

Zinke asks for comparison to Teddy

By BEN LONG
Writers on the Range

The newly drafted secretary of the Interior Department, Ryan Zinke, takes pride in comparing his conservation principles to those of Theodore Roosevelt. After all, Roosevelt's handiwork looms dramatically over Zinke's hometown of Whitefish, Montana, even more than Mount Rushmore looms over the plains of South Dakota.

Look north from downtown Whitefish and you will see the ski runs of Big Mountain, an increasingly posh ski resort. Look to the east, and there's the Great Northern Mountain, one of the highest peaks of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex.

The ski hill and wilderness areas are both on the Flathead National Forest, which Theodore Roosevelt created with the stroke of a presidential pen in 1908. A bit farther upstream is Glacier National Park. This year, a record 2.8 million people visited Glacier Park, showering gateway towns with money along the way. Glacier was created in 1910, after a long fight led by Roosevelt's disciple, George B. Grinnell, and Roosevelt's outdoorsy clique, the Boone and Crockett Club.

Ryan Zinke, who has served fewer than two terms in Congress, remains a relatively unknown figure in the world of natural resource politics. Whenever he has entered a national debate on cable news, it has been to make hawkish remarks on national security issues, touting his credentials as a former Navy SEAL.

But the Department of Interior's responsibilities lie within America's boundaries, and especially in the West. Of the 640 million acres of federal public land in the United States,



LEFT: Interior Secretary-designate, Rep. Ryan Zinke, right, R-Mont., arrives in Trump Tower in New York. RIGHT: Theodore Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States.

500 million acres are under the purview of Interior. It's a heady portfolio that includes national parks, national wildlife refuges, Bureau of Land Management lands and some national monuments. Interior also includes the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Zinke's record on natural resources issues appears to be somewhat contradictory. When he issued a news release accepting the nomination to lead the Department of the Interior, he vowed to follow in the footsteps of Theodore Roosevelt. Indeed, since his first

run at the state Legislature in Montana, he has often invoked the memory of that conservation icon.

Yet many environmental groups greeted his nomination for Interior boss with dismay, citing his congressional approval rating of only 3 percent from the national League of Conservation Voters. There's also his tight connection to the coal and fossil fuel industries.

Sportsmen's groups were warmer, noting that Zinke hunts and fishes and has at times stood up against some Republican leaders. He is against the sale of public lands and supports the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Understanding a few key facts about Zinke may provide context as to how he will run the Interior Department:

Zinke is a coal-promoting politician from a coal-producing state.

He waxes nostalgic about the good old days of the Western timber industry and pushes for more logging on national forests.

At the same time, Zinke appears to understand how protected wild lands such as Glacier National Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness contribute both to the economic vitality and the quality of life in small communities.

You can count on Zinke to push for the delisting of species under the Endangered Species Act, particularly the grizzly bear. In Whitefish, grizzlies act like super-size raccoons and routinely raid garbage cans.

But here's the dilemma: Trump, and now by extension, Zinke, made a lot of promises to rural voters. They expect to see jobs coming back to loggers, sawmills and coal fields in rural America. Once regulations get purged, they were assured, America will be great again — at least according to their idea of greatness.

Trouble is, those jobs are gone for reasons that are a lot more complicated than overbearing regulations. It's magical thinking to imagine that Trump or his Interior secretary can or will bring them back. You don't get very far driving into the future when you're looking in the rear-view mirror.

Zinke is setting a high standard for himself. Theodore Roosevelt loved science and constantly embraced new ideas. He spoke out vigorously against industries that, in his words, were out to "skin" the American landscape.

Yes, he loved the vigorous outdoor life and he delighted in his battleships, but he was also a scholar with a vision for America. TR paid a devastating political price for his principles in his lifetime. He was abandoned by the Republican Party, though his face later was carved on a mountain, a few decades after his death.

