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OUR VIEW

No stopping Canyon Creek catastrophe

On Sunday, *The Oregonian* distributed a special 20 page report, the culmination of a year-long investigation into the Canyon Creek Fire. That fire destroyed 43 homes and nearly 100 other structures on August 14, 2015 near the town of Canyon City in Grant County.

It was a journalistic endeavor that produced a fascinating product. Two reporters for the newspaper, Laura Gunderson and Ted Sickinger, spent nearly a year digging through documents, conducting interviews and questioning the U.S. Forest Service's initial response to the small, lightning-caused fires that two days later united into a conflagration that could not be stopped.

Perhaps the most confounding part of the story is the aftermath. Burned yet valuable timber from government lands received priority in local mills, leaving private landowners high and dry. Those tree farmers, who counted on the revenue from their lumber stands, can now only watch as millions of dollars rot on the ground because mills from John Day to Pilot Rock are dealing with a glut of logs caused by last year's disastrous fire season. Yet if the logs languished on government land, we imagine a similar uproar over waste of taxpayer dollars and resources.

The Oregonian report did nothing to change our opinion about the fire. Our own Tim Trainor was on the ground in Canyon City while lodgepole pines were still smoking, and wrote some of the first stories documenting the Forest Service's initial response to both the Berry Creek and Mason Spring blazes.

The Blue Mountain Eagle, our sister paper in John Day, has also documented the response and given voice to those who think it was lacking. That publication produced a lengthy look back just this week.

In our opinion, the devastating and tragic conflagration was caused by a region-wide lack of resources

precipitated by one of the worst fire seasons in the Northwest. It became a damaging, devastating fire because of a freaky and terrifying convergence of natural events, first the lightning strikes and secondly the hot weather and then the cherry on top: high winds blowing the exact direction of Canyon Creek. That made the canyon act like a flue, which stoked the inferno beyond any ability to fight it.

Yet we're happy *The Oregonian* invested time and resources into the investigation, even if they came to a different conclusion.

It's important for the people of Grant County, who feel like they are being attacked by the government and to some extent the media, to have an organization deeply investigate an issue important to them. No matter your takeaway from the project, Gunderson and Sickinger dug and dug, and unearthed information Grant County citizens wouldn't have seen any other way. That's valuable, as is the threat that future decisions by the USFS or another government agency may be vetted just as carefully.

There are lessons to be learned from the Canyon Creek Fire. The USFS has admitted it would have fought the Berry Creek and Mason Spring fires differently, knowing how it turned out. That's the benefit of hindsight. Sometimes you play the odds and lose, and both the Forest Service and the people of Grant County lost last August.

On a larger scale, state and federal agencies must rethink their strategy and philosophy for fighting fire, as well as its management of Oregon's valuable and vulnerable forests. It must get better. Lives and livelihoods are at stake.

This year's fire season has been much more manageable, and therefore has been better managed. But it won't be long until another dangerous fire is growing in intensity outside a rural Oregon town, and the stakes will be high once again.

The fire became devastating because of a lack of resources and a freaky convergence of natural events.

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 VIEWS

Tell the state its transport troubles

The Bend Bulletin

A public hearing on state transportation is this week. Money is limited. Choices must be made. What should the state priorities be?

You'll get a chance to tell state decision-makers what you think.

Some advocates want Oregonians out of their cars. In their view, the state's priority should be to discourage cars and promote alternatives, such as buses, trains, biking and walking. The state already has rules, policies and directives intended to reduce driving and make parking more challenging. Some want more. Is that what you want?

Others call for a focus on social equity. In other words, their aim is to ensure everyone has access to affordable transportation options.

We'd argue the state should focus first on ensuring what it has gets fixed.

State roads and bridges need repairs. It's a basic and fundamental investment in keeping Oregon competitive. So much of Oregon's economy relies on being able to export goods, and the state can't count on the federal government to fix the problems.

Rough pavement means Oregonians must spend more on repairs to vehicles and tires. As much as two-thirds of the state's bridges need work. Without improvements come weight restrictions and truck detours. That can create congestion and incentives for companies to move elsewhere.

Seismic retrofits can also be smart investments. We don't know if the numbers are right, but before the 2015 legislative session, the Oregon Department of Transportation said the state needed some \$5.1 billion to prevent major bridge collapses.

Keep the state's focus on fixing.

