

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

Delicious sturgeon back on Columbia menu

After a three-year moratorium on keeping white sturgeon caught between the mouth of the Columbia and Bonneville Dam, a modest retention season started this week. By the time last weekend arrived, anglers had found where the sturgeon were gathered within the vast Columbia estuary and the catch was good. Many are happy to see some progress toward a return to normal for this important fishery.

Columbia white sturgeon venture out into the Pacific, but are formally considered a freshwater fish — the largest in North America. They can live more than a century and have become legendary among fishermen for their strength and size, with old sturgeon sometimes weighing hundreds of pounds. The much younger and smaller ones that anglers are permitted to keep — only 44 to 50 inches from snout to the fork in the tail — are locally renowned as one of the most delicious fish.

Under pressure
Like many other species, white sturgeon are struggling with habitat loss and deteriorating environmental conditions. During the drought year of 2015 for example, 80 breeding-age sturgeon died in the vicinity of Bonneville — possibly victims of too-warm water or perhaps harmful changes in water oxygen levels. Stellar sea lions also have multiplied and found their way into sturgeon holes, exerting considerable hunting pressure. Fleeing predators disrupts the sturgeons' breeding patterns.

There also is little doubt that human fishing pressures played a role in sturgeon declines that led to the 2014 moratorium. When salmon numbers plunged in the 1990s, private and charter fishing heavily switched to sturgeon with an enthusiasm it was easy to foresee would lead to trouble.

Rebounding
We now are in the rebound period. Fortunately, state conservation measure appear to be succeeding, with an estimated 165,600 legal-size sturgeon in the river below Bonneville, up from 147,000 last year and 72,700 in 2012.

Fishery managers have set an extremely conservative 3,000-sturgeon catch limit in the ongoing season — disappointing but much better than no season at all. The middling-sized sturgeon fishermen are allowed to keep generate a lot of economic activity for Columbia estuary ports, merchants and charter operations.

A study funded by the Bonneville Power Administration starting in 2000 has found female sturgeon do not sexually mature until they're at least 18 to 32 years old and only spawn about once every



LUKE WHITTAKER/EO Media Group
After three years of catch and release fishing, anglers are allowed to keep one sturgeon between 44 and 50 inches per trip.

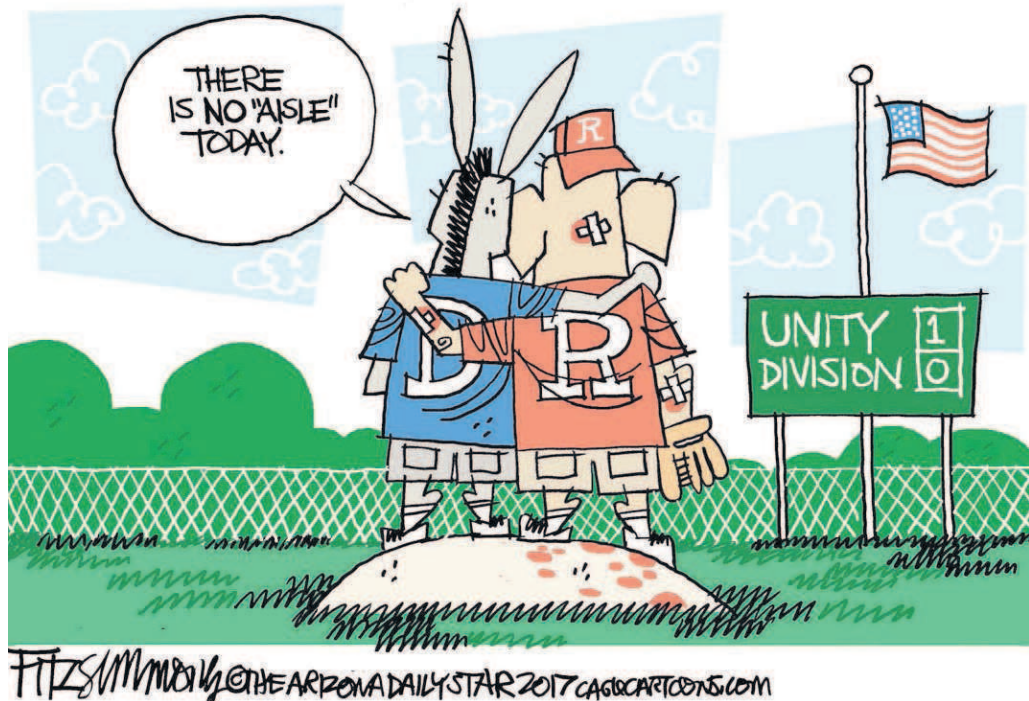
three years. Although not ideal fishing conditions, biologists have learned spawning success is best during high-flow years when the river creates turbulence over rough substrate or rocky-river bottoms — so this winter's intense rain and deep mountain snows may have a silver lining in future years in terms of producing young sturgeon.

