

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Many rural Americans seek less attention from Washington, D.C.

In an interview earlier this month with *Capital Press* reporter Eric Mortenson, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said Democrats deserved the shellacking they took in rural areas in the past election because they ignored rural issues.

"We as a party have not spent enough time in rural areas," he said.

With all due respect to Vilsack, many farmers and ranchers think the Democrats, or more accurately the Obama administration, has spent all too much time on rural issues, to their detriment.

Vilsack's commitment to agriculture can be traced back to his days as governor of Iowa. He's a decent, honorable guy in a town with too many disingenuous politicians and inflated egos.

But as the only member of the Obama cabinet who has served throughout both terms, Vilsack has to be seen as a full-fledged member of the administrative state. As many farmers and ranchers see it, the administrative state is the problem.

The federal government holds more than half the land in the West. The economic and civic fabric of rural communities depends on trees cut from the forest, livestock grazed on the range and minerals gleaned from mining claims. All of this has become increasingly more difficult over the last eight years, and many in the rural West believe their livelihoods, their very way of life, are in the hands of bureaucrats controlled by interests outside their communities.

Here are some egregious

examples:

- The Department of Labor has tried to extort confessions from Oregon blueberry growers for alleged violations and deprive them of due process. It tried to devise labor rules that would have made it all but impossible for kids growing up on the farm to work on the farm.
- The Food and Drug Administration has devised food safety rules that do more to drive producers out of business than they do to make food safer.

• The administration has made it difficult to get legal foreign workers by creating more regulatory hoops in the H-2A guestworker visa programs.

• In reworking the "Waters of the U.S." rule, the EPA and the Corps of Engineers greatly expanded their jurisdiction over private lands.

• The Forest Service and BLM have policies and rules that discourage logging, building fuel loads and facilitating wildfires that further endanger rural communities and economies.

It's not a

comprehensive list.

We think the Democrats err in believing that they can win rural votes by offering more programs to cure the ills bureaucrats perceive infect rural America.

And here we come back to Vilsack, who correctly observed that rural Americans want the same things urban and suburban Americans want. They want a country they're proud of, they want to make a good living, give back and take part in their communities.

In many instances, the best way to help make that happen is to get out of the way.



Courtesy USDA

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

Rural Americans want a country they're proud of, they want to make a good living, give back and take part in their communities.

YOUR VIEWS

The city newsletter: a test or a joke?

Have you read the December newsletter from city hall? If you're into fiction, this may be for you. A quote from the news: "A warm thank you to our Public Works Road Department for a job well done, in being ahead of the weather and providing safe roads and walking conditions as we welcomed the first storm of the year." Really? Were they talking about Pendleton?

I'm curious about how you "get ahead" preparing the streets and sidewalks for a winter storm, and I evidently missed the committee that "welcomed" this first storm. I don't think the superintendent of schools was appointed to that particular committee.

No doubt about it, this is really just a test to see if anyone really reads the city newsletter, or it could very well be an attempt at standup comedy. Rumor has it that the Screen Actors Guild may be filing suit pending the outcome in their investigation as to whether city hall had obtained the proper licenses, although this could not be independently verified.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

Only way to curb energy production is to cut usage

I'm sitting down for those who did not stand up for their rights and allowed Big Oil to run through their property to make gasoline for people who are driving around standing up for people standing up.

So if you don't want the dams, turn out the lights.

Why is it OK for oil and coal to endanger someone else's health and backyard, but not mine? Funny thing, no one seemed to notice how David Close was discovering the source of these troubles. Some day maybe Mr. Close will be held in esteem as he deserves to be for standing tall, face to face with the man who claims to rule the world. Could David Close be the Martin Luther of the Indian world?

So, first or second best: Stay home, save your money, help your neighbor, be content. If we start here, stop buying oil, gas and electricity, and if there is no market, there will be no pipes and no coal cars.

Cecil Spreed
Adams

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

Netanyahu makes Trump his chump

For those of you confused over the latest fight between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu of Israel, let me make it simple: Barack Obama and John Kerry admire and want to preserve Israel as a Jewish and democratic state in the Land of Israel. I have covered this issue my entire adult life and have never met two U.S. leaders more committed to Israel as a Jewish democracy.