YOUR VIEWS

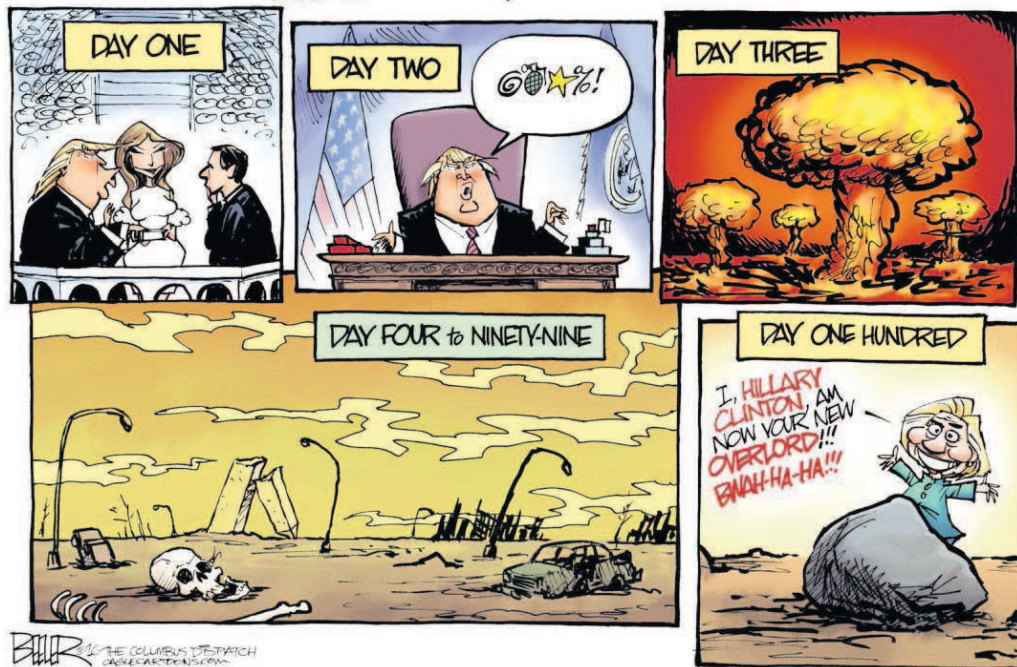
Bothum should win bid for EOTEC rodeo grounds

Since David Bothum was the low bidder, and could obtain any missing credentials, I think he should be awarded the bid for the Eastern Oregon Trade & Event Center rodeo grounds. Design changes could be made so that the bid

would come in at budget. Mr. Bothum has given thousands of hours of his time and skills to make the Farm-City Pro Rodeo a success. Awarding him this bid would be a fine way to say thank you from our community.

Mike Mehren
Hermiston

FIRST 100 DAYS of a TRUMP PRESIDENCY....



OTHER VIEWS

The pull of racial patronage

Think of a Donald Trump voter, the kind that various studies have identified as his archetypal backer: a white man without a college education living in a region experiencing economic distress.

What do you see? A new "forgotten man," ignored by elites in both parties, suffering through socioeconomic dislocations, and turning to Trump because he seems willing to put the working class first? Or a resentful white bigot, lashing back against the transformation of America by rallying around a candidate who promises to make America safe for racism once again?

You're allowed to answer "both, depending." But where to lay the emphasis has divided liberals and conservatives against one another.

Conservatives who are generally happy with the Republican Party's status quo, the mix of policies that Trump has ranged himself against, have stressed his voters' baser proclivities and passions, dismissing them as bigots who are really the authors of their own unhappy fates.

Conservatives who favor a populist shift in how the GOP approaches issues like taxes or transfer programs have stressed the ways in which Reaganite Republicanism has failed the working class, while urging a conservative politics of solidarity that borrows at least something from the wreck of Trumpism.

Likewise on the left: The more content you are with a liberalism in which social issues provide most of the Democratic Party's energy, the more likely you'll be to crack wise on Twitter — "a lot of economic anxiety here!" — every time Trump or one of his hangers-on or supporters makes a xenophobic foray.

Alternatively, the more you favor a left-wing politics that stresses economic forces above all else, the more you'll cast Trump's blue collar support as the bitter fruit of the Democratic Party's turn to neoliberalism, and argue that social democracy rather than shaming and shunning is the cure for right-wing populism.

My sympathies are with the second group in both debates — as a partisan of a more solidaristic conservatism, and as an outsider who prefers the old left's class politics to the pseudo-cosmopolitanism of elite liberalism today.

But it's also important for partisans of socioeconomic solidarity, whether right wing or left wing, to recognize that racial and economic grievances can't always be separated, and that a politics of ethnic competition is an unfortunately common state of political affairs.

