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OUR VIEW

Health care the key to rural vibrancy

We don't have to look to Washington, D.C., to consider the uncertain future of the American health care system. For many in rural Oregon, access to and affordability of quality health care is as critical, local and personal an issue as they come.

That's certainly the case in Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Last week we featured a Pendleton-raised doctor who returned to practice in Walla Walla, while many of his classmates remained in big cities and the large hospitals, clinics and private practices located there. We also noted that Oregon

Health & Science University, Oregon's only medical school, is recommitting themselves to producing doctors who are able and willing to practice in the state's rural outposts.

Now, someone in Fossil or Burns or elsewhere in frontier Oregon is sure to laugh at the bureaucrat who designated Walla Walla — home to 30,000 people and a French restaurant, for goodness sakes — as a rural hospital. But the relationship between frontier outposts, small and medium-sized cities (one of Walla Walla's two hospitals closed this year) and large metropolitan areas is fundamental to how the health care system works today. And strengthening each step in that ladder is key to overcoming some of the hurdles faced nationwide.

For those of us in rural Oregon, the first step is the most critical. And that starts with having qualified, dedicated medical professionals living and working in our small towns.

And we're not just talking about doctors.

Nurses, physician's assistants, pharmacists, radiologists, therapists, technicians, trainers, dietitians, psychologists and mental health professionals have long been critical cogs in any economy and community.

But they are becoming more critical than ever as life expectancy increases, medical tech advances demand more and more human expertise, and the economic realities of health care impact life and death decisions everywhere

Health care will determine which rural areas survive and which ones thrive.

on the globe.

Eastern Oregon's population is aging. Its doctors are, too. We're living longer — which is great — but that puts added stress on a health care system turmoil. At the same time, our economic underpinnings are evolving — jobs in the health care field are expanding faster than manufacturing jobs are declining.

High-quality local healthcare professionals save lives. That's the most important argument. But they also save money for local families. They save homes. They save inheritances. They save heartache. They save long commutes and overnight stays far from home. Did we mention they save lives?

They will also be the key to which rural areas survive and which ones thrive. With that in mind, health care must be atop every local economic development director's priority list. And recruiting doctors is a job for local hospitals, chambers of commerce, and each and every rural resident.

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

Black market weak link in Oregon's legalization experiment

Albany Democrat-Herald

If the Trump administration truly is serious about enforcing federal marijuana laws, even in states like Oregon that have legalized pot, their best argument revolves around the amount of the weed that's hitting the black market.

So Oregon officials have to be hoping that their increased efforts to track weed will pay off. Otherwise, this could be the Achilles' heel for the state's growing multibillion-dollar legal marijuana business.

If you'll allow a bit of understatement here, it's fair to say that U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions isn't a fan of marijuana and no advocate for legalization. But it's still not clear how vigorously the administration plans to push back against the tide of states that have legalized recreational pot.

Sessions himself has offered mixed messages on this point: He has said he believes pot is "only slightly less awful" than heroin. But he also has said that he believes the so-called Cole memo, a document from the Obama administration that governs the relationship between the feds and states that have legalized marijuana, is "valid."

That's where black market marijuana could give Sessions a card to play: The memo, crafted in 2013 by deputy attorney general James Cole, essentially said that marijuana would remain illegal under federal law, but that the feds would tolerate legalization on the state level — as long as those states worked hard on eight enforcement priorities. Among those priorities was one asking states to control the black market.

Earlier this year, the U.S. attorney for Oregon, Billy Williams, met with the state's top marijuana regulators. Williams requested the meeting in the wake of a draft report from the Oregon State Police that concluded that Oregon remains a leading black market exporter of pot to other states.

An Associated Press story said the

report used statistics from the legal industry and estimates of illicit grows to conclude that Oregon produces between 132 tons and 900 tons more marijuana than what state residents can conceivably consume. The report identified Oregon as an "epicenter of cannabis production."

The report has drawn barbs from critics who say the numbers in it are overstated. But it also has drawn attention from Sessions himself, who made reference to it in a July letter he sent to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown.

