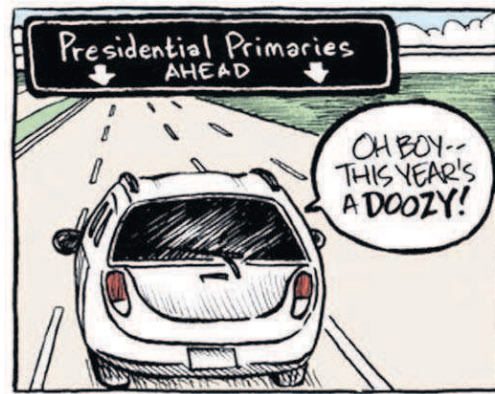
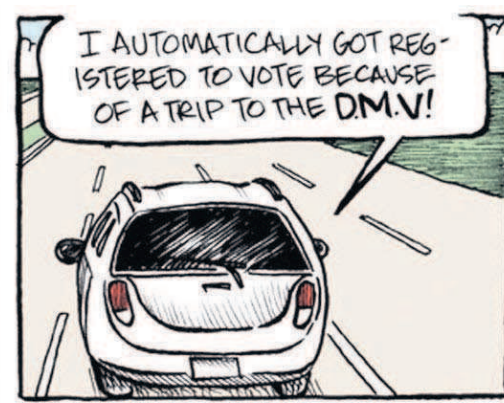
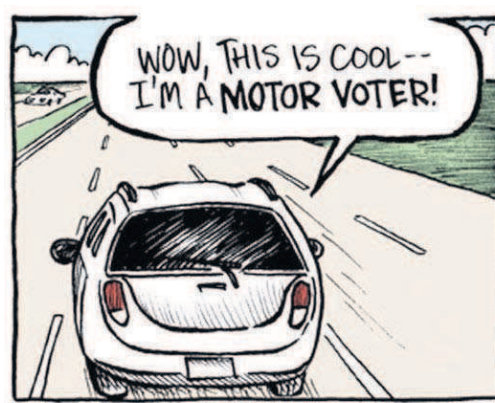
The deadline to submit a change for the May primary is April 26.

The secretary of state's announcement, however, does highlight a problem that officials will need to eventually address.

Nonaffiliated voter registrations are surging nationally, not just in Oregon, and the state should recognize that closed primaries are cutting out hundreds of thousands of Oregonians who should not have to declare fealty to one party or another to simply cast their vote.

If the state truly wants to give voters a voice, that means recognizing how the system is set up intentionally to keep them out. Cosmetic fixes like a failed legislative bill to prepay postage for ballots are nothing more than meaningless gestures.

The real work requires the Democratic and Republican establishment to recognize that their rhetoric about eliminating barriers means nothing when they refuse to remake a system based on exclusion.



OTHER VIEWS

Learning from Obama

Like many political junkies, I've been spending far too much time looking at polls and trying to understand their implications. Can Donald Trump really win his party's nomination? (Yes.) Can Bernie Sanders? (No.) But the primaries aren't the only things being polled; we're still getting updates on President Barack Obama's overall approval. And something striking has happened on that front.

At the end of 2015 Obama was still underwater, with significantly more Americans disapproving than approving. Since then, however, his approval has risen sharply while disapproval has plunged. He's still only in modestly positive territory, but the net movement in polling averages has been about 11 percentage points, which is a lot.

What's going on?

Well, one answer is that voters have lately been given a taste of what really bad leaders look like. But I'd like to think that the public is also starting to realize just how successful the Obama administration has been in addressing

America's problems. And there are lessons from that success for those willing to learn.

I know that it's hard for many people on both sides to wrap their minds around the notion of Obama-as-success. On the left, those caught up in the enthusiasms of 2008 feel let down by the prosaic reality of governing in a deeply polarized political system. Meanwhile, conservative ideology predicts disaster from any attempt to tax the rich, help the less fortunate and rein in the excesses of the market; and what are you going to believe, the ideology or your own lying eyes?

But the successes are there for all to see.

Start with the economy. You might argue that presidents don't have as much effect on economic performance as voters seem to imagine — especially presidents facing scorched-earth opposition from Congress for most of their time in office. But that misses the point: Republicans have spent the past seven years claiming incessantly that Obama's policies are a "job killing" disaster, destroying business incentives, so it's important news if the economy has performed well.