If Secretary Zinke truly wants to follow in the conservation footsteps of Roosevelt, he has his work cut out for him.

Ben Long is a contributor to Writers on the Range, the opinion service of High Country News (hcn.org). He writes in Montana.

Quick takes

Road conditions deteriorate

I was behind the snowplow. I watched him roll right in front of me. He wasn't going that fast. We all lost traction.

— Dom Toomey

I was down the road a ways when he rolled over. About three semi trucks stopped and two other people stopped and we all went over to see if he was OK. He was laying down on the roof dizzy and trying to get out of the truck we all asked if he was ok and what the date and year was, but in the end he was ok and the ambulance got there.

— Michael Mosqueda

My boyfriend works for ODOT up in Meacham and a lot of crashes are due to other drivers being "inconvenienced" by being stuck behind a snow plow. No matter how fast or slow the plow is going, there's a reason not to try and fly around them thinking they're in your way. Please be more patient.

— Kolleen Chapa

Pendleton OKs pot business

I wonder what the cigarette shop pays for their renewal fees each year. And where does that money go?

— Becky Cary

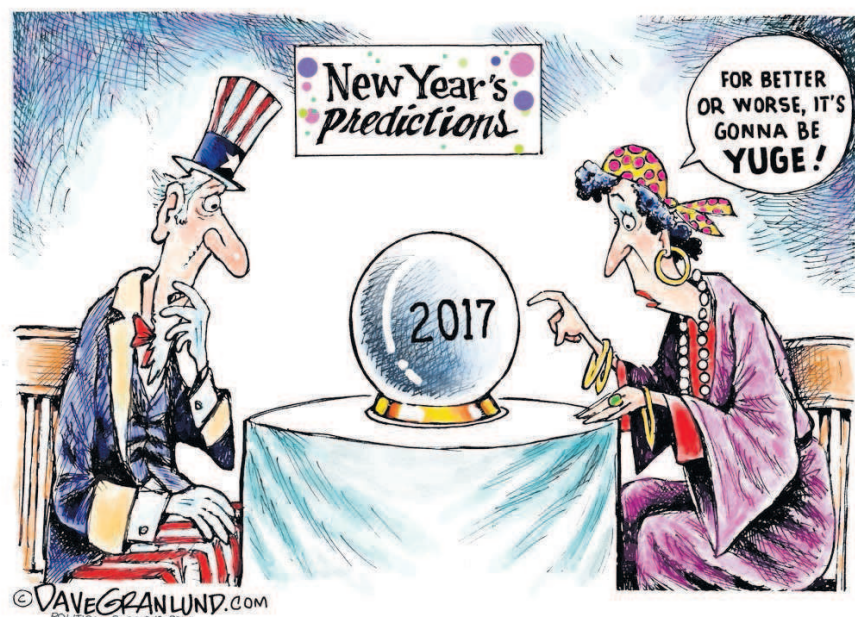
Hope they use the taxes for homeless and veterans.

— Guethie Winebarger

And Pendleton enters the 21st Century ... finally!

— Jim Stengle

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.



Problems in records law plain to see

The Bend Bulletin, Dec. 17

When the public requests public information, government agencies in Oregon can turn refusal into an art form. High fees and lengthy delays are among the tools of the trade.

Gov. Kate Brown has offered draft legislation to improve Oregon's public records law. But it has so much wrong with it, Oregonians would be better off without it — unless it gets a rewrite.

The draft creates a public records advocate and a public records advisory council. These reforms have been discussed by Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum's public records task force.

One thing the advocate would do under the draft is provide training to ensure government workers understand the public's right to access government information. If that training emphasizes not only the letter of the law but the law's spirit — that public access should prevail barring compelling reasons otherwise — it might be a good thing.

Oregon has 550 specific exemptions in its public records law. The federal Freedom of Information Act has only nine, though they are broader.

But there are other aspects of the draft that Rosenblum challenged during a meeting of her public records task force on Thursday.

