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OUR VIEW

Carbon choices are climate choices

While many economists and energy regulators remain convinced that the best approach to controlling greenhouse gases is to tax carbon emissions, it nevertheless is good to see that Oregon is continuing to closely examine an alternative approach: an economy-wide carbon cap-and-trade system in partnership with other governments around North America.

Under cap-and-trade, agencies assign individual carbon emitters a “cap” based on emissions history and future targets. Emitters can then use, buy and sell their rights to produce carbon dioxide pollution. By providing a monetary incentive to emit less — either to preserve emission rights to use or sell for a profit or to avoid having to buy those rights from someone else — advocates believe CO2 will cease to be so easily discharged into the atmosphere, where it becomes everyone’s problem.

Detractors of cap-and-trade believe it is needlessly complicated, essentially creating a new profit center for corporations that will require an unwieldy private/public bureaucracy to maintain. In contrast, a direct tax could be

crafted to specifically discourage emissions, with the revenues going to offset impacts on needy residents, to conduct research and for other purposes.

These are, however, early days in what will surely be a long process of figuring out how best to wean industrial society off its addiction to fossil fuels, a dependency that permits carbon dioxide to warp our climate. Just this year, CO2 levels are stuck above 400 parts per million in the atmosphere, after starting out at 280 ppm before the industrial era. Levels will continue going up, possibly for decades. We probably will need to explore an array of regulatory and technological solutions before we arrive at a satisfactory set of answers.

Climatewire, a publication of Environment & Energy Publishing (www.eenews.net), recently reported a helpful summary of Oregon’s cap-and-trade steps. Read it at www.tinyurl.com/OR-cap-and-trade.

Decisions on these matters will have a pervasive impact on citizens and society. It is worthwhile for all of us to try to understand our options and participate in deciding what to do.

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Culture Corner

Add Paul Tremblay’s new horror novel “A Head Full of Ghosts” to your summer reading list. The taut, disturbing work comes under 300 pages and is just the thing to add chills as the temp rises.

Marjorie Barrett, 14, starts acting a little mean, a little creepy, her behavior worsens (maybe it’s a disease or psychological), the family suffers under the stress, and by the end it sure seems like something vile has moved in and kicked Marjorie to the basement.

Writing that kind of scary novel is tough work. William Peter Blatty’s “The Exorcist,” after all, remains an imposing monolith in horror fiction even after 45 years (and if you have not read it, do. It’s better — and more ambiguous — than the subsequent film, itself a horror classic).

But the familiar road stops and this tale takes on new tones because most of it is told from the point of view of Marjorie’s little sister, Merry, just 8. Tremblay then adds the most postmodern of elements to the mix — a reality TV show to air the whole sinister unraveling and a blogger’s

comments on that show.

I’m not a fan of popular fiction, and I don’t read much of it. The English major in me is too much of a snob. “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”

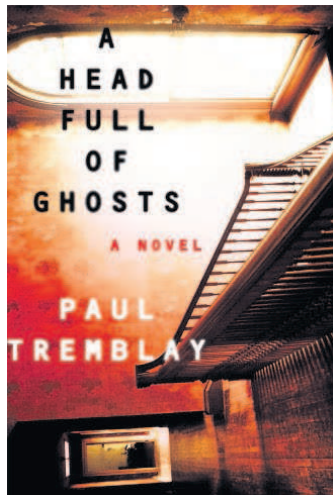
was often a slog through list-making and weak characterizations. I couldn’t even finish the first 25 pages of “A Game of Thrones,” and I’ve read “Moby-Dick” about a dozen times.

Tremblay’s not weaving the “great American novel” here but telling a good story well. His dialogue sometimes is forced, but he builds tension in steady steps, sprinkles in plot twists that make sense, and adheres to Edgar Allen Poe’s rule of keeping horror short. And he uses literary devices to fine effect.

The best writing doesn’t tell us how something is, it shows us. Demonic possession stories are at their dark heart rape stories: a malevolent spirit forces its way into a victim, usually young and female, and she and everyone else seem helpless to stop the violation.

“A Head Full of Ghosts” shows us that well enough.

— Phil Wright, senior reporter



YOUR VIEWS

City could deed ball field to BMCC if they wanted to

It appears that the mayor and city council have been less than candid about the agreement signed with the state of Oregon concerning the property that hosts the Blue Mountain Community College baseball field.

At the May 3 city council meeting, Chuck Wood stated that as per the agreement with the state of Oregon, if they deeded the property to the city, they would only use it for economic development and they wouldn’t consider asking the state for approval to deed the property to BMCC because of the lengthy period of time it took to negotiate the transfer of the property to the city.

A request to the state through Representative Greg Barreto and forwarded to Scott Fairley, Regional

Solutions Coordinator, resulted in the following statement: “deeding the baseball field to BMCC would not violate the city’s agreement with the state. The land was given to the city based on an argument of the economic development, however, the city is not required to use the land for industrial development.”

