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OUR VIEW

Stay safe this Fourth of July

Although this Fourth of July will be greener and wetter than most in Eastern Oregon's recent history, it is still a dangerous time to be setting flame to flammable objects and then sending them to burst in the sky in a shower of sparks and embers.

This is desert country after all. Tall, brown grasses cover our fields and back yards, just waiting for a spark to cause trouble and damage.

Which means, as the holiday draws near, it's a good time for a refresher, so we can keep ourselves and our property safe. First, remember that all fireworks that explode or fly into the air are illegal in Oregon. While that's disappointing for our American tradition of blowing things up into loud bangs and beautiful colors, it's necessary to keep our part of the world from turning into blackened ash.

And you don't have to let Oregon's fireworks laws rain down on your parade: You can still get your fix with big shows in Hermiston, Stanfield, Ione and Condon, for instance, and leave the dangerous part to the professionals. All you'll need to do then is tip back a cold one and don't let that hot dog burn on the grill. While doing so, you'll be doing your part keeping Eastern Oregon unengulfed.

It's also worth mentioning, if you plan to leave the cities behind and spend your long weekend in the woods, that fireworks are illegal on all public land — even sparklers and smokebombs and the like. If the stakes are high for in-town fireworks, they may be even higher

when you are surrounded by a forest full of kindling. Leave the fireworks behind, then, when you're packing the camper.

We do understand, however, that some people need to spend the Fourth of July in their back yard with at least a sparkler in their hand. If you're that kind of person, the American Red Cross has some advice for how to keep yourself, your family and your property safe.

Fireworks start an average of 18,500 fires per year. And the risk of injury is highest for children ages five to nine.

Keep fireworks away from children and — just in case — keep water nearby. Wear ear and eye protection when necessary. Light one firework at a time and don't attempt to relight any that fizzle out before firing. Never make your own fireworks. And don't throw the darn things toward

people or animals, structures or flammable materials. It's basic stuff, but statistics show a bunch of these common sense rules will be broken this holiday weekend, and it will cause at least a few costly emergencies. According to the National Fire Protection Association, fireworks start an average of 18,500 fires per year and the risk of injury is highest for children ages five to nine.

And for all the pet owners who find their furry friends freaking out with all the booms and bangs, keep those animals indoors in the quietest place in the house you can find.

Once we get all of this out of the way, we can concentrate on the thing we're supposed to be celebrating: America turning the big 241. Happy birthday, USA. We'll do our part to keep you looking great.

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

What's wrong with Democrats?

The Republican (Springfield, Mass.)

The Democratic Party is a study in frustration — at Donald Trump, at the public's unwillingness to see problems they consider unmistakable, and to make matters worse, at themselves.

Central to their internal angst is House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, who shows no inclination to relinquish her power, despite scattered calls from party figures for her to step down.

Pelosi, 77, is expected to remain in her current position of power until after the 2018 midterm elections. The opposition to push her out is not organized. There is certainly no consensus that the party's woes would be healed with an internal conflict at a time its energies are aimed at opposing Trump's policies.

But Pelosi is not serving her party's needs by clutching the reins of power. She is an easy target for Republicans and an obstacle for Democrats who want the party to represent a refashioned voice for the future and for millions of Americans who have tuned it out.

Pelosi represents the California district that includes San Francisco. She was once the voice of progressive liberal thinking in the House, similar to what the late Ann Richards represented as the governor of Texas in the 1980s.

That voice is represented by Senator Elizabeth Warren today. A Warren-Trump race in 2020 would be a titanic showdown of political opposites, and no one should be sure of the outcome.

Positioning any Democrat to beat Trump will require the party to reclaim at least some of the large geography it has

lost, without sacrificing its fundamental principles or unduly alienating its base. That won't be easy; with Pelosi, it will be much more difficult.

To many voters, Pelosi represents the previous generation. She also stands for the constant anti-Republican and anti-Trump rhetoric which, to many citizens, does not provide solutions for their biggest economic concerns.

The party has fallen into a reputation as "bi-coastal," popular in the Northeast Corridor and on the West Coast but ceding too many states and voters in between. Trump won 30 states. The Democrats cannot beat him without getting some

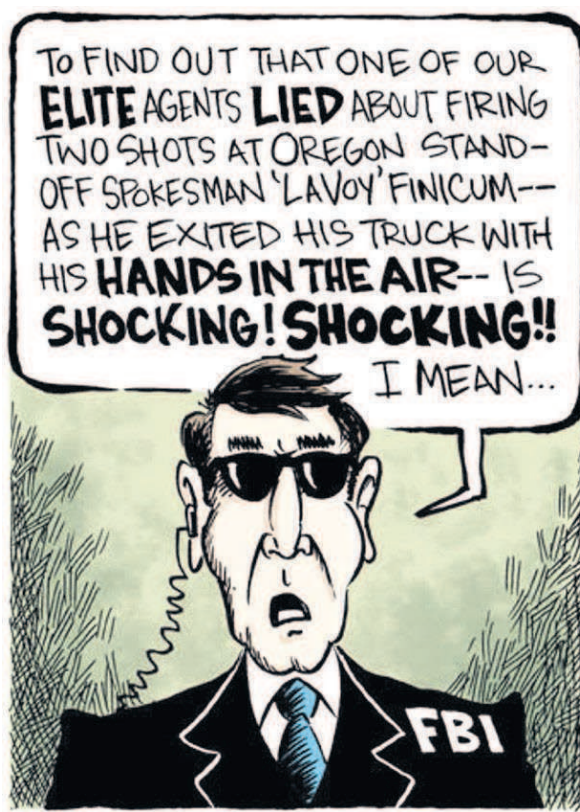
of them back, and it's hard to see Pelosi serving as the resonant, relevant voice to that goal.

