

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# The gold at the end of the Rainbow

It's unacceptable that 20,000 people are camping, cooking, living and defecating on our public land. It's flat wrong and that cannot be stated strongly enough.

But, unfortunately, it is happening. The Rainbow Family of Living Light annual gathering is underway and expected to grow through the Fourth of July on Malheur National Forest land in Grant County.

Which means the goal now for emergency crews, the U.S. Forest Service and taxpayers across the nation must change. That goal had been trying to dissuade, move and block the Rainbow gathering — but it now must shift to making it as safe as possible while protecting public resources and limiting damage to property.

Of course, everyone should have equal access to America's public lands. Hunters and anglers, backcountry horsemen and yes, even counterculture "greenies," should be free to enjoy what nature has to offer. But it's not possible for a group of this size, without adequate infrastructure, to leave the land undamaged. It cannot be done, no matter how well-intentioned the caretakers are — and we're not convinced that the Rainbow Family has caretaking atop their list of priorities.

They have fun and community atop that list, sprinkled in with experimentation of the economic, social and chemical kind. So be it. Moral judgment is easy, but rarely does it do any good. So we won't

dwell too much on that either, although we understand some readers may feel more inclined.

But we will report on the unique human beings who attend the event, as well as the costs of law enforcement. We will report on the environmental legacy of this gathering, and also about the culture clash taking place in rural Eastern Oregon.

**Next year, Rainbows should gather in numbers that nature can handle.**

We have one suggestion to the Rainbow Family: Next year, actually be "green." Call off a gathering in the tens of thousands. Get 12 of your best pals and hit the hills. Bring a toilet and all the kale and granola you can carry. Get naked. Take some of Oregon's legal drugs. Have an absolute blast on our country's wonderful public lands.

Then pack it all out, that toilet most especially. Leave the site as you found it, then come back and do it again next year. There is no need to overwhelm what nature can provide in order to prove you can go without rules and basic hygiene for a week or two.

This may be wishful thinking, however. The gathering has been going on since 1972 and most are bigger than the year before.

Eastern Oregonians and our forest, law and health representatives should be vigilant about protecting our lands. And we should protect those using that land.

While doing so, perhaps it is helpful to think of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Some call it peace and quiet, nature at its most natural.

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

# Democrats throw in the towel on tax reform

Corvallis Gazette-Times

Last week's announcement that Democratic leaders were throwing in the towel on tax reform during this session didn't really come as much of a surprise, considering the various legislative forces that had aligned against the idea.

But it still came as a disappointment — and, if Oregon citizens are growing weary of legislative promises that this important topic or that important topic will be top of the agenda during the next session, you can understand that weariness: It's not the first time these particular cans have been kicked down that particular road.

This session, yet another can got kicked down the road: Reforms to the state's public pension fund, with its \$22 billion unfunded liability, also appear to be joining that tax discussion: Democrats said all session long that pension reforms would be tied to tax reform; with tax reform off the table, so is PERS reform.

It still remains to be seen whether the last big-ticket item on this year's legislative docket, the bill that identifies major transportation projects around the state and ways to pay for them, will also be kicked over to 2019; our hope is that legislators still see a path forward in this session for the transportation bill.

A statement last week from three key Democrats — Gov. Kate Brown, Senate President Peter Courtney and Speaker of the House Tina Kotek — certainly suggested a big deal was dead. The statement read, in part, that the three had worked "for months with legislators in both parties, business leaders, and labor leaders, to identify ways to reduce state spending, contain costs going forward,

and finally reform our revenue system. While we are moving forward on several major cost containment measures, it has become clear that the Legislature will not have the necessary support to achieve structural revenue reforms this session."

That is partially because Democrats are one vote short in both the Senate and the House of the supermajorities required to pass tax increases. Senate Republicans, in particular, have maintained a united front against any tax increase.

Other pockets of opposition have risen this session: Sen. Mark Hass, the Beaverton Democrat who's been carrying the flag of tax reform for at least the last couple of sessions, last week pitched an idea to simply increase corporate income taxes. The plan enjoyed some support from businesses. But the idea didn't go anywhere, in part because House Democrats objected to the fact that it didn't include a tax on corporate gross receipts.

No wonder that a frustrated Hass warned in a speech last week that failure to address these issues would trigger the sort of pension crisis that's facing Illinois: "It will eventually wreck our schools and swallow our state," he said.

It now seems that the Legislature will be able to patch together a budget that will allow the state to limp along.

It also seems likely that the Legislature's failure to act will trigger yet another wave of citizen initiatives. Legislators complain about how those initiatives complicate their work. But it's hard to fault citizens for wanting to see if they can do something about the can before legislators get the chance to give it yet another kick.

## OTHER VIEWS



# A vote of conscience and courage

Forget for a minute about partisan labels and listen to members of the U.S. Senate talk about why they work in politics.

Rob Portman talks about a 16-year-old constituent who died of a drug overdose — and about honoring his life by fighting drug use. Lisa Murkowski talks about protecting children from fetal alcohol disorders, and Lamar Alexander speaks about premature babies.

There are many more stories like these, and they're not only for show. They reflect deeply held beliefs that senators have about themselves.

Republican or Democrat, they see themselves as public servants — their preferred term for politicians — trying to make life better for their fellow Americans.

Sure, when they're being honest, they admit that they enjoy the power and perks. But even with all the cynicism Washington engenders, senators still take pride in the high ideals of politics.

This week, these senators will face a career-defining choice.