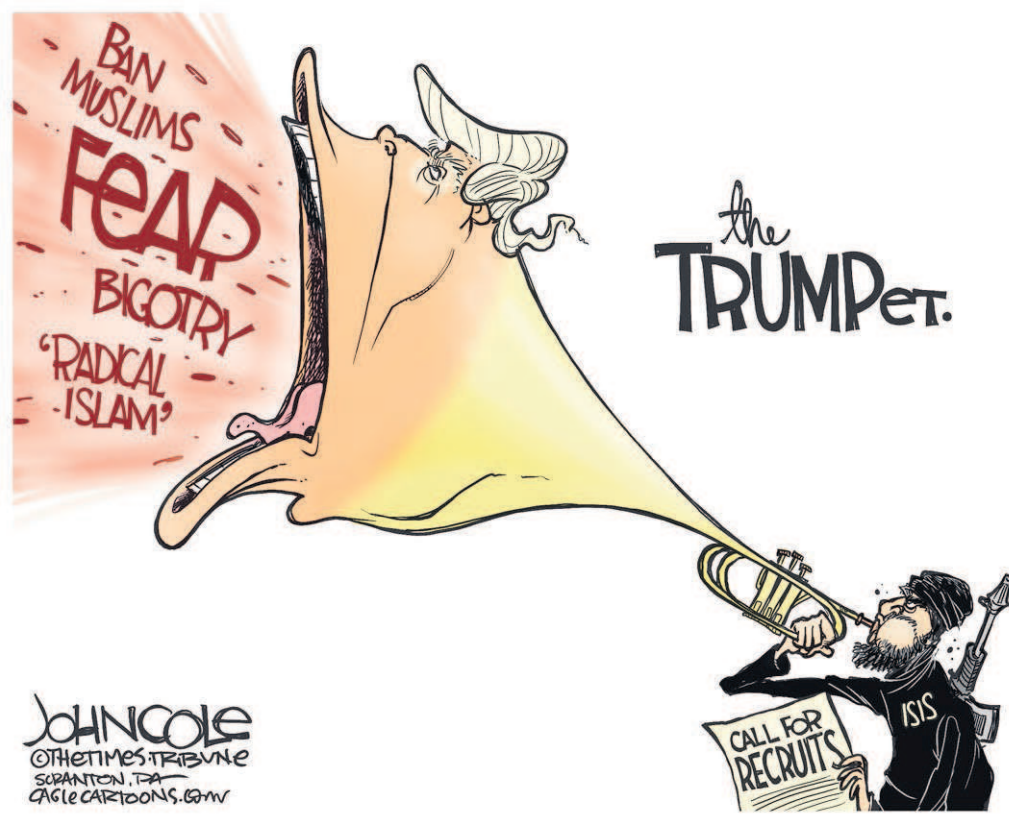
I submit that the construction of the baseball field in itself has provided the city of Pendleton with a measure of economic development as students are drawn to the city and contribute both rent and, of course, they must eat, buy gas and clothing, and entertain themselves.

The words of the city ring hollow when it’s a tangible show of support that is needed.

Rick Rohde
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.



OTHER VIEWS

Is the internet living up to its potential?

Access to the internet brings such amazing promise. It offers access to specialized health care, regardless of location; easier access to government at every level; access to the global economy; the opportunity to get an education, even if you can’t physically attend a particular campus; and the ability to connect with friends and family in real time over great distances. But, is the internet living up to its potential, and are we using it appropriately?

I remember when we first started using email in the Army. I was a captain serving as an administrative officer for a year. My group effectively filled the role of a human resources department for the 500-man unit I was assigned to. We had computers when I first got that job, but we used them mostly as glorified word processors. They were not even connected to a network.

Then the Army rolled out email. There was great hope that it would streamline communications and reduce paperwork. Sadly, it soon became apparent that it had the opposite effect. Since it was suddenly so easy to communicate, the volume of memorandums, letters, and notes exploded. Instead of reducing paperwork, electronic communications made it easy to transmit even the most mundane thought — and so people did.

The commercialization of the internet has had a similar impact on the rest of society. The International Data Corporation (IDC) estimates that by 2020, the global population will be creating 40 zettabytes (40 trillion gigabytes) of data every year. Let me help put that into perspective. A pickup truck full of books is the equivalent of about one gigabyte of data. So, in just a few years, we’ll be collectively generating enough new data on the internet to fill 40 trillion pickup trucks (if that data were printed in book form). Since our global population is now about 7.4 billion people, each person on the globe would have to have 5,405 pickup trucks full of printed books to equal the amount of new data that will be generated in 2020. That’s a bunch of data.

