

Quick takes

Turkey hunter kills cougar

Had a friend turkey hunting shoot one at 6 feet, ready to nail him up outta Milton. They are sneaky and mean.

— Peggy Carlson

Not enough wolves = too many cats. And remember wolves don't attack humans like cougars do (in North America, that is).

— Jake Sabin

Whoohow scary. Very intense story. Glad to hear he made it. Makes me wonder how close them cougars are.

— Natasha Watchman

Marijuana taxes flood in

And the Board of Commissioners decided to ban dispensaries for what reason again?

— Eric Simonton

It's no surprise. If you want something to appear successful, set a low expectation and crow when it is exceeded.

— Mike Navratil

Your state was smart and has the participation clause: Not a dime goes to the non-participating areas. Well done Oregon!

— Janice Martin

PGG to vote to dissolve

I'm sure if people worked together, the way they did in the early 1900s, it could still be saved.

— Candace Gates

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

In Alexander Hamilton's debt



PAUL KRUGMAN
Comment

The Treasury Department picked an interesting moment to announce a revision in its plans to change the faces on America's money. Plans to boot Alexander Hamilton off the \$10 bill in favor of a woman have been shelved. Instead, Harriet Tubman — one of the most heroic figures in the history of our nation, or any nation — will move onto the face of the \$20 bill.

She will replace Andrew Jackson, a populist who campaigned against elites but was also, unfortunately, very much a racist, arguably an advocate of what we would nowadays call white supremacy. Hmm. Does that make you think about any currently prominent political figures?

But let me leave the \$20 bill alone and talk about how glad I am to see Hamilton retain his well-deserved honor. And I'm not alone among economists in my admiration for our first Treasury secretary. In fact, Stephen S. Cohen and J. Bradford DeLong have an excellent new book, "Concrete Economics," arguing that Hamilton was the true father of the U.S. economy.

Full disclosure: I know next to nothing about Hamilton the man and his life story. Nor, I'm sorry to say, have I managed to see the musical. But I have read Hamilton's pathbreaking economic policy manifestoes, in particular his 1790 "First Report on the Public Credit," a document that remains amazingly relevant today.

In that report, Hamilton proposed that the federal government assume and honor all of the debts individual states had run up during the Revolutionary War, imposing new tariffs on imported goods to raise the needed revenue.

He believed that doing so would produce important benefits, which I'll get to in a

minute. First, however, I think it's interesting to ask how such a proposal would be received today.

On the left, it would surely be denounced as a bailout — a giveaway to speculators who had purchased devalued debt for pennies on the dollar, and would reap large capital gains. Indeed, a fair bit of the report is devoted to explaining why trying to prevent such windfall gains, via "discrimination between the different classes of creditors," would be impractical and unwise.

Meanwhile, on the right — well, Hamilton was calling for a tax increase, which modern conservatives oppose under any and all circumstances. Luckily for him, there was no Club for Growth to demand his impeachment.

But why did Hamilton want to take on those state debts? Partly to establish a national reputation as a reliable borrower, so that funds could be raised cheaply in the future. Partly, also, to give wealthy, influential investors a stake in the new federal government, thereby creating a powerful pro-federal constituency.

Beyond that, however, Hamilton argued that the existence of a significant, indeed fairly large national debt would be good for business. Why? Because "in countries in which the national debt is properly funded, and an object of established confidence, it answers most of the purposes of money."

That is, bonds issued by the U.S. government would provide a safe, easily traded asset that the private sector could use as a store of value, as collateral for deals, and in general as a lubricant for business activity.

As a result, the debt would become a "national blessing," making the economy

more productive. This argument anticipates, to a remarkable degree, one of the hottest ideas in modern macroeconomics: the notion that we are suffering from a global "safe asset shortage." The private sector, according to this argument, can't function well without a sufficient pool of assets whose value isn't in question — and for a variety of reasons, there just aren't enough such assets these days.

As a result, investors have been bidding up the prices of government debt, leading to incredibly low interest rates. But it would be better for almost everyone, the story goes, if governments were to issue more debt, investing the proceeds in much-needed infrastructure even while providing the private sector with the collateral it needs to function. And it's a very persuasive story to just about everyone who has looked hard at the evidence.