It is not an easy one for many of them. Republicans have spent years promising to repeal Obamacare. Now the Senate is nearing a decision on whether to do so. Opposing the bill risks marking any Republican as a traitor to the party.

By late Monday, enough Republicans were nonetheless expressing skepticism about the bill to put its success in serious doubt. Susan Collins of Maine, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Dean Heller of Nevada have all distanced themselves from the bill. But we've seen a version of this story before. House Republicans also expressed serious doubts — only to wilt after party leaders made superficial changes to the bill. The Senate bill remains alive until it's dead.

In the meantime, I hope that each senator takes some time away from the daily swirl of Capitol Hill to think back to the reasons they entered politics. I hope they understand that this bill is a test of conscience and of courage.

A "yes" vote is still the politically easy vote for any Republican. But it is also a vote that will come back to haunt many senators when they reflect on their careers — and when more objective observers pass historical judgment on those careers.

There is little precedent for a bill like this one. That's why Mitch McConnell, the majority leader, kept it secret for as long as possible. Americans have often fought bitterly about how large our safety net should be and about the precise forms it should take.

But once the country commits to a fundamentally more generous, decent safety net, it becomes an accepted part of society.



DAVID LEONHARDT  
Comment

Poverty, disease and misfortune that had been accepted as normal became rejected as cruel.

Once we stopped allowing 10-year-olds to work in factories and fields, we didn't go back on it. Once we outlawed 80-hour workweeks at miserly pay, we didn't reinstate them. Once we made health insurance and Social Security a universal part of old age, we didn't repeal them.

The Senate health care bill would be a reversal on that scale.

Yes, Obamacare is flawed, and it needs to be improved. But the Senate bill would not fix those flaws. It would instead take away health insurance from millions of Americans — middle class and poor, disabled and sick, young and old — largely to finance tax cuts for the wealthy. Ultimately, the bill would lead many Americans to lose medical care on which they now depend.

**Once we made health insurance and Social Security a universal part of old age, we didn't repeal them.**

I hope the senators will listen to some of these people's stories. The most affecting that I've read recently is about Justin Martin, who has overcome cerebral palsy to become a thriving student at Kenyon College. As the HuffPost's Jonathan Cohn reported, Martin depends on Medicaid

to pay for a wheelchair that helps him get around and for health care aides who help him in the bathroom.

When history comes to judge today's senators, do they want to have made life harder on Justin Martin?

I hope the senators will also take the time to ask themselves why virtually no health care expert supports the bill. Conservative health care experts have blasted it, along with liberal and moderate experts. The Congressional Budget Office says it will do terrible damage. Groups representing doctors, nurses, hospitals and retirees oppose the bill. So do advocates for the treatment of cancer, heart disease, lung disease, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis and, yes, cerebral palsy.

I hope the senators will watch a two-minute video created by doctors around the country. In it, each one looks into the camera and explains how the bill would damage medical care. "This bill would dramatically affect my patients," said Dr. Gregory Lam of Circleville, Ohio, "and my ability to care for them."

I hope the senators grasp the weight of the decision they face, for the country and for themselves.

It takes only three Republican senators to prevent millions of their fellow citizens from being harmed. Which of them has the courage to make the right choice over the easy one?

David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for The New York Times.

## YOUR VIEWS

# Oregon lawmakers taking steps to fix education problems

As a city of Union councilor, I know that schools and services here in rural Oregon are in desperate need of investment. Finally, legislative leaders Speaker Tina Kotek (D-Portland) and Senator Mark Hass (D-Beaverton) have agreed on and introduced a compromise plan that would bring in much-needed revenue. The legislature must act swiftly to support their plan. With little time left this legislative session, we cannot afford to wait to take action on revenue reform.

In Union County, we have class sizes that are 28 percent larger than the national average and a school year that is over a full week shorter than the average school year in Oregon.

With the additional investments that would be brought in with the compromise plan proposed by Speaker Kotek and Sen. Hass, school districts would be able to plan for a \$8.5 billion state school fund budget instead of the \$8.2 billion school budget that the Legislature is passing. We should all realize that another budget shortfall will likely result in significant impacts to the quality of education that our children deserve. This session, legislators must end our perpetual budget shortfalls and put Oregon families first by fully funding our schools.

For years, our students across the state of Oregon have been denied the opportunities and tools they need to succeed because corporations don't pay their fair share in taxes. The compromise plan is a responsible step toward addressing the current funding shortfall

for Oregon's educational system and providing a long-term solution. Rural Oregon, especially, after decades of significant disinvestment, cannot wait a day longer on this legislature to act.

Senator Hansell and his colleagues must make raising revenue their top priority this legislative session. I'm counting on him to finally hold corporations accountable so Oregon can prove that it values education.

Randy L. Knop  
Union

# People will leave Pendleton if rural hospitals have to close

A little over a year ago, during a visit to our family in Pendleton, my wife had a late evening medical emergency and I took her to the new hospital. She got excellent care. I shudder to think what would have happened if St. Anthony Hospital were to close; your community, that sacrificed so much to build this new facility, is counting on continuing funding.

I respect Greg Walden, as he worked well with our former representative Brian Baird. However, it needs to be made clear the link between national health insurance and the funds it directs to rural health that keeps St. Anthony operating.

Who is going to move their business or keep their family in Pendleton without decent medical facilities? My guess is even a U.S. representative with guaranteed lifetime healthcare wouldn't retire to such a place.

Pat Campbell  
Vancouver, Wash.

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters to the editor. Send those letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.