

Quick takes

Boardman mega-dairy would bring in 30,000 cows

Smelly economy. I wonder how that will attract people and tourism.

—Jovanna Centre

If they burn off the methane it won't be so bad. Gladstone did that with the old landfill as the city moved in around it, and they actually sold the hot water and steam power to a nearby wood mill. Both are gone now and Home Depot built a store right on top of it. No smell anymore.

—Dan Wolf

Fact is animal farming (meat, egg, or dairy) creates way more greenhouse gases and pollution than vehicles do.

—Destiny Lynn Chase

And most of it isn't really all that nutritious, and not very economical when compared to growing plant food.

—Kate Chastain

Minam grade to get straighter

It's about flippin' time! How many lives have been lost over the years on the Minam downgrade?

—Julie Smith Peterson

So much for Wallowa County history. That curve has been there longer than all of us have been alive. My husband says that they should install a solar powered flashing sign then maybe people would pay attention. It would be less expensive but we as taxpayers don't have any say.

—Flo Powers

I'm thankful. I lost my sister/best friend not long ago to this curve. Thank you so much. It's about time.

—Rebekah Weaver

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.

The resilience of rural America



BARACK OBAMA
Comment

I've spent most of my life living in big cities. But the truth is, a lot of what's shaped me came from my grandparents who grew up on the prairie in Kansas. They taught me the kind of values that don't always make headlines, let alone the daily back-and-forth in Washington. Honesty and responsibility. Hard work and toughness against adversity. Keeping your word, and giving back to your community. And treating folks with respect, even if you disagree with them.

They're the same values I saw as a senator in Illinois, driving long country roads to visit with folks in small towns. They're the same values I saw in Iowa, campaigning for this office in community centers and coffee shops and high school cafeterias. They're the same values that have inspired me every day as President, in visits to all 50 states and letters I read every night from every corner of this nation. And it's only reinforced my belief that the values that drive our small towns and rural communities are the same ones that drive America as a whole.

At the same time, what's also true is that when our country is tested, our rural communities are tested as well. An economy that's been changing for decades — more automation, more global competition — has, in many ways, hit rural communities particularly hard. Too many people are still fighting back from the recklessness on Wall Street that shuttered storefronts on Main Street. Too many workers are still reeling from plants that moved overseas and took good jobs with them. Too many communities are struggling to compete, hamstrung by lagging infrastructure like slow or nonexistent broadband connections. And too many families have been ravaged by the heartbreaking epidemic of opioid use.

For too long, leaders who could do something to help have passed the buck

or pointed fingers, rather than offer concrete solutions and new avenues of opportunity. But we've pursued a different approach — one that helps workers retrain and learn the skills they need for a job in the new economy. One that supports small businesses and entrepreneurs to help attract more of the new economy's jobs to rural communities. One that upgrades our schools — from working toward

universal preschool to two years of free community college — so that all our kids have the same chance to reach their potential without having to leave their hometown.

Over the last eight years, my administration has worked hand-in-hand with rural communities to build more opportunity — investing in rural schools, supporting rural small business owners, deploying high speed internet and wireless, and building partnerships between businesses and colleges to help train folks not just for a job, but for a career. And for those struggling with opioid use, we've expanded access to treatment to help them get the care they need.

So we're making progress — progress that's possible only because of the strength and resilience of the people in our rural communities.

In Pikeville, Kentucky, former coal miners are trading coal for code. They're retraining to learn HTML, JavaScript, and PHP, transforming an old bottling factory into a digital hub. It's a transition that not only supports good jobs, but also offers a glimpse of what the future could look like in other communities like Pikeville.

In Clinton County, Ohio, young people have organized to tackle the brain drain,

creating a fellowship program that matches local businesses with college students home for the summer. And those young people aren't just learning, they're leading — just last year, Wilmington, Ohio, elected a majority-Millennial city council.

In Piedmont, Alabama, school leaders have invested in high-speed connectivity and laptops for every student, so that teachers can tailor lessons to individual students and assess each student's progress in real time. Already, test scores and graduation rates are up, and tiny Piedmont City School District has emerged as a national model for digital learning.