Unfortunately, policymakers won't do the right thing, largely because they keep listening to fiscal scolds — people who insist that public debt is a terrible thing even when borrowing costs almost nothing. The influence of these scolds, their virtual veto over fiscal policy, somehow persists even though their predictions of soaring interest rates and runaway inflation keep not coming true.

The point is that Alexander Hamilton knew better.

Unfortunately, Hamilton isn't around to help counter foolish debt phobia. But maybe reminding policymakers of his wisdom is one way to chip away at the wall of folly that still constrains policy. And having his face out there every time someone pulls out a 10 can't hurt, either.

Paul Krugman joined The New York Times in 1999 as a columnist.

Logging a cause — not a cure — for wildfires

By GEORGE WUERTHNER

The Forest Service solution to large wildfires is more logging, but this prescription ignores the growing body of scientific research that suggests that logging/thinning/prescribed burning does not work under severe fire conditions.

Why is this important? Because the vast majority of all fires self-extinguish whether we do anything or not. However, all large fires — the ones that are a threat to communities — burn

under what are termed "severe fire weather." These are fires burning under conditions of low humidity, high temperatures, persistent drought and most importantly high winds.

If you get these conditions in the same place as an ignition source, you cannot stop the fire until the weather conditions change. Blazes under such conditions regularly burn through fuel treatments — even clearcuts. In fact, fuel treatments can even make fire spread quicker by opening the forest to greater drying and wind penetration.

Here's a small sample of conclusions that cast doubt upon Forest Service policies: "Finally by current standards, even our best fuel reduction do not appear to be adequate to provide much assistance in the control of high intensity wind-driven fires. If fuel treatment is the answer, it will need to be done on a level that is far more extensive (area) and intensive (fuel reduction than we are now accomplishing — even on our best fuel breaks." (Source: Wildfire Cast Management)

"Extreme environmental conditions ... overwhelmed most fuel treatment effects. ... This included almost all treatment methods including prescribed burning and thinning. ... Suppression efforts had little benefit from fuel modifications."

"It may not be necessary or effective to treat fuels in adjacent areas in order to suppress fires before they reach homes; rather, it is the treatment of the fuels immediately proximate to the residences, and the degree

to which the residential structures themselves can ignite that determine if the residences are vulnerable."

"The majority of acreage burned by wildfire in the U.S. occurs in a very few wildfires under extreme conditions (Strauss et al., 1989; Brookings Institution, 2005). "Under these extreme conditions suppression efforts are largely ineffective." (Source: Objectives and considerations for wildland fuel treatment in forested ecosystems of the interior western United States Elizabeth D. Reinhardt *,

Robert E. Keane, David E. Calkin, Jack D. Cohen.)

We cannot halt large fires through fuel treatments. The best way to save homes is not by

logging more of the forest, but by implementing fire-wise policies in communities that reduces the flammability of homes.

I suspect many in the Forest Service, and especially firefighters, know this, but the agency is continuously under attack from politicians, rural communities, and the timber industry to increase the amount of subsidized timber from federal lands. Fire prevention is the excuse used to justify these sales.

Plus, logging/thinning gives the agency reasonable deniability. When a fire overwhelms firefighting efforts, the Forest Service can always say we did what we could to protect the community.

It is easier to log the forest than face the wrath and accusations from ill-informed community members that if only the Forest Service had logged more, then the "disaster" could have been avoided.

The truth is that the responsibility for avoiding disasters lies not with the Forest Service, but with individual private land owners, and county commissioners who continuously approve new subdivisions in the wildlands-urban interface. But the Forest Service can't say this publicly.

George Wuerthner is an ecologist and the author of 38 books, including two dealing with wildfire issues. He serves on the Western Watersheds Project board.



How bigotry helped shape the West

By PAUL KRZA
Writers on the Range

I've traveled frequently to Slovenia to see the place where my grandparents came from, and I remain amazed why they would trade that land of lush forests for windswept Rock Springs, Wyoming. But with thousands of migrants on the move in Europe these days, it's understandable: They simply wanted a better life. Less understandable is some of the anti-migrant rhetoric we're hearing at home.