Rosenblum questioned the power granted to the advocate to issue advisory opinions on public records disputes. She and other members of the task force wondered how the advisory opinions might complicate and conflict with opinions issued by district attorneys, judges or the attorney general's office on public records disputes. How would the advocate's advisory opinions be weighted?

If there's one thing Rosenblum's task force has discussed, it's the number of exemptions to Oregon's public records law. Oregon has more than 550 specific exemptions. The federal Freedom of Information Act has only nine, though they are broader. A draft report from Rosenblum's task force says: "The task force believes that Oregon's exemptions are out of control and need systematic review."

Do you know what Brown's draft legislation does? It adds another!

Under the draft, the advocate would be given the authority to mediate some public records disputes. All materials given to the advocate by the requester of the record and the government entity that holds the record would be exempted from public disclosure. So in a dispute over the public records, the public can't know the arguments for and against disclosure? Now, there's a new low for Oregon public records.

Brown vowed her administration would be transparent. This draft legislation is transparently bad.

Venezuelan president: Santa or grinch?

The Chicago Tribune, Dec. 19

Venezuela's nadir keeps finding a new low. The country's currency, the bolivar, has lost so much of its value that storekeepers have started weighing bolivar notes instead of counting them. Everyday living is all about lines — long, desperate lines for food, medical supplies, toilet paper and a host of other staples that have been scarce for months or years. Increasingly, Venezuelans are giving up and fleeing — by plane, on foot, or even on perilous boat rides that conjure up bygone images of Cubans escaping Castro.

Now, as Venezuela nears the holidays, President Nicolas Maduro thinks he has found the right salve for all this misery. Toys. Some 3.8 million of them.

Maduro's government has seized the toys from a distributor he claims hoarded them in a scheme to claim a shortage and foist higher prices on an unsuspecting public. A couple of company executives have been arrested. And now, Maduro, riding in on a white horse — wait, make that a sleigh pulled by reindeer — will oversee the distribution of 3.8 million toys to Venezuelan girls and boys. "Our boys

and girls are sacred," an official with the country's consumer protection agency said on Twitter. "We will not let them be robbed of Christmas.

Never mind that starving Venezuelan families would rather see bread, meat, flour, cooking oil and medicine come down their chimneys this Christmas. The confiscation smacks of grandstanding by a socialist regime that has wrecked the economy and is now looking for scapegoats — and an image makeover.

But if Maduro thinks the ploy will convince Venezuelans he's less Grinch and more Kris Kringle, he's probably going to be disappointed. What he's doing is seizing private property so that he can boost his standing with Venezuelans. Hard to imagine Venezuelans will fall for it, especially when they're seething about another head-scratching idea he recently inflicted on the public.

Maduro, a Hugo Chavez lackey who rose to power with Chavez's death in 2013, declared earlier this month that Venezuela's largest bank note, the 100-bolivar note, would cease as legal tender. The government said hyperinflation rendered worthless that

denomination, which equals roughly two cents on unofficial exchange rates widely used in the country. But money that would serve as a replacement — 500-, 1,000- and 20,000-bolivar notes — hasn't been made available to the public yet.

When Maduro gave Venezuelans 72 hours to turn in their 100-bolivar notes, they jammed into banks across the country to deposit the 100-bolivar bills into their accounts as credit. More than a third of them don't have bank accounts and are stuck trying to exchange the soon-to-be-expired money for 10-bolivar notes, which are still in circulation. In the midst of protests and looting sparked by the cash shortage, Maduro has extended the deadline for phasing out the 100-bolivar notes to Jan. 2. In the meantime, with Christmas around the corner, Venezuela is cash-starved. Hardly the holiday spirit, President Maduro.

Venezuela's best hope is a referendum that would oust Maduro from power. The opposition, which controls parliament, was on its way to gathering the necessary signatures to force a referendum, but the Maduro-controlled elections commission suspended the collection of signatures.