That's what rural America can look like in the 21st century. Smart investments that lead to real, tangible progress. Today, rural unemployment has

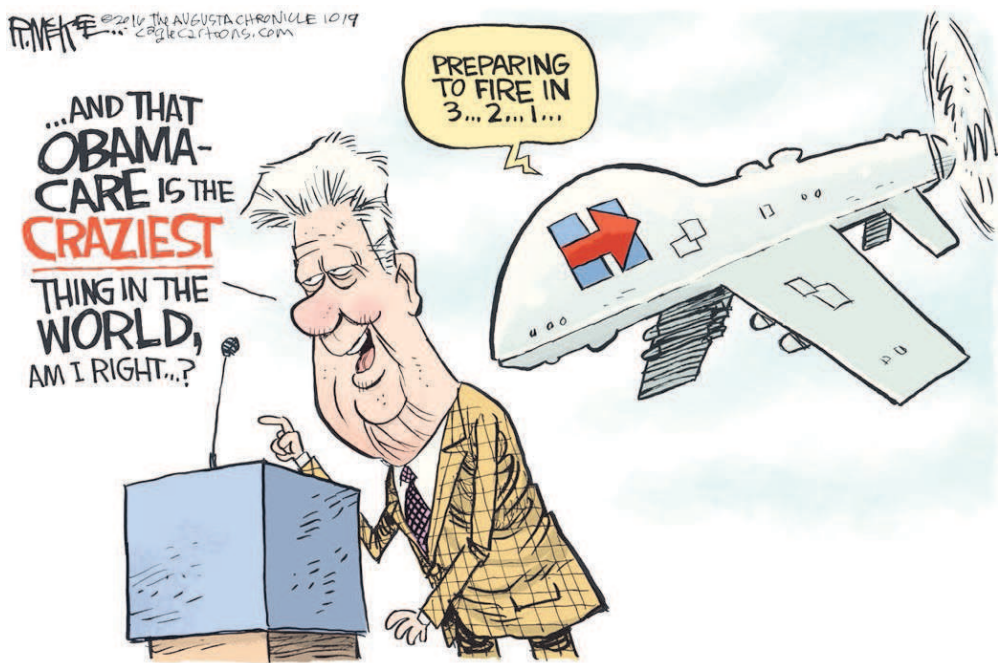
dropped from a high of about ten percent during the Great Recession to six percent. The rural child poverty rate is dropping, and rural median household incomes are rising again.

We certainly still have more work to do, but we're moving in the right direction. And that couldn't be more important. Because as a prominent rural Kansan — President Eisenhower — once said, "Whatever America hopes to bring to pass in the world must first come to pass in the heart of America."

In so many ways, from its resilience and ingenuity in the face of a challenge to the defining values that power it every day, rural America represents that beating heart. That's why these communities are so important — because when America's rural communities are strong, America is strong.

Barack Obama is the president of the United States. This op-ed was released Oct. 4.

The rural child poverty rate is dropping, and rural median household incomes are rising again.



Logging myths fuel legislation

By GEORGE WUERTHNER

The timber industry and its advocates continue to promote a number of myths designed to garner public support for increased logging. These myths are being repeated by many in Congress, including Oregon's Greg Walden, who are advocating new legislation that would weaken environmental protections, reduce public review of Forest Service timber sales (called variously vegetation management, forest health restoration, fuels reduction, hazard tree reduction, salvage timber sale) and significantly increase money-losing logging on public lands.

Myth: Restoration of our forests is needed to recreate historic conditions

Truth: There is growing debate about whether most forest ecosystems need any restoration. Nearly all higher elevation mixed conifer and subalpine forests grew in dense stands that tended to burn at medium to long intervals (often at intervals of hundreds of years) with large patches of mixed to high mortality so they are well within historic conditions.

Low elevation ponderosa pine forests were considered different from the moister, higher elevation forests and characterized as open and park-like, and burned by frequent low severity surface fires. However, new research concludes that many pine stands historically experienced occasional high severity stand replacement blazes and may not be significantly outside of their historic condition.

For instance, one recent review paper concluded: "Current attempts to 'restore' forests to open, low-severity fire conditions may not align with historical reference conditions in most ponderosa pine and mixed-conifer forests of western North America."

Myth: Logging reduces large wildfires

Truth: Large wildfires burn under extreme weather conditions. Under extreme weather, wildfires burn through, over and around clearcuts, thinned forests, and areas that have been prescribed burned. Such fires

are "controlled" when the weather changes to more moderate conditions.

Logging may even increase fire spread and fire severity.

The conclusion of the Sierra Nevada report to Congress had this to say: "Timber harvest, through its effects on forest structure, local microclimate, and fuels accumulation, has increased fire severity more than any other recent human activity. Logged areas generally showed a strong association with increased rate of spread and flame length, thereby suggesting that tree harvesting could affect the potential fire behavior within landscapes. In general, rate of spread and flame length were positively correlated with the proportion of area logged in the sample watersheds."