It's not the first time bigoted attitudes have surfaced in the United States. Rock Springs was ground zero in 1885, when hate talk spurred an orgy of medieval brutality and the murder of Chinese immigrants.

Chinese people came here in the 1860s, first as railroad workers, and later as miners for the Union Pacific Railroad Company, many in the Rock Springs coal pits. In 1870, the company paid "white labor" up to \$3 a day; the Chinese were paid a dollar less under what the company called a "race differential."

The Knights of Labor, then organizing white miners in Rock Springs, also were championing a nationwide hate campaign against Chinese. Called "Chinamen," or "Chinks," they were yesterday's version of today's Mexicans, seen as "taking white men's jobs," or like Muslims, having strange customs. In 1870, Cheyenne's *Wyoming State Tribune* suggested it was time to "throw back the tide of heathen paupers from our shores."

On the afternoon of Sept. 2, 1885, whipped-up white miners fanned out from the separate "Whitemen's Town" in Rock Springs and mounted a scorched-earth attack on Chinatown. The raiders — including two women seen firing rifles — killed "at least" 28 Chinese that day and terrorized the fleeing survivors. The consul's investigation grimly noted the "more or less mutilated" and burned bodies. Wyoming Gov. Francis Warren asked for help from U.S. Army soldiers in Rock Springs, though some suggested he was

motivated more by company needs than a desire to quell violence.

A week later, some of the Chinese returned, this time accompanied by federal troops who stayed for 13 years. "The company intends to make a 'Chinatown' out of Rock Springs," the *Rock Springs Independent* lamented. "It means that Rock Springs is killed, as far as white men are concerned."

The Chinese identified perpetrators, and authorities arrested 16 men in Rock Springs. However, a white grand jury indicted no one, because no crime was committed "by a white person."

I knew nothing about this as a kid growing up in Rock Springs. Nobody talked about it, and schools didn't teach this tarnished bit of local history. Last I heard, there's still no memorial to the mass killings. It wasn't until the mid-1970s, when I wrote a story about the massacre, that I managed to learn about it. My source was an uncle who cared about local history.

That history was all around me, many years later. Camp Pilot Butte, where the Army troops lived, remained intact for decades after they left. I even attended catechism in rooms we called "the barracks," and played outside on the old parade ground, which had been turned into a playground. Remnants of nearby Chinatown surfaced when a school, built on the old site, expanded along "Ah Say Avenue," which was named after a local Chinese leader.

Though a few Chinese continued as miners, the Rock Springs turmoil prompted the Union Pacific to shift its recruitment strategy to depressed southeastern Europe. That's how my Slovenian grandfathers came to Rock Springs, part of a migrant

flow between 1876 and 1914, when 5 million people left hardscrabble lives for America. By 1910, about half the miners in Rock Springs came from the same area, among them one of my grandfathers, who entered

mine tunnels there in 1918. My other Slovenian grandfather opened a blacksmith shop in Rock Springs.

Like the Chinese, they encountered ridicule and suspicion about their politics, which many believed were dangerously leftist. When other ethnic groups arrived in growing multinational Rock Springs, racist name-calling was the norm, and

sometimes, people duked it out in the local park. But there was no mass murder, because, simply, the newcomers were mostly white.

For me, the family's migratory movement has been circular. Last year I applied for, and amazingly was granted Slovenian citizenship. I can always go back to the old country.

Had the Chinese been welcomed or even tolerated, those terrible events in 1885 might not have occurred. If so, my forebears might never have come here. They might have hunkered down and stayed in Slovenia. I'd never have had to seek citizenship: I'd already be living there.

But now I can leave this country, and if hate wins our election, I can honestly say, as some friends only half-jokingly declare: "I have an escape route." Perhaps I won't have to take it.

Paul Krza is a contributor to Writers on the Range, an opinion service of High Country News (hcn.org). He was a longtime newspaperman in Wyoming and now lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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