

EAST OREGONIAN

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OUR VIEW

Frightful forecast puts drivers on notice

Winter in Eastern Oregon.

It can be a beautiful time and place, as long as you have the option of staying indoors next to a burning fire.

Tuesday morning broke to 45 degrees and windy in Pendleton, a balmy start to what would be a mild day. Residents of the city and in Hermiston might be surprised to read about the treacherous conditions that were just a few miles to the south and east.

Things were markedly different atop Cabbage Hill, atop Tollgate and east of La Grande. Drivers who thought they would just cruise through the area were sorely disappointed as Interstate 84 was closed in both directions for much of the day. State highways in Union and Wallowa counties were shut down, too — and for good reason.

Opinion page editor Tim Trainor risked life and limb to make the drive from Pendleton to Enterprise to fill in at our Wallowa County newspaper.

Highway 82 was closed at Island City, but he drove over Tollgate and through snow-smacked Elgin, which looks more like the North Pole right now.

Low visibility, blowing snow and deep drifts covered the roadway, and there was nary a place to get off the road and out of harm's way. It was a downright blizzard, and that warm breeze that flashed through Pendleton was much more menacing at a couple thousand feet of elevation.

We love to live in Eastern Oregon because of its remoteness, because of a close relationship to nature and because of its wide expanses and empty space. But those all work against us when winter storms come to town and we find ourselves behind the wheel.

Drivers must do a mental check when trying to navigate the region.

Studies have shown — from climbers atop Mt. Everest to city-dwellers just trying to get to the store for a gallon of milk — that in dangerous situations humans often pile poor decisions atop poor decisions. We don't take advantage of our good fortune, and having come out of a hairy situation clean we tend to put ourselves into an even hairier one.

Mentally, the longer we have traveled the more we have suffered, the more likely we are to keep going through it. That can be a fatal flaw if backcountry skiing, say, or trying get yourself to Boise when the roads won't allow it.

Eastern Oregonians must sometimes be strong enough to turn around, and surrender a round to Mother Nature and live another day.



Photo contributed by ODOT
Snow drifts cover Highway 237 in Union County on Tuesday.

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

As Oregon grows, more representation imminent

The (Eugene) Register-Guard, Dec. 26

Oregon is solidly on track to gain a sixth congressional district as a result of the 2020 Census. In nearly all of the period since statehood, Oregon's population has grown more rapidly than the national average — and that trend has continued since 1980, the last time Oregon added a member to its delegation in the U.S. House of Representatives. It's not too early for state officials to begin thinking about how to divide Oregon into six geographically coherent districts of equal population.

A sixth district looks likely for Oregon partly because the state was close to gaining a new district after the last Census, in 2010. Oregon's population growth has been relatively robust since then. More than halfway through the decade, most of the population changes that will be used to adjust congressional representation among the states have already occurred. According to an analysis by RealClearPolitics, among the states that might qualify for an additional House seat, Oregon's position is relatively strong.

Figures from mid-2016 show that Oregon was home to 1.24 percent of the nation's population. With a five-member U.S. House delegation, Oregon has only 1.15 percent of the nation's representatives. The addition of a sixth member would give Oregon 1.38 percent of the 435-member House. The state would probably remain over-represented for a decade or two, and then would become under-represented until it gains a seventh House member in 30 or 40 years.

All House districts are redrawn every 10 years to ensure that each of a state's House members represents the same number of people. No district can be divided between two states, so House members from some states represent more people than members from others. Wyoming's lone House member, for

instance, represents 584,000 people, while each House member from Oregon represents more than 800,000.

In Oregon, redrawing political districts is a responsibility of the state Legislature. If legislators can't agree on a redistricting plan, the job is assigned to the secretary of state. After the Census of 2010, the Legislature successfully completed a redistricting plan for the first time in several 10-year cycles.

Most of Oregon's current congressional districts are geographically coherent. Rep. Peter DeFazio's 4th District, for instance, covers the timber-dependent southwest quarter of the state, while Rep. Greg Walden's 2nd District takes in all of Eastern Oregon and Rep. Earl Blumenauer's 3rd District is centered in Portland. The most awkwardly shaped district is Kurt Schrader's 5th, which extends from the Portland suburbs to the coast. The 2020 Census is likely to offer an opportunity to draw more compact districts in fast-growing Washington and Clackamas counties.

Nationally, current population growth patterns suggest that the long-term shift of political power from the north to the south, and from the east to the west, will continue. Along with Oregon, Arizona, Colorado and North Carolina are each considered likely to gain a House seat. Florida could gain two, and Texas three. Alabama, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and West Virginia can expect to lose one seat apiece.

The effect on the partisan balance in the House is likely to be minimal. In Oregon, however, a sixth district centered in conservative-leaning Clackamas County could present an opportunity for Republicans, who currently hold only one of the state's five House seats. Schrader's 5th is currently Oregon's closest to being a swing district, but after 2020 the state could have either two swing districts or a second one that leans Republican.



OTHER VIEWS

A letter to President-elect Trump about health care

Dear Mr. President-elect:

Your position on universal health insurance has been admirably clear. You support it. You did before you ran for president and continued to do so in the campaign.

