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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

Tip of the hat to the many different volunteer and professional fire crews who responded to the blazes Wednesday on Weston Mountain.

There were at least two different fire starts (perhaps more) and those fires behaved erratically, due to the variety of vegetation (stubble field, standing wheat, scrub grass, forest) along the unique slope of that country. The fires closed Highway 204 toward Tollgate for hours, and brought fire crews from as far away as Hermiston to control and mop up the blaze, which grew to 250 acres at its peak. Oregon Department of Forestry crews even stayed at the scene overnight to make sure it didn't relight.

The small city of Weston, where you could watch the fire creeping down the hill toward Main Street, sure are happy for the quick response. As are the rest of us.

A kick in the pants, though, to the smoke kicked up by that fire. It mixed in with all the Canadian soot that jumped the border from British Columbia to really do a number on local air quality.

The weather report shows a front may blow out this smoky, stagnant air Friday and Saturday, hopefully keeping the sky clear going into the total solar eclipse on August 21.

But the odds of Eastern Oregon going without a wildfire for a week — fresh off a steady stream of 100-degree temperatures — doesn't seem too great. Especially as those eclipse crowds start making their way into the forests, on foot and behind the wheel, in record numbers.

We can hope for a bit of wind to blow out the smoke. But for the time being, we can look at the bright side: The beautiful sunrises and sunsets, scorching through the thick air.

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

OHA reveals lack of ethics

The Bend Bulletin

How does a state agency influence proposed legislation?

The Oregon Health Authority came up with a shocking approach: Try to plant negative news stories about a nonprofit that would benefit from the legislation.

The Portland Tribune's Nick Budnick reported Friday that the OHA plotted to find a disgruntled patient and anonymously connect that patient with a newspaper. The goal was to have the newspaper publish a story that would damage FamilyCare's credibility. The OHA plan involved identifying friendly legislators and getting them to plant the stories so the OHA could appear neutral.

FamilyCare is a Portland-area nonprofit that provides care to low-income Medicaid patients under the OHA's supervision. The two were in a court dispute because FamilyCare said OHA set reimbursement rates too low.

No newspaper stories resulted, but a bill that would have helped FamilyCare died in committee in the recent session of the Legislature.

The plan came from OHA's communications staff and was not formally approved, but Budnick found

evidence that OHA Director Lynne Saxton signaled her approval in an email, saying some new developments "will build on the already good start you have outlined." (Saxton resigned Monday.)

FamilyCare is one of the state's 16 coordinated care organizations. It has been a vehement critic of the OHA, Budnick reported, accusing the agency of incompetence and trying to damage the nonprofit.

FamilyCare had a lower rate of reimbursement than other CCOs because it had a healthier population, Budnick reported. The agency also said FamilyCare was "taking advantage of taxpayer money" by paying providers more than Medicaid required. FamilyCare said it did so to make sure patients could get appointments and to focus on prevention.

Whatever the merits of the rate argument, the notion of a state agency seeking to influence the Legislature by secretly planting negative stories reveals an appalling lack of ethical standards.

Budnick found numerous references to the OHA's interest in maintaining its reputation. Clearly, the agency has done exactly the opposite with its underhanded tactics.

YOUR VIEWS

Renewable fuel standard supports Oregon jobs

Oregon is home to vast renewable resources, providing new and exciting opportunities to lead the way in the fight against climate change. We produce 13 percent of the nation's hydroelectric power and our geothermal potential is rivaled only by Nevada and California. We are also home to some of the West Coast's premier biofuel facilities, producing cleaner liquid fuels from agricultural feedstocks, supporting nearly 16,000 Oregon jobs.

A lot of this progress has been driven by state and local efforts. But federal policies play an important role. That's why we need our lawmakers in Congress to stand up for the renewable fuel standard, which ensures that renewable fuel can compete at the gas pump.

Oil companies are looking for any opportunity to hold back competition, and biofuels are a top target. They

displaced 500 million barrels of oil in 2016, cutting emissions and protecting consumers from price manipulation.

More importantly, thanks to the increasingly sustainable agricultural practices, those biofuels cut emissions by an average of 43 percent, according to federal reports.

Conventional ethanol production also leaves behind processed grain that is repurposed as low-cost animal feed. The next generation of ethanol, produced from material like wood waste and corn cobs, is even more promising, with some varieties reducing the total carbon in the atmosphere over their full lifecycle.

Thanks to smart policies like the renewable fuels standard, the future is bright for Oregon. Lawmakers like Congressman Greg Walden, who chairs the energy committee, should take note, and protect that progress.

Bobby Levy
Echo

OTHER VIEWS



Google's war over the sexes

Men and women are different. On this, almost everyone acquainted with reality agrees. How different is the more controversial question, to which there is one particularly interesting answer: A little more different than they used to be.

This growing difference seems to be a striking aspect of modern Western life. In societies where both sexes have greater freedom — and women have more educational and professional opportunities relative to men than in the past — the sexes' academic interests tend to diverge relative to more traditional societies. And not only their interests but their personalities as well: The more officially egalitarian a society, a credible body of research suggests, the stronger the differences in stereotypically male and female personality traits.

Conservatives sometimes worry that our society features an unhealthy blurring of sexual identities, an androgynous confusion. The left tends to be more optimistic about such blurring, seeing it as a liberation from the rule of patriarchy and the prison of heteronormativity.