Obviously, creation and availability of that much new data beg the question of reliability. Is it fact, opinion, or fabrication? The fact that it looks authentic does not necessarily mean that it is. Or perhaps it is authentic, but incomplete. I remember reading an incomplete copy of the Mayflower Compact online. There was no mention that it had been abridged, but the meaning and purpose had been significantly altered. In the days of physically published materials, you could generally judge the reliability of the data by the reputation of the publishing house. It is much more difficult to judge what you find on the internet. And yet, people form opinions and make decisions based on generally unsubstantiated data, rarely even considering the need to validate the information. This is disturbing.

When I was a second lieutenant in the Army back in the late ’80s, I received instruction on how to develop training for soldiers. One of the core premises I learned was the need to train in 20-minute blocks of time, because that was the average attention span of an adult. According to “An Empirical Study of Web Use,” by Weinreich, Obendorf, Herde, and Mayer, published in 2015, the average attention span is now 8.25 seconds. This makes me wonder how a person who struggles to focus for more than a few seconds at a time can effectively reason through complex problems or situations.

Similarly, a recent Pew online survey, which polled 2,462 middle and high school teachers, indicates that 87 percent believe that digital technologies are creating “an easily distracted generation with short attention spans.” Sixty-four percent of those surveyed believe digital technologies “do more to distract students than to help them academically.” What happened? What has caused this erosion of our ability to focus?

DOMO’s Data Never Sleeps 3.0 report tells us that every minute of every day, users like 4,166,667 posts on Facebook; users like 1,736,111 Instagram photos; Netflix subscribers stream 77,160 hours of video; Apple users download 51,000 apps; and Twitter users send 347,222 tweets. Why is this a problem? A University of Gothenburg report, “Intensive mobile phone use affects young people’s sleep,” tells us that intensive use of mobile phones, tablets, and computers is linked to stress, sleep disorders, and depression. Receiving information in “sound bites” and

constantly surfing just the headlines also change the way that we process information.

Abuse of digital technologies can lead to other, more serious things as well. Internet addiction is a real problem. A St. Bonaventure University study, “Internet Addiction: A New Clinical Phenomenon and Its Consequences,” compares internet addiction with an addiction to gambling in that both are impulse-control disorders. The study highlights

some signs of internet addiction which include: online affairs (I was surprised that this made it into a clinical paper, so it must be a bigger problem than I imagined.), changes in sleep patterns, personality changes, ignoring other responsibilities, evidence of lying, and a declining investment in relationship. Further, the paper states that college students are the most at-risk population to develop an addiction to the internet because of the following contributing factors:

- Free and unlimited internet access
- Huge blocks of unstructured time
- Newly experienced freedom from parental control
- No monitoring of what they do or say online.

This is not just a problem for college students. In a survey by Vault.com, an online analyst firm, 37 percent of employees admitted to surfing the Web constantly while at work. The implications for lost productivity are staggering. According to a survey done by Salary.com and AOL, employee non-work-related online surfing costs employers in the U.S. \$282 billion in lost productivity every year!

Several years ago, I had the privilege of hearing Amber Case, a cyber-anthropologist, speak. She is a very bright young lady from Portland who studies the impact of technology on society. I was impressed by her passion for leveraging technology to enhance our lives. Her vision for how we can use smart phone apps to connect and enable ourselves to be better was inspiring. She also recognized the negative impacts of hyper-connectivity on individuals and community. She talked about how social media connects us and isolates us at the same time and how civility in communication has been eroded because of the anonymity of electronic communications.

The sad reality is that the internet is not at fault. The questions I posed at the beginning of this article were, “Is the internet living up to its potential and are we using it appropriately?” The internet is like any other inanimate object. It is neither good nor bad; it is how we use it that matters. Coffee is good for you if used in moderation. If abused, it can have serious consequences to your well-being. The problems we are experiencing with the internet are our fault. We have become so enamored with our ability to connect, we have become obsessed as a society. Putting boundaries in place can help correct the problem.

Dell suggests these healthy internet habits:

- **Set rules for internet use.** A good set of rules should include things like the amount of time kids are allowed to be online, what types of content are appropriate and whom it’s okay to chat with, as well as proper online conduct and good internet citizenship.

- **Balance time online.** Model a healthy balance between your online and offline activities.

- **Distinguish between fact and opinion.** Teach your family how the internet works, and encourage critical thinking. Train them to use a variety of online resources and to always check, question and verify what they see online.

- **Keep personal facts private.** Ensure that you understand the risks involved in making private or personal information public online. Discuss and evaluate online relationships as you would any other relationship in your life.

Ms. Case predicted that we would either learn to put healthy limits on our use of the internet, or we would not survive as a society. Since it is my business to connect people to the internet, I am hopeful that we apply a healthy, responsible, and measured approach to its use and realize the incredible benefits that it promises.

Joseph Franell is the CEO of Eastern Oregon Telecom, an internet and phone company based in Hermiston. His column typically appears on the Business & Technology page.



JOSEPH FRANELL
Comment