Consider the trajectory of liberalism. In the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal deliberately excluded blacks from certain benefits and job programs. This was discrimination, but it was also patronage: It was a time when "affirmative action was

white," to borrow from historian Ira Katznelson, lifting white workers at the expense of African-Americans.

Then decades later, liberalism moved to create affirmative action programs to help those same African-Americans. This was redress and expiation, but it was also another form of patronage: a promise of a hand up, a race-based advantage that only liberalism would provide.

With time, that promise was extended to groups with weaker claims to redress than the descendants of American slaves, even as mass immigration expanded the potential pool of beneficiaries.

Eventually, we ended up with a liberalism that favors permanent preferences for minority groups, permanently large immigration flows — plus welfare programs that recent immigrants are more likely than native-born Americans to use.

This combination is (mostly) rooted in idealism. But it still amounts to a system of ethnic patronage,

which white Americans who are neither well-off nor poor enough to be on Medicaid see as particularly biased against them.

This constituency, the gainfully employed but insecure lower middle class, is the Trumpian core. By embracing white identity politics, they're being bigoted but also, in their own eyes, imitative: Trump's protectionist argle-bargle boils down to a desire to once again have policies that specifically benefit lower-middle-class whites — welfare for legacy industries and affirmative action for white men.

This crude attempt at imitation, unfortunately, is part of a very common iterative cycle in politics. It's a reason why, in multiethnic societies, multiracial parties are the exception rather than the rule.

And breaking that cycle won't be easy for either party. The activist energy on the left is pushing for a more ethnically focused politics, devoted to righting structural race-based wrongs. That energy will be blunted temporarily by the flight of well-educated whites from Trump, but the absence of economic common ground between Hillary Clinton-voting white moderates and the party's poorer, minority base means that her temporary coalition is likely to fracture first along racial lines.

That fracturing will help the GOP recover, but it won't help Republicans build a pan-racial conservatism. The pull of white identity politics can be overcome, but only with great effort. Not least because it requires not only that conservatism change, but that minority voters be persuaded that the change is meaningful.

And after Trump, what forgiveness?

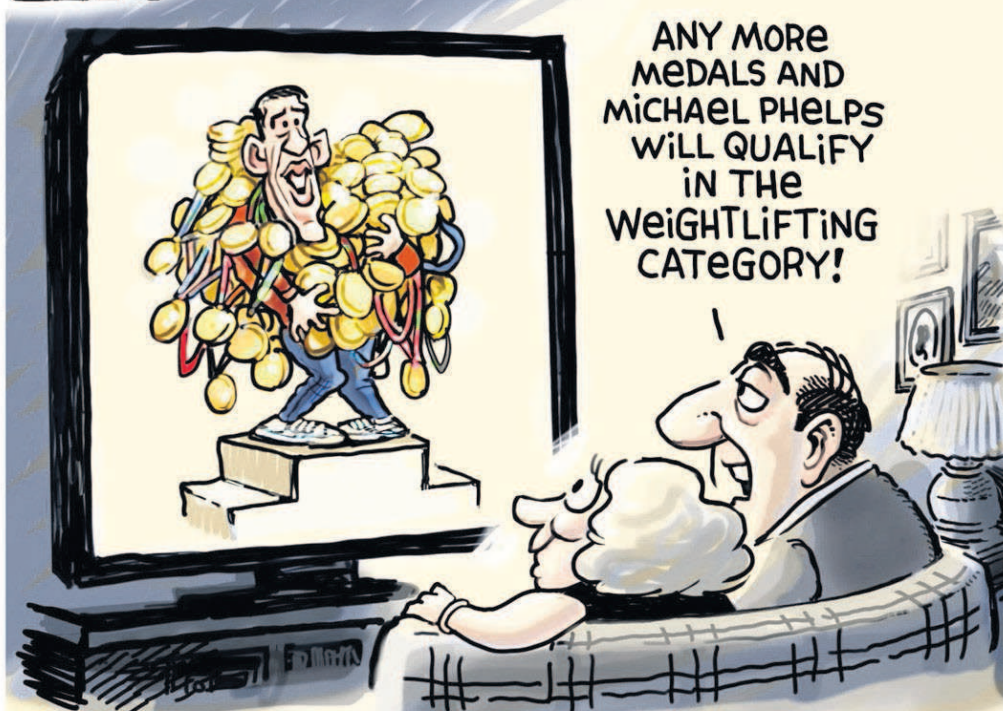
Ross Douthat joined *The New York Times* as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. Previously, he was a senior editor at the *Atlantic* and a blogger for *theatlantic.com*.



ROSS DOUTHAT
Comment

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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. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.