But the opposite trend, the divergence of the sexes, might be more important. Some of our present difficulties may flow from an excess of feminine and masculine differentiation, from the sexes growing apart and losing common ground, from the decline of marriage's male-female partnership and the rise of a singlehood that's often more sex-segregated than family life.

Certainly the frontiers of sexual license often feature strong male-female differentiation rather than androgyny or gender-neutrality.

Think of the clichés that prevail in internet pornography, or the gendered kinks of "Fifty Shades of Grey." Even our culture's highest-profile gender transition had a highly sex-specific presentation — Bruce Jenner was the ultimate male Olympian; Caitlyn Jenner, a busty, hyper-feminized Vanity Fair cover model.

So too with political trends. The idea of a "Mommy Party" and a "Daddy Party" goes way back, but the Trump-Clinton election made the increasingly gendered nature of the parties seem ridiculously stark. As Ed West, a columnist for *The Week*, pointed out last week, the social justice left and the alt-right are among the most gendered movements imaginable — "the political equivalent of the Lego Friends Heartlake Cupcake Cafe and the Lego Nexo Knight's Clay's Falcon Fighter Blaster, examples of where greater freedom of association and self-actualization has led men and women."

Consider it this way: If you asked a right-wing misogynist to craft a sexist parody of his political opponents, you might get something like the highly neurotic, fainting-couch politics of recent campus and online progressivism, whose acolytes oscillate between soft therapeutic language and maenad-like frenzy.

If you then asked a left-wing misandrist to do the same sort of parody in reverse, you'd end up with something like the online far-right — nerds and autodidacts obsessed with cuckoldry, fascist cosplayers eager for evidence of their own racial superiority, would-be lotharios furious at feminism, libertarians with a ten-point case for despotism.

The divergence of the sexes also provides a useful context for thinking about this week's culture-war controversy, the high-profile firing of a Google software engineer, James Damore, for a memo he wrote criticizing the company's diversity policies.

Damore's memo argued, roughly, that the tech world's conspicuous dearth of women is quite possibly a consequence of the trend I've just described — that more men than women are attracted to the kind of work that's done by programmers and software engineers, and that it's a mistake to assume discrimination when self-selection might be at work. He also questioned why Google's official rhetoric and internal propaganda focus on the diversity of sex and race while ignoring the value of political or ideological diversity.

The memo was sometimes tone deaf, clinical, insensitive (in, well, a stereotypically male sort of way), understating the ways

in which self-selection and sexism can shape an industry. Even if more men than women are attracted to a particular field, a male-dominated profession can be distinctly unpleasant for the women who work in it, in ways that can justify special scrutiny, recruitment and redress.

But Damore also made reasonable points about different ways to pursue diversity and the costs and benefits thereof, in an earnest and dialogic style that a healthy corporate culture would

have found a way to answer without swiftly giving him the ax.

At the same time, there was a sense in which Damore had to be fired, precisely because of the intertwined realities that he described. Silicon Valley is a very male environment, a land of nerd kings and programmers whose deepest beliefs tend to be the sort that men come up with when they don't have very many women around — arch-libertarian, irreligious, utopian in a mechanistic style.

But the internet industry is also part of a wider elite culture that is trending in the opposite direction, becoming more feminized and feminist, and inclined to view male-dominated enclaves with great suspicion. So Silicon Valley's leaders use corporate wokeness, diversity initiatives and progressive virtue signaling as a kind of self-protection, a way of promising that they're mostly men but they're the good kind of men, so that discrimination lawsuits and antitrust actions and other forms of regulation are less attractive to their critics.

I strongly suspect that more than a few Silicon Valley higher-ups agreed with the broad themes of Damore's memo. But just as tech titans accept some censorship and oppression as the price of doing business in China, they accept performative progressivism as the price of having nice campuses in the most liberal state in the union and recruiting their employees from its most elite and liberal schools. And for questioning that political performance while defending the disproportionate maleness that makes it necessary, the Google memo-writer simply had to go.

This is not a healthy dynamic, obviously. Indeed, part of why the alt-right has such a strong (if sub rosa) presence in Northern California is because it's a predictable kind of male response to professional life under the rule of political correctness — a response that the Damore firing will only make more attractive.

Meanwhile, the real truth — which the memo at its most sensible almost grasped — is that Silicon Valley might benefit from having a more female-friendly culture because of the differences between men and women, not because those differences are all somehow a misogynist invention. The fact that the brave new online world of social media may be particularly psychologically unhealthy for young women, for instance, seems like a telling indicator of what can go wrong with a virtual architecture built by brilliant and obtuse males.

But since the usual way to reintegrate the sexes is to have them marry one another and raise kids, what Silicon Valley probably needs right now more than either workplace anti-microaggression training or an alt-right underground is a basic friendliness to family, pregnancy and child rearing.

This is why the new Apple headquarters, which has a 100,000-square-foot fitness and wellness center but no child care center, is a more telling indicator of what really matters to Silicon Valley than all the professions of gender-egalitarianism that have followed James Damore's heretical comments about sex differences.

Those differences, the real ones, have one common root: Women bear children; men do not. Figuring out how to respect that essential fact and all its implications, while also respecting the equality of the sexes, is one of the great challenges of our age. And it's because we are failing at it that the sexes have begun to go their separate ways.

Ross Douthat joined The New York Times as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. Previously, he was a senior editor at the Atlantic and a blogger for theatlantic.com.



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Comment

Silicon Valley might benefit from having a more female-friendly culture.

LETTERS POLICY

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