The party's more immediate goal is to win 24 new Congressional seats and reclaim House majority in the 2018 midterms. If that happens, Pelosi's tenure will be deemed a success.

That's possible. Cries for Pelosi to step down increased after the expensive, much-publicized Democratic Congressional loss in Georgia, but the party came closer than usual in a traditional GOP stronghold.

Results in 2018 will not be measured by coming close, but by victory or defeat. Regaining influence for the Democrats will not occur until they reconfigure their message.

Pelosi represents an old message that many voters find irrelevant and stale. Maybe that's unfair, but her continued presence as House Minority Leader will tell voters that nothing has changed with the Democrats, leaving less reason to think election results will, either.



OTHER VIEWS

Tie Congress' paychecks to our good health

Members of Congress are paid \$174,000 a year, while members of Poland's lower house of Parliament are paid \$32,300 a year.

Hmm. It looks as if we're getting ripped off. Members of Congress seem to underperform compared to members of Parliament in Poland and across the democratic world.

Conservatives are right to worry that feeding at the government trough breeds dependency and laziness. So I suggest we introduce pay for performance, using metrics like, say, health.

I cite Poland because so many Poles (including the Krzysztofowicz family, later renamed Kristof) came to America for a better life, yet today American babies are one-third more likely to die in their first year of life than Polish children are (and twice as likely as Italian, Portuguese and Czech babies!). Meanwhile, American women are four times as likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth as Polish women, according to the World Health Organization.

If we had Italy's child mortality rate, we would save 12,000 American babies' lives each year — that's 33 children's lives saved every day.

Meanwhile, the U.S. spends far more on health care — an average of nearly \$10,000 per person — than other countries do. Poland spends just \$1,680 per person.

This is a stain on America. Choose almost any modern country, and its people pay less for health care and its children are more likely to survive; the CIA's World Factbook ranks the U.S. 42nd in longevity, and we've had a smaller increase in life expectancy over 25 years than other industrialized countries have.

In short, we as taxpayers are getting cheated. Should we really be paying senators a base rate of \$174,000 — Mitch McConnell as Senate majority leader gets more — to preside over such bad results?

It's time to apply the discipline of markets. For the sake of our senators' own characters, we should pay for work.

If we now pay almost six times as much per capita on health care as Poles do, and get outcomes that are far worse, hmm, what do you think? Maybe we pay our representatives one-tenth what the Poles get? That would be \$3,200 a year for a member of Congress.

Good thing Congress has resisted raising the minimum wage!

OK, I'm not really in favor of slashing congressional pay; we should pay officials well to attract the best talent.

But I offer this absurd proposal for two reasons. First, many Americans, including politicians, just don't understand how poorly our health care system actually performs by international standards.

It's true that American hospitals have the finest diagnostic equipment and the best specialists, but we falter at basics and at



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

public health. We're lousy at getting kids vaccinated, at reaching at-risk young people with contraception, at protecting citizens from lead and endocrine-disrupting chemicals — and simply at keeping people alive.

That leads to my second point: We need universal health care.

In Poland, Canada, Britain and virtually every other advanced democracy, there is a national health system, with single-payer coverage like Medicare for all.

Analysts find that Canada's rollout of single-payer coverage cut infant mortality by 5 percent. Likewise, researchers have found that cystic fibrosis patients live 10 years longer in Canada than in the U.S., because of insurance gaps in America.

Granted, there are deep underlying problems in the U.S. that complicate health care. Inequality is immense, obesity is widespread, and American teenagers have babies at several times the rate of European teens.

But one reason to think that universal health coverage would make a difference is that when Americans make it to age 65 — after they get Medicare — life expectancy

of 18 more years for men and 20 more for women is roughly the same as in Europe. When Americans finally get single-payer care, we do fine.

Likewise, a new study in *Annals of Internal Medicine* finds that in the U.S., being insured significantly reduces death rates for young and middle-aged people.

All health care reform efforts — whether Obamacare or Trumpcare — struggle with the unwieldiness and inefficiency of the existing architecture, built on employer-provided coverage. The basic problem is that we're spending almost \$10,000 per person per year on health care, and somebody has to pay for it or else we ration care and people die.

Early research finds that Obamacare is helping: One study finds it saving the life of one millennial a day.

But ultimately the United States should follow the example of every other advanced country and ensure health coverage for all. "We're going to have insurance for everybody," President Donald Trump promised a week before taking office. Now he backs plans that would lead to 22 million fewer people having coverage. But if Taiwan, Slovenia, Spain, Japan and just about every other modern country can have coverage for everyone, so can we.

And, members of Congress, here's the deal: If you ever adopt Medicare for all, I'll endorse a pay-for-performance pay raise for all of you along with guaranteed, subsidized health insurance.

Oh, never mind. That, you already have.

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

YOUR VIEWS

Take care of your property — stop spread of invasive weeds

As residents of rural Oregon, we love our elbow room and having space to live comfortably. That space can become a detriment when it is not maintained and this is the time of year when it is obvious that the spread of noxious weeds is getting our hand.

As property owners, learn about weed identification and control, then do it! If it means hand pulling this time of year because the yellow star is in the wrong stage for

spraying to control, then get yourselves some gloves and start pulling. There are forests of scotch thistle growing in some areas, with no effort to contain them.

Public land managers deserve a taste of this advice as well, the state, city and county roadways are all conduits for the flood of weeds allowed to grow unchecked on public lands.

This is important and needs to be reminded of each year. Take pride in land ownership and get rid of your weeds.

Colleen Blackwood Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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