

Meadowlarks and mechanics

According to the calendar and the thermometer, it appears as though spring has sprung. I must confess that even though I need to maintain a somewhat calloused demeanor to salvage a modicum of respect from the neighbors, I truly love certain aspects of the time near the Vernal Equinox. My favorite flower is the daffodil — some of whom occasionally arrive on the scene too early and are rudely greeted by a March snowfall — and my favorite bird is the Western meadowlark.

Though maligned recently by a certain state legislator who wants to supplant him with the osprey, I believe we should leave the meadowlark in his position of superiority as our state bird. His merits include one of the prettiest songs of any winged creature and a propensity for nesting in grasslands that are far enough away from my tractor seat that he doesn't leave the disgusting mess of his startling brethren.

Speaking of the tractor seat, the arrival of spring also means that I need to shift gears in my employment endeavors and go to work (principally for my son) as a Catskinner. For readers unfamiliar with the term, a "Catskinner" is an operator of a crawler-type tractor. Since Caterpillar more-or-less invented the tracklayer, the name Cat has largely been applied to describe most

crawlers (especially those with steel tracks) whether they are Cletrac, John Deere, Allis-Chalmers, International or Caterpillar. The "skinner" portion of the term is a left-over from the days when horsepower in farming was a more literal term. In our area, many farms used mules to pull their plows, harrows, seed drills, wagons, combined harvester-threshers or other equipment; hence, the driver was sometimes referred to as a "mule-skinner" (think of the old Jimmie Rodgers song).

This year, we are engaged in a farming project to convert Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands back into grain production. This land has not been farmed for more than a decade and has presented some challenges for us — not the least of which is increased wear and tear on our mostly antique equipment fleet.

Thankfully, Willie (my son) is very mechanically inclined and recently purchased an old farmstead that came with many useful items, among which are a functional privy, a great old barn, and a shop full of tools that included a portable welder. The welder had not run for a while, but after a carburetor overhaul and a tuneup we were ready to strike an arc and run a bead. Neither of us is an expert in the craft, but we can weld well enough to keep things together most of the time.

I have great respect for welders, machinists, and mechanics and attempt to imitate them often — though seldom with the degree of success they possess. Since early colonial times in this country, there has always been a need for a village blacksmith, or similar individuals, to keep the wheels of industry (including farming) moving forward and fix whatever might be broken.

Our little town of Helix was fortunate to have a welding shop for many decades that had multiple proprietors, the last of whom retired and sold out a few years ago. He was a tremendous asset to our community, and many others in the surrounding area, and I am proud to say he is still a good friend of mine. I was fortunate to grow up in a household where oil changes were the tip of the iceberg for maintenance. On site repairs included carburetor rebuilds, engine overhauls, and plenty of welding and fabrication.

I was also extremely lucky to attend a school where the Industrial Arts program was the nonpareil. The instructor taught not only woodworking, welding, and auto repair but also life lessons concerning morality, decency, and work ethic.

I think it is a colossal mistake to de-emphasize the "useful arts" in public school (Matthew B. Crawford's book "Shop Class as Soul Craft" is, in my opinion, a must-read on the subject). If I had any say in the matter, I would recommend projects for kids that have more to do with tools than video games or texting. Not every student can or, more importantly, should attend college and pursue a career that is traditionally white-



MATT WOOD
FROM THE TRACTOR

collar. Even our third president, Thomas Jefferson, once experimented in designing an improved moldboard plow. I highly doubt that would be in the realm of expertise for Donald or Hillary!

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Matt Wood is his son's hired man and his daughter's biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.

Quick takes

EAS subsidy for airport

No, I'm sorry, I cannot support public dollars for this air service. I would benefit, both personally and professionally, but this is not an area for federal tax dollars.

Bryant Jackson

Yes please keep the flight service. Our family has flown into and out of Pendleton many times.

Marcy McLemore

Eclipse beckons tourists

I'm getting about 100 "No Trespassing" and informative signs ready so we alert people that they are near private property with cows roaming and that it is the middle of what many call FIRE SEASON in Eastern Oregon.

Elizabeth Pilling

Imagine back in the days before science. The sky goes dark.

Richard Ryan III

Mega-dairy permit approved

While big dairy provides jobs and tax revenues to the economy, it also comes with the risk of groundwater contamination and poor air quality.