Conservation and next steps
Sturgeon are in trouble worldwide and caution is obviously warranted when it comes to harvest and stress. In this gloomy picture, the Columbia actually is something of a bright spot, with a 2015 estimate of up to 1 million white sturgeon of all ages from Bonneville to the river's mouth. It is especially important to protect breeding fish age 18-plus — they are vital to the species' future. "It's a resource that's not replaceable," a scientist observed in 2015. "Those big spawners, we know how valuable they really are."

Continuing proactive management of sea lion populations is clearly justified. Although the idea is repellent to avid animal-right activists, their numbers are out of proportion to available prey in the Columbia River as it exists today. Responsible wildlife management means adjusting sea lion numbers to match their niche in what is now an inherently human-centric environment.

Sturgeon are well suited to hatchery propagation. The states should begin such a program.

Fishery managers are being careful about sturgeon. This is understandable, even if disappointing. But they must be bolder in enacting long-term plans for viability of these ancient and treasured fish.



OTHER VIEWS

Five notes on Trump's current predicament

The danger President Trump faces from the various investigations into the Trump-Russia matter has changed dramatically in recent weeks. If you're a Republican and you still believe the critical question is whether Trump or his associates colluded with Russians to influence the 2016 election — if you still think that, you're behind the times. So now, a few notes on where the Trump affair is today:

1. It's not about collusion anymore.

Fired FBI Director James Comey's testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee marked the full shift of the Trump-Russia investigation from a probe dedicated to discovering collusion to a probe dedicated to proving the president obstructed justice. Democrats at the Comey hearing barely touched on the collusion issue, which appears to have turned out to be a dry hole.

But to Democrats, that no longer matters. Now, it's all about obstruction of justice. While Comey testified that President Trump was never under investigation in the FBI counterintelligence probe under Comey, now, after the Comey memos and the Comey firing, it seems safe to predict that special counsel Robert Mueller will investigate Trump for obstruction. So it is a new game, even if Republicans keep trying to play the old one.

2. Trump failed to take the threat against him seriously.

Here is a simple fact: Many of Trump's most determined adversaries do not want just to defeat him on Obamacare, although they want that, too. They do not want just to defeat him on taxes, although they want that, too. No, they do not want just to defeat him — they want to remove him from office.

That has been clear from the moment The Associated Press called the presidential race for Trump in the early hours of Nov. 9. Some of those adversaries began discussing ways to remove Trump that very day. Some Democrats have been talking about it ever since.

What seems clear, though, is that Trump never, at least until now, took the threat terribly seriously. Whether from his own belief that he can persuade people to like him, or his faith in his ability to do business with a wide variety of players — for whatever reason, Trump has acted as if he is not every day in mortal threat from opponents who want to remove him from office. He has given them ammunition left and right and then complained that they are using it.

3. The future is in Robert Mueller's hands.

There are a few models for how the Mueller investigation might play out. Perhaps the most relevant is the Patrick Fitzgerald-Plamegate investigation of the George W. Bush years. There was an underlying crime in that matter — the leak of CIA employee



BYRON YORK
Comment

Valerie Plame's identity — but Fitzgerald knew who did it even as he started the investigation. Fitzgerald never prosecuted that person or anybody else for an underlying crime, and instead spent more than three years dragging Bush figures before a grand jury and finally prosecuting one, Lewis Libby, for perjury and obstruction.

Mueller could certainly follow that path if he chooses. But some on Team Trump believe that he won't, given a career they believe shows good judgment and a straight-down-the-line-not-a-zealot-like-Fitzgerald style. But that could be just hope, and in any event, the final decision will be Mueller's.

4. More evidence? Democrats don't need any more to impeach.

How many times have you heard a Democrat or Trump critic say that the Russia investigation is "just getting started" or that they are determined to "get to the bottom" of it? With a new prosecutor starting an open-ended investigation, they're hoping for years of

happy hunting.

But the fact is, Democrats do not need any more information than what is already publicly known to pursue impeachment proceedings against the president. What they need is 218 votes in the House of Representatives. If they had majority control of the House now, they would already be pursuing impeachment. Which means ...

