

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

KATHRYN B. BROWN Publisher, DANIEL WATTENBURGER Managing Editor, TIM TRAINOR Opinion Page Editor, MARISSA WILLIAMS Regional Advertising Director, MARCY ROSENBERG Circulation Manager, JANNA HEIMGARTNER Business Office Manager, MIKE JENSEN Production Manager

OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to new public officeholders in our area — many of whom were sworn in this week during the first meeting of the new year, and others who will do so in the coming days.



We appreciate them running for their positions and taking the job seriously. Elected public service on the local level is low pay and high stress, and the cons often seem to outweigh the pros.

But these are important positions and public service is an admirable endeavor, when it is done for public benefit. We wish our new officeholders — be they mayors or city councilors or on any myriad of city committees from Ione to Meacham — a lot of luck and harmony, progress in their municipalities and appreciation for their services.

A kick in the pants to people who choose to drive drunk on routes as difficult to navigate as many Eastern Oregon roads have been this winter.

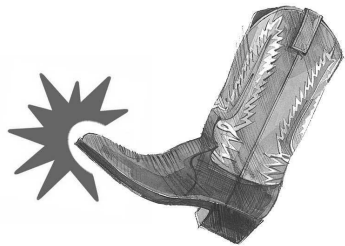
Drunk driving is dumb in any season, but it's especially gauche in this most beastly of winters. Roads in the area have been snow-packed for weeks, and a steady barrage of winter storms have made travel difficult for even the most steely-eyed drivers.

Those who impair themselves with drink or drug are endangering themselves and others, and adding additional danger to an already dangerous situation.

But that didn't stop six drivers who were stopped and arrested by the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office in the last month, or the 80 others who were given citations or warnings for traffic-related violations.

That's a reminder that in a time when driving is extra difficult, we should all be doing the little things — buckling our seat belts, make sure our vehicles are in good working order, with lights and flashers and bells and whistles.

Heck, while you're checking all that, throw a blanket along with some water and food into your trunk. This winter has been a useful reminder as to how bad it can be, and no one should travel unprepared.



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

So far, so good on snowpack

The (Corvallis) Gazette-Times

The snow just keeps coming to the Cascade Mountains, and while that can cause headaches for travelers, it's good news for skiers and other folks who enjoy winter recreation.

It might also be good news for farmers, who rely on a supply of water from the melting snow to keep their fields irrigated, and for those of us who worry about the prospect of summertime fires in our forests. But we won't know for sure about that until later next year.

In the meantime, though, let's just enjoy the early signs pointing to the possibility of a good snowpack year.

Here's one of those early signs: Last week, on the first day of winter, snowpack in the Willamette River basin, on average, was 148 percent above its normal levels. Every measuring spot was above 100 percent; some, in fact, were at 200 percent or more.

Those are the kinds of numbers that impress even hardened weather and water observers.

"I can't remember the last time there was this strong of a snowpack," said Michael Mattick, the water master for Linn and Lane counties for the Oregon Water Resources Department.

But these weather veterans also know that the December numbers, impressive as they are, represent just the first few chapters of a story that will be playing out for the next few months.

And the key factor isn't necessarily how much snow is in the mountains now — although ski areas like Hoodoo are ecstatic about current conditions — but how much remains for the critical runoff when the winter months give way to spring.

During each of the last two winters, snowpack faded much earlier than

hoped in the face of warmer-than-usual February temperatures. That could happen again in 2017. And a snowpack that is gone by the time May rolls around isn't much use at keeping stream flows steady and holding wildfires at bay.

In the meantime, you certainly can understand why ski areas like Hoodoo are embracing this year's wave of snow. It's the deepest snowpack for this time of year in at least a decade, Hoodoo workers said last week.

And its Dec. 3 opening this year marks its earliest opening date in a decade.

Last year, Hoodoo stayed open from mid-December until mid-April. (May was far warmer than normal and resulted in a rapid melt, according to weather experts; in fact, weather experts report that 2016 will end up being warmer than usual, despite the recent cold snap.)

But the two years before that were awful for the ski area: in 2014-15, Hoodoo was open only nine days. The season before that, lifts ran for just 39 days. Hoodoo workers are optimistic about this year, but, of course, you need to have more than a measure of optimism in the first place to work at a ski area.

Of course, a busy season at a ski area also translates into increased spending from visitors, and that's good news for nearby businesses as well.