Tammera Karr

I wish they could have left a tree buffer along the highway. The peace and smell of the trees vs the sights and smells of 30,000 cows.....

Tanya Collier

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.

Fighting for the 'American Dream' budget Oregonians deserve

Growing up, my family was like a lot of Oregon families: My dad was a millwright and my mom stayed at home. At that time, a single working income could buy a three-bedroom ranch house, an annual camping trip, and a dinner out a couple times a year.

We had enough to have faith in the American Dream.

Life's a lot tougher today for working families, and rural and small town communities are feeling it most.

Life's going to get even tougher if the Trump administration's recent budget proposals get through.

At a time we need creative ideas to build economic opportunity in rural America, the new budget proposes an unprecedented 26 percent cut to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which includes the Rural Development Agency and the U.S. Forest Service, in addition to essential agricultural programs.

This is an assault on rural communities' most basic needs. From slashing investment in small business growth and job creation, to threatening access to clean drinking water, to reducing funding to prevent and fight wildfires, the cut hurts farmers, ranchers, children, and timber communities.

The Trump budget guts Payments In Lieu of Taxes — funding for counties that have large tracts of federal lands that don't

generate property taxes — by \$100 million this year alone, stripping from Oregon counties critical funding for public safety, social services, transportation and housing.

It decimates the community development block grants, cutting the \$3 billion program that has been critical to revitalizing rural Oregon's infrastructure and community services, housing, and economic development.

The budget would eliminate the entire \$175 million Essential Air Service program that is vital to keep small, remote airports operating. It would dramatically defund programs to get doctors and other health care providers to rural communities. It would end grants for rural transportation projects; cut off rural entrepreneurs from loans; and push huge costs onto rural water system ratepayers.

The Trump budget even seeks a devastating \$1.3 billion cut to the budget of the U.S. Coast Guard, which just last weekend rescued three Oregonians.

Millionaires and billionaires in big cities are doing great; they don't need the government to invest in their success. Rural communities are facing unprecedented challenges, and we need to crank up investment in essential programs and infrastructure — that is, the opposite of Trump's budget proposals.

This month I partnered with bipartisan

colleagues in Congress to introduce the Timber Innovation Act, which would support Oregon's innovative uses of wood for construction and manufacturing. I've helped preserve and reopen small airports and save small-town post offices, both of which are essential in today's interconnected economy. I've pushed to bring bipartisan sense to our wildland firefighting. I've used my position as the ranking member of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee to fight for research that helps our farmers fight off pests and improve their yields.

There is so much to do to move our smaller communities forward. But instead, this administration's budget is an enormous step backward.

The American Dream is one of equal opportunity for the child of a middle-class millwright and the child of a wealthy CEO. But this administration's budget takes us even further from this most fundamental ideal, eviscerating the programs that create that opportunity and level the playing field in our rural communities, where they are needed most.

We need to move closer to the American Dream. I will work with the true champions for rural America in both parties to fight for the programs that give Oregonians the opportunity to share in the economy they help create, and ensure future generations have the chance to thrive.

■
Sen. Jeff Merkley, a Democrat, was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2008. He previously served in the Oregon House of Representatives since 1999 including as the Speaker of the House in his last term.



JEFF MERKLEY
Comment

This administration's budget is an enormous step backward.

Agriculture is changing, its values are not

By **KENT MADISON**

As federal policymakers begin debating the next round of farm-focused legislation, it is important to recognize the values that serve as a foundation of U.S. agricultural strength. These values not only support the sustainability of Oregon's family farms but also the communities that we live in.

Everyone knows the daily trials of being a farmer, but few recognize the long-term gambles that farms make when picking a commodity to bring to market. Even after solid, long-term planning, natural and man-made factors can dramatically impact the bounty of a harvest and whether commodity prices will keep pace with costs. In the end, the ability for all farmers to be flexible, to maximize yields, and repurpose waste is critical to our success as a farming community.

One of the great green energy revolutions of the 21st century has been the partnership between the agriculture and the energy sectors in the creation of biofuels, especially as corn ethanol has matured and become increasingly eco-friendly thanks to strong support from the U.S.

Department of Agriculture. It's a partnership that works for the farmer and the consumer and one that needs to be protected moving forward. Support for biofuels provides a vital market for rural communities and, as a co-product of ethanol production, generates high-quality animal feed for other agricultural industries.