5. 2018 is everything.

In 2006, when the Iraq War was going disastrously and George W. Bush was at a low point, some Democrats hoped they would not only win control of the House in that year's midterm elections, but that they could then impeach Bush as well. But even though Bush was in political trouble, Nancy Pelosi, who stood to become speaker if Democrats won, was wary of making the 2006 midterms a referendum on impeachment. Knowing that voters want to vote for something more positive than punishing a president, Pelosi flatly declared before the election that if Democrats prevailed, impeachment would be "off the table." As it turned out, she won big, became speaker, and impeachment stayed off the table.

Now, Democrats have a new class of impeachment enthusiasts who want to go after Trump as soon as possible. And Pelosi, who likely would again become speaker if Democrats take the House in 2018, is again counseling caution.

Whatever the case, the bottom line next year is 218 votes. If Democrats have them, the president's life becomes much, much more difficult and fraught with danger.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

But to Democrats, it's all about obstruction of justice.

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.

YOUR VIEWS

Cable company keeps Rose Parade from viewers

This is definitely a "Kick in the Pants" article, and its to Charter/Spectrum TV and the FCC.

I wonder how many people in the Pendleton, Hermiston, Athena, Weston and Milton-Freewater area were waiting to watch the Portland Rose Festival Parade on Saturday morning at 10 a.m.?

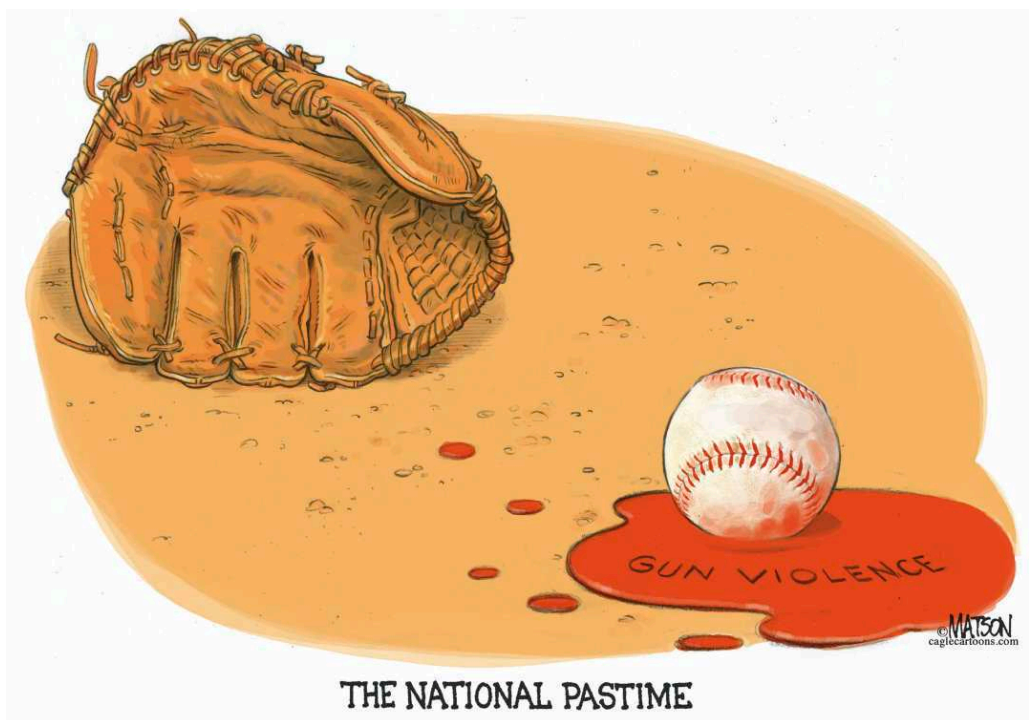
Thanks to Charter/Spectrum TV and the FCC, none of us were able to see it. Charter/Spectrum was called by many in the Milton-Freewater area, but all received the same message: "Not our fault." The FCC decided to cancel

the Portland CBS (KOIN) and FOX (KPTV) feeds in these areas — we could get our news from the Tri-Cities or Spokane, but not Portland. They made the decision for us that we don't need to watch those channels.

No "Let 'er Buck" advertisement in the Rose Parade this year, or ever again. The Round-Up Court might as well have stayed home.

There is certainly no reduction in our monthly Charter/Spectrum statements, and did we get the opportunity to vote on this change? Of course not. I am a very disgruntled Charter/Spectrum TV customer.

Bonnie Stephens
Milton-Freewater



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 phone number. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.