And it has: We've gained 10 million private-sector jobs since Obama took office, and unemployment is below 5 percent. True, there are still some areas of disappointment — low labor force participation, weak wage growth. But just imagine the boasting we'd be hearing if Mitt Romney occupied the White House.

Then there's health reform, which has (don't tell anyone) been meeting its goals.

Back in 2012, just after the Supreme Court made it possible for states to reject



PAUL KRUGMAN
Comment

the Medicaid expansion, the Congressional Budget Office predicted that by now 89 percent of the nonelderly population would be covered; the actual number is 90 percent.

The details have been something of a surprise: fewer people than expected signing up on the exchanges, but fewer employers than expected dropping coverage, and more people signing up for Medicaid — which means, incidentally, that Obamacare is

looking much more like a single-payer system than anyone seems to realize. But the point is that reform has indeed delivered the big improvements in coverage it promised, and it has done so at lower cost than expected.

There is essentially no chance that conservatives will reconsider their dogma.

Then there's financial reform, which the left considers toothless and the right considers destructive. In fact, while the big banks haven't been broken up, excessive leverage — the real threat to financial stability — has been greatly reduced. And as for the economic effects, have I mentioned how well we've done on job creation?

Last but not least, the Obama administration has used executive authority to take steps on the environment that, if not canceled by a Republican president and upheld by future Supreme Courts, will amount to very significant action on climate change.

All in all, it's quite a record. Assuming Democrats hold the presidency, Obama will emerge as a hugely consequential president — more than Reagan. And I'm sure Republicans will learn a lot from his achievements.

April fools!

Seriously, there is essentially no chance that conservatives, whose ideas haven't changed in decades, will reconsider their dogma. But maybe progressives will be more open-minded.

The 2008 election didn't bring the political transformation that Obama enthusiasts expected, nor did it destroy the power of the vested interests: Wall Street, the medical-industrial complex and the fossil fuel lobby are all still out there, using their money to buy influence. But they have been pushed back in ways that have made American lives better and more secure.

The lesson of the Obama years, in other words, is that success doesn't have to be complete to be very real. You say you want a revolution? Well, you can't always get what you want — but if you try sometimes, you just might find, you get what you need.

Paul Krugman joined *The New York Times* in 1999 as a columnist on the *Op-Ed Page* and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.

YOUR VIEWS

Athena-Weston voters should support school bond

I want to encourage all of the voters who live in the Athena-Weston School District to vote yes on the upcoming bond.

You may have read in the paper that several schools in our region have been picked to receive a matching fund grant from the state of Oregon. The Athena Weston School District is one of the lucky ones. We will only be paying 44 cents more per assessed \$1,000 than we are paying right now. Along with that 44 cents comes an additional \$4 million from the state of Oregon for a total of \$8 million to improve our aging schools.

We can replace buses that are over 30 years old. I have two boys in high school here. I can't believe they are riding some of the same buses that I rode when I was in high school. How long have you had the car in your driveway?

The school board has many items they want to fix. This list has been prioritized and student security is at the top of the priority list. Passage of this bond will keep our children safe for years to come.

This list includes energy maintenance and renovations, energy savings upgrades, technology upgrades and many others that are way overdue. You can see this list on the school district website www.athwest.k12.or.us and watch a promotional video where you will

hear firsthand from students, staff, and parents alike on the importance of this bond.

A yes vote on the passage of the Athena Weston School District Bond is a yes vote for our future. Please join me by voting yes to our children and our future.

John Shafer, mayor
Athena

Guns at national convention the latest in GOP craziness

What's up in the crazy world of Republican politics this week? Fifty thousand Republican conventioners signed a petition saying they wanted to carry heat (semi-automatic pistols) into the Republican National Convention. The Secret Service said "No way, Jose."

Picture the Republican convention and a shootout taking place: 50,000 Republicans, the big bad National Rifle Association gun nuts with their semiautomatics blazing away, all caught on world wide TV coverage. That would end the gun debate in America, here and now, once and for all.

Republican politicians, who are usually at the forefront pushing their "guns everywhere" agenda, have remained silent about this latest idea. What do Republican presidential candidates Ted Cruz and Donald Trump have to opine about it?

Ron Lowe
Nevada City, Calif.