Best of all, these fuels displace imports from hostile foreign governments and promote local investment in our own renewable resources here at home, key goals of the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). Biofuel alternatives burn cleaner and, thanks to greater efficiencies in U.S. agriculture, farmers can grow more biofuel on less land than ever before.

Alternative commodities, sustainability, new markets — these are the values that should drive federal policy. As family farmers in a major agricultural state, we hope that leaders in Washington, like Congressman Greg Walden are listening. Long-term stability in the RFS and other federal farm policies are good for all Americans and the farmers that feed them.

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Kent Madison is the retired third generation owner of Madison Ranches Inc. in

All bodies better off with less lead

By **BETTE KORBER**
Writers on the Range

When Interior secretary Ryan Zinke rode Tonto, a handsome bay roan horse, through the busy streets of Washington, D.C., into work his first day on the job, he was making a statement: Secretary Zinke is a Westerner, a Montanan, a sportsman.

But beautiful Tonto was an unwitting accomplice to a nefarious deed: Zinke's very first act on the job was to break trust with the wild lands of the West that he has sworn to protect, by repealing an order that blocked the use of lead ammunition in national parks, federal wildlife refuges and other public land involving the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The order he revoked had been put in place during the last days of the Obama administration and was a step in the right direction towards protecting hunters and their families from unintended exposure to toxic lead in their meat.

The problem with lead bullets is that they fragment, leaving microscopic traces in animals that have been shot. Lead is extremely toxic, and residual lead from bullets is a serious issue for endangered condors, other birds and animals — and very likely for people. Venison donated to food banks by hunters frequently contains lead, and people who eat wild game have more lead in their blood.

While we know with certainty that lead is toxic and that microscopic residual lead from shattered bullets can be found in hunted meat, studies are just beginning to explore at what point the levels of residual lead in

game pose a human health risk. Still, even very low levels of lead can harm children and developing fetuses, and no level is considered safe, so a better-safe-than-sorry attitude seems like good horse sense. Hunters are proud of their chosen sport and consider the meat they obtain to be much healthier than the store-bought kind. Maybe so, but these folks need to rethink the use of lead bullets if they plan to feed their kids elk-burgers.

In the wild, birds are particularly sensitive to lead toxicity, and when they feed on gut piles left behind by hunters who use lead bullets, it can kill them. Lead poisoning is the leading cause of death for California condors, which were very near extinction, with only 22 left in the world in 1987. All were captured for a breeding program, and their descendants have been re-released into the wild in the Grand Canyon, Utah and Big Sur. Their numbers are growing, but the survival of the species remains precarious.

As the big scavengers widen their range, what takes place on the land becomes important throughout the West, not just near release sites. A condor named N8, known as Nate, flew into Los Alamos, New Mexico, last year, near my home — the whole town hoped he was house-shopping. These birds are a wonder, with up to a 10-foot wingspan. Condors can reach speeds of 55 mph in flight, and soar 15,000 feet above the Earth. They can live for up to 60 years, and they mate for life. These highly intelligent birds are an integral part of Mother Nature's cleanup crew. They deserve to survive, but with

the continued use of lead bullets for hunting, they may not make it.

Residual lead is also a frequent cause of death for bald eagles. My hunting friends all share a love for the wild and are thrilled whenever they look up to see an eagle soaring overhead. Not one of them would want to inadvertently kill one of these majestic birds.

Copper bullets, a good alternative to lead, do not fragment like lead. It is true that they are more expensive, but friends who hunt, and who have switched to copper, tell me the change was no problem, the cost difference really minor, and the switch didn't impact ballistics.

One New Mexican hunter raised an interesting concern: Animals that have been shot but survived can carry an old bullet in their bodies. Hunters typically cut out their own bullet around the fresh wound, but could undiscovered bullets increase the risk of lead contamination?

In California, using lead bullets for hunting is illegal, but as Secretary Zinke demonstrated, there will be few if any regulations coming from the current administration to protect hunters and their families, let alone wildlife. Still, hunters can make their own informed choices. Most hunters I've spoken with say they simply weren't aware of this issue, but after they read up on it, most opted for safer ammunition. In a way, it is a simple choice that's good for the wild and good for people.

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Bette Korber is a contributor to Writers on the Range, the opinion service of High Country News (hcn.org). She writes in New Mexico.