In 2000, you wrote, "We must have universal health care." In a Fox News debate last year, you said, "We have to take care of the people that can't take care of themselves." On "60 Minutes," you said, "Everybody's got to be covered."

I am writing to you now because I am concerned that Republicans in Congress do not share your goal and are not giving you good advice on this issue. I'm worried that they are not acting in the best interests of your presidency or the country. I encourage you to be skeptical of them.

It is entirely possible for you to sign a conservative health care bill that lives up to your belief in universal coverage. It's a bill that you could celebrate as a replacement of Obamacare. But it would be quite different from the bills that congressional Republicans are pushing.

When they claim that their bills will not take health insurance away from millions of people, they're engaging in magical thinking. They are trying to fool the media, voters and you.

They are focusing on a strategy of "repeal and delay," in which major parts of Obamacare will remain for months or years. In the intervening time, they say, they will somehow keep people from losing insurance.

But they do not have a realistic plan, despite years of talk. Nor, to be blunt, does your choice for secretary of health and human services, who is one of those congressional Republicans. And a repeal is likely to undermine insurance markets long before its effective date.

Mr. President-elect, you are a businessman. You understand that savvy executives don't simply live in the present. They look to the future. They're fond of quoting Wayne Gretzky: "Skate to where the puck is going, not where it has been."

Insurance executives can see through the magical thinking of politicians. They know that a functioning insurance market must include both healthy and sick people. There are very few ways to guarantee this combination. Without Obamacare's subsidies to help people buy coverage and its mandate (weak as it is) to require they have coverage, markets will break down. The healthy will leave, the sick will stay and costs will soar.

After a repeal is signed, the uncertainty will



DAVID LEONHARDT
Comment

give insurers reason to exit quickly. As Nicholas Bagley, a leading expert at the University of Michigan, says, "If you're an insurer, you're likely to head for the hills."

The chaos runs a high risk of leaving millions of people without insurance early in your presidency. Many of them will be members of the white working class who voted for you. Everyone who loses insurance will be grist for criticism of you.

As you know, the Republican leaders in Congress have never been your biggest fans. I think it's fair to say that they care more about being able to brag that they got rid of Obamacare than about your political standing. The bills they are considering threaten your standing.

But you have alternatives.

The crucial first step is to avoid repealing the insurance expansion without simultaneously replacing it. The new Congress comes to Washington next week, and its members should know where you stand from the beginning. It won't work to promise millions of people health insurance on spec.

If you avoid this trap, you can then push both parties toward a different version of universal health coverage.

"There is a ton of policy space for compromise," as Bagley says. "There is room for a really interesting discussion and potentially a breakthrough that could rebrand Obamacare and replace some of the portions of it that most set Republican teeth on edge." You will like this, Mr. President-elect: Bagley also says you are "the kind of politician who could cut a really interesting deal."

That deal could give states more flexibility to meet the top-line coverage goals. It could rely more heavily on subsidies to bring healthy people into the market — and ultimately scrap the mandate. It could permit insurers to charge young people less (and older people more). It could create incentives for personal responsibility, allowing higher prices for people who have voluntarily gone without insurance.

I will be honest that I do not favor some of these ideas and worry that they would cause hardships. But I was not elected president, and you were. And all of these ideas are within the realm of serious debate about our health care system.

For your sake and the country's, I hope you insist that Congress deals in reality. Magical thinking isn't good for a presidency.

David Leonhardt is the managing editor at The New York Times Company and served as its Washington bureau chief since 2011.

YOUR VIEWS

A 'quieter federal land battle unfolds'

If you really look at what is unfolding, it's a battle for who speaks for local residents and how they use public resources.

Mark Webb, executive director for the Forest Service-supported Blue Mountains Forest Partners (collaborative) worked hard to disband the forest commission — a commission that friends of Mr. Webb's sat on for years, and never once questioned the legitimacy of the commission. Steve Beverlin, supervisor for the Malheur National Forest, told forestry leaders that if road closures were opposed, no harvest would come off the forest, meaning "partners" of the "collaborative" would not see their \$70 million "stewardship contract" come to pass.

So, what were Mr. Webb and Mr. Beverlin to do? Could they sit back and watch "their" collaborative not be the sole "voice" on the Malheur National Forest? No. Could they sit back and watch people they supported for the commission lose in the primary and see their "influence" dwindle to nothing, as the forest commission could be used in Grant County

directly "coordinating" on projects in the county? No.

They were left with only one course of action: Disband the commission, steal the voice from the people of Grant County, and remove the last effective tool the people had to affect change on bad projects. This doesn't even mention Mr. Webb's growing influence and wage as the executive director of the collaborative, that is in direct conflict with the commission.

Were Forest Service "collaboratives" formed to bring people together, or to control a message? Seems more to the latter any more. Do what the collaborative says, and you can proceed; go against the collaborative, and they send in their executive director to kill public participation.

Nice model you have, Mr. Webb and Mr. Beverlin. Maybe you should take in nationally — oh wait, it already is.

John D. George
Bates, Ore.

Editor's note: This letter is in response to an Associated Press article published Dec. 22 in the East Oregonian.

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.