It's not inconceivable that the federal government could attempt to make Oregon its first big target in a fight against legalized pot. Over the long run, the fight almost certainly would be a losing effort. But in the short run, it could easily devastate the state's growing pot industry and blow a multimillion-dollar hole in the state's budget as tax collections from sales of legal pot diminish.

Oregon has some cards of its own to play: Brown recently signed into law a requirement that state regulators track from seed to store all marijuana grown for sale in Oregon's legal market. So far, only recreational marijuana has been comprehensively tracked.

These tracking systems, which increasingly are in use in other states that have legalized marijuana, aren't foolproof in that they rely on the honesty of the users. But if Oregon is aggressive about identifying and citing violators early and often, the message might get out that the state means business on this front.

That might be enough to convince the feds to keep their hands off of Oregon's growing marijuana industry for the time being, instead of falling back on a heavy-handed and overly broad attack.

Such an attack from federal officials would almost certainly devastate Oregon's fascinating experiment with legalization. It also could end up, ironically, giving an unintended boost to the very same black market that Sessions and other federal officials want to shut down.

STAR TRIBUNE
S&K



OTHER VIEWS

This American land

We're living in the middle of a national crisis of solidarity — rising racial bitterness, pervasive distrust, political dysfunction. So what are the resources we can use to pull ourselves together? What can we draw upon to tell a better American story than the one Donald Trump tells, one that will unite us instead of divide us, and yield hopeful answers instead of selfish ones?

One resource is the land.

Throughout our history, the American identity has been shaped by nature, by how our wilderness molds, inspires and binds us. Up until now, most U.S. presidents have somehow been connected to nature.

Washington surveyed, T.R. hunted, Reagan and Bush cleared brush. Trump is unusual in that he seems untouched by wilderness, by the awe and humility that comes from the encounter with nature. He only drives around golf courses, which, though sometimes lovely, are dominated, artificial forms of nature.

From the nation's founding, Americans had a sense that their continent's vast and beautiful abundance gave their nation a unifying destiny and mission. The land made them feel apart from Europe — their manners simpler, their admiration for practical work more fervent and their ambitions more epic:

"A European, when he first arrives, seems limited in his intentions as well as in his views," Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote, "but he very suddenly alters his scale; two hundred miles formerly appeared a very great distance, it is now but a trifle. He no sooner breathes our air than he forms schemes and embarks on designs he never would have thought of in his own country."

The abundance mentality did not lead to decadence, but to optimism, a sense that there was room for all to spread out. It nurtured a future-minded mentality — seeing the present from the vantage point of the future.

"It requires but a small portion of the gift of discernment for anyone to foresee that providence will erect a mighty empire in America," Samuel Adams wrote at a time when America was 13 scraggly colonies hugging one coast. This job, constructing a new order for the ages, gave generations of Americans a sense of purpose, something to devote their lives to.

The biggest thing nature did was offer ideals. Different Americans came up with different character types for how to engage with nature. Each type offered a model for how to live an admirable life.

According to one type, character was forged by tilling the land; according to another it was forged by being tested by the land; and in another it was formed by being cleansed by the land. These types wove together to form the American mythsos.

The first ideal was the Steward. This is the



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

small yeoman farmer and craftsman who lives close to the soil — self-reliant, upright, humble before creation and bonded to his local community.

"The name of our proper connection to the earth is 'good work,'" Wendell Berry wrote, "for good work involves much giving of honor. It honors the source of its materials; it honors the place where it is done; it honors the art by which it is done; it honors the thing that it makes and the user of the made thing. Good work is always modestly scaled."

The second ideal was the Pioneer. This is the person who pushes against the wilderness and develops skill, courage and virility. This

is the daring innovator who ushers progress by venturing to the edge of the known.

"Life consists with wildness," Thoreau decreed. "The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him. One who pressed forward incessantly and never rested from his labors, who grew fast and made

infinite demands on life, would always find himself in a new country or wilderness, and surrounded by the raw material of life. He would be climbing over the prostrate stems of primitive forest-trees."

The third ideal was the Elevated Spirit. This is the person who slips off the conformist materialism of commercial society and is both purified and enlarged by nature's grandeur. This is John Muir in Yosemite, Ansel Adams in the Grand Canyon.

Such an awakened soul often comes back singing with Walt Whitman, filled with