"It's going to be one of those big seasons that we talk about for a long time," Hoodoo's office manager, Daidre Streeter, said last week.

The difference between a merely good season and a "big" season is whether a ski area can run its lifts well into the spring.

And the measure of a good snowpack is whether it can keep water flowing into the mid-valley well into the warmer months. The early signs are very promising, but there's lots more weather to come between now and spring.

The key factor isn't necessarily about how much snow is in the mountains now, but how much remains for the critical runoff.

OTHER VIEWS



"BRING OUT YOUR DEAD!"

The GOP health care hoax

This week, President-elect Donald Trump and congressional Republicans began to dismantle Obamacare, and here are the details of their replacement plan:



NICHOLAS KRISTOF Comment

That captures the nonexistent Republican plan to replace Obamacare. They're telling Americans who feel trapped by health care problems: "Jump! Maybe we'll catch you."

This GOP fraud is called "repeal and delay." That means repealing the Affordable Care Act, effective in a few years without specifying what will replace it.

If the Republicans ran a home renovation business, they would start tearing down your roof this month and promise to return in 2019 with some options for a new one — if you survived.

And survival will be a real issue. The bottom line of the GOP approach is that millions of Americans will lose insurance, and thousands more will die unnecessarily each year because of lack of care.

The paradox of Obamacare is that it is both unpopular and saves lives. Preliminary research suggests that it has already begun saving lives, but it's too early to have robust data on the improvements to life expectancy among the additional 20 million people who have gained insurance. It is notable that an Urban Institute study found that on the eve of Obamacare's start, lack of health insurance was killing one American every 24 minutes.

One careful study found that the Republican health care plan in Massachusetts, which was the model for Obamacare, noticeably lowered mortality rates. For every additional 830 adults covered by insurance, one death was prevented each year.

The American College of Physicians warned this week that the GOP course could result in 7 million Americans losing their health insurance this year alone, by causing parts of the insurance market to implode. Back-of-envelope calculations suggest that the upshot would be an additional 8,400 Americans dying annually.

How can insurance make such a difference?

I've written about my college roommate Scott Androes, a fellow farm boy from Oregon, who switched careers in 2003 and didn't buy health insurance on the individual market because it was so expensive. Then in 2011 he had trouble urinating and didn't see a doctor because of the cost.

By 2012 he had blood in his urine and finally was scared enough that he sought

medical help. He had waited too long: He had stage IV prostate cancer.

"I blew it," Scott told me. "I feel like a damned fool." He showed immense courage in agreeing to tell his story — despite concern that his legacy would be an article highlighting his foolishness — because he wanted people to understand the human cost of a lack of universal insurance. He died soon afterward.

That's the system that the Republicans are trying to take us back

to. Americans spend two or three times as much on health care as a share of GDP as other industrialized countries but get worse outcomes. American children are 75 percent more likely to die in the first five years of life than British or German children, according to World Bank data, and American women are twice as likely to die in pregnancy as Canadian women. The reasons have to do partly with American poverty, and partly with the high number of uninsured.

The paradox of Obamacare is that it is both unpopular and saves lives. Before its was enacted, lack of health insurance was killing one American every 24 minutes.

Trump would have you believe that he will keep the popular parts of Obamacare, such as the ban on discriminating against pre-existing conditions, while eliminating unpopular parts like the mandate.

That's impossible: The good and bad depend on each other.

The Trump approach would be like trying to amputate a dog's rear end so you wouldn't have to clean up its messes. It just doesn't work that way.

A full repeal of Obamacare would also worsen the deficit. The Congressional Budget Office said in 2015 that "repealing the ACA would increase federal budget deficits by \$137 billion over the 2016-2025 period." That's more than \$1,000 per American household.

Yes, health policy makes eyes glaze over. But focus on these two points: By broad agreement, the number of people insured will drop if Republicans "repeal and delay," and more uninsured Americans means more Americans dying.

That's why the American College of Physicians, the American Medical Association and even conservative health care analysts have warned Congress not to repeal Obamacare without stipulating what comes next.

Republicans spent \$7 million investigating the deaths of four Americans in Benghazi and ultimately found no evidence of high-level wrongdoing. Now they are rushing toward a scam that may cost thousands of American lives every year.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. A columnist for The New York Times since 2001, he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990 and 2006.



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.