Another study done by fire ecologists at the Missoula Fire Lab concluded: "Even extensive fuel treatments may not reduce the amount of area burned over the long-term and furthermore, reduction of area burned may actually be an undesirable outcome."

They go on to conclude: "Treating fuels to reduce fire occurrence, fire size, or amount of burned area is ultimately both futile and counter-productive."

A new study soon to be published found that reviewed 1,500 wildfires between 1984 and 2014 found that actively managed forests had the highest level of fire severity.

While those forests in protected areas burned, on average, had the lowest level of fire severity. In other words, the best way to reduce severe fires is to protect the land as wilderness, not "manage" it.

Myth: Thinning national forest lands will protect homes.

Truth: One only needs to reduce the flammability within 100 feet of homes to protect them. Reducing fuels more than 100 feet beyond the home confers no additional protection.

As one study concluded: "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."

Myth: Beetle outbreaks increases the chances of wildfire.

Truth: Any number of research studies have documented that beetle outbreaks have little effect or even reduce the chance of large wildfire for a period of years. Dead trees do not burn as well as live trees with flammable resins. For example, one study concluded, "We found no detectable increase in the occurrence of high-severity fires following ... outbreaks. Dry conditions, rather than changes in fuels associated with outbreak, appear to be most limiting to the occurrence of severe fires in these forests."

Myth: Large wildfires have increased.

Truth: If you start with the middle of last century when the climate was cooler and moister — a climatic condition that reduces fire spread — one might conclude there are more large fires, but if your starting point is earlier in the century or even over the last thousand years, there is no evidence for an increase in large fires. We have a deficit of large fires, and as a consequence of the snag forest and dead wood habitat that such fires creates. For instance, a 2016 study concluded that "area burned at high severity has overall declined compared to pre-European settlement."

Myth: Dead trees are a sign of a forest health problem.

Truth: Dead trees are critical to healthy forest ecosystems. Some 250 scientists recently sent a letter to Congress affirming "snag forest habitat" are "ecological treasures comparable to old growth forests."

Unfortunately, as result of logging and other forest management, we have a deficit of dead trees in our forest ecosystems. Episodic input of dead woods results from wildfire, beetles, and disease. These natural processes help maintain forest ecosystem health.

George Wuerthner is an ecologist who has published 38 books.

Avoiding a punitive tax on wind

By RYAN CALL
Writers on the Range

In 1986, President Ronald Reagan observed that under his predecessor, Jimmy Carter, "Government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: 'If it moves, tax it. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it.'"

Reagan's quip about the government's interfering tendency under a Democratic president drew laughter from those attending a White House Conference on Small Business just over 30 years ago. But in Wyoming, a handful of Republican lawmakers have pushed a three-fold increase in the tax rate on wind-energy production, and that is no laughing matter.

Wyoming is the only state in the nation that imposes a \$1 per megawatt tax specifically on power generation from wind. For a state where the Republican-dominated Legislature routinely invokes Reagan's legacy, this latest proposal — recently considered and fortunately rejected by the Wyoming Legislature's Joint Revenue Interim Committee — contradicts his low-tax approach.

When entrepreneurs decide to invest billions of dollars and almost a decade's worth of planning to develop and deploy new technologies, build significant infrastructure, and create thousands of new and well-paying jobs, they do so hoping that a state's tax and regulatory policy will be predictable enough to allow them to earn sufficient returns on their significant capital investment. But as Bill Miller, CEO of the Power Company of Wyoming, told the *Los Angeles Times*: "Just about every legislator we've met with asks us, 'You tell us how much we can tax you before we put you out of business.'" In a state hurting from a decline in revenue from fossil fuels, is that how elected officials should help to spur economic growth?

The Bible records the observation that "the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going." In Wyoming, it appears that a few state lawmakers have decided that the sound of the wind signals only an opportunity for generating new tax revenue.

It makes sense for the state and federal government to impose severance taxes when oil, gas, precious metals and other minerals are permanently taken from the land. But taxing energy production from renewables such as wind and solar as if they, too, were not renewable, makes no sense. Nor does it make sense to single out a specific form of energy production that has the capacity to meet consumer demand and help reduce carbon emissions. It's almost as if wind power were a vice meriting the kind of "sin taxes" imposed on alcohol and cigarettes.

It's bad enough that Wyoming is the first and only state in the nation to impose a punitive tax on wind-energy production. This tax needs to be repealed, and at the very least, state lawmakers should resist any move to add more tax burdens to an industry that we all need to prosper.

Ryan Call is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, the opinion service of *High Country News* (hcn.org).