But they are convinced — rightly — that Netanyahu is a leader who is forever dog paddling in the middle of the Rubicon, never ready to cross it. He is unwilling to make any big, hard decision to advance or preserve a two-state solution if that decision in any way risks his leadership of Israel's right-wing coalition or forces him to confront the Jewish settlers, who relentlessly push Israel deeper and deeper into the West Bank.

That is what precipitated this fight over Obama's decision not to block a U.N. resolution last week criticizing Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The settlers' goal is very clear, as Kerry put it Wednesday: to strategically place settlements "in locations that make two states impossible," so that Israel will eventually annex all of the West Bank. Netanyahu knows this will bring huge problems, but his heart is with the settlers, and his passion is with holding power — at any cost. So in any crunch, he sides with the settlers, and they keep pushing.

Obama ordered the U.S. to abstain on the U.N. resolution condemning the settlements (three months after Obama forged a 10-year, \$38 billion military aid package for Israel — the largest for any U.S. ally ever) in hopes of sparking a debate inside Israel and to prevent it from closing off any chance of a two-state solution.

Friends don't let friends drive drunk, and right now Obama and Kerry rightly believe that Israel is driving drunk toward annexing the West Bank and becoming either a binational Arab-Jewish state or some Middle Eastern version of 1960s South Africa, where Israel has to systematically deprive large elements of its population of democratic rights to preserve the state's Jewish character.

Israel is clearly on a path toward absorbing the West Bank's 2.8 million Palestinians. There are already 1.7 million Arabs living in Israel, so putting these two Arab populations together would constitute a significant minority with a higher birthrate than that of Israeli Jews — who number 6.3 million — posing a demographic and democratic challenge.

I greatly sympathize with Israel's security problems. If I were Israel, I would not relinquish control of the West Bank borders — for now. The Arab world is far too unstable, and Hamas, which controls another 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza, would likely take over the West Bank.

My criticism of Netanyahu is not that he won't simply quit all the West Bank; it is that



THOMAS FRIEDMAN
Comment

he refuses to show any imagination or desire to build workable alternatives that would create greater separation and win Israel global support, such as radical political and economic autonomy for Palestinians in the majority of the West Bank, free of settlements, while Israel still controls the borders and the settlements close to it.

Bibi never lays down a credible peace plan that truly puts the ball in the Palestinians' court. And when someone like Obama exposes that — and Bibi comes under intense criticism from the liberal half of Israel, which sees the country getting more and more isolated and less and less democratic — Bibi just calls Obama an enemy of Israel and caves to the settlers. U.S. Jewish "leaders" then parrot whatever Bibi says. Sad.

One day Trump will wake up and discover that he was manipulated into becoming the co-father of an Israel that is either no longer Jewish or no longer democratic.

More worrisome is the fact that President-elect Donald Trump — who could be a fresh change agent — is letting himself get totally manipulated by right-wing extremists, and I mean extreme. His ambassador-designate to Israel, David Friedman, has compared Jews who favor

a two-state solution to Jews who collaborated with the Nazis. I've never heard such a vile slur from one Jew to another.

Trump also has no idea how much he is being manipulated into helping Iran and ISIS. What is Iran's top goal when it comes to Israel? That Israel never leaves the West Bank and that it implants Jewish settlers everywhere there.

That would keep Israel in permanent conflict with Palestinians and the Muslim world, as well as many Western democracies and their college campuses. It would draw all attention away from Iran's own human rights abuses and enable Iran and ISIS to present themselves as the leading Muslim protectors of Jerusalem — and to present America's Sunni Arab allies as lackeys of an extremist Israel. This would create all kinds of problems for these Arab regimes. A West Bank on fire would become a recruitment tool for ISIS and Iran.

One day Trump will wake up and discover that he was manipulated into becoming the co-father, with Netanyahu, of an Israel that is either no longer Jewish or no longer democratic. He will discover that he was Bibi's chump.

What a true friend of Israel and foe of Iran would do today is just what Obama and Kerry tried — assure Israel long-term military superiority to the tune of \$38 billion, but, unlike Trump, who is just passing Israel another bottle of wine, tell our dear ally that it's driving drunk, needs to stop the settlements and apply that amazing Israeli imagination to preserving Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

Thomas Friedman, a *New York Times* columnist, was awarded two Pulitzer Prizes for international reporting in Beirut and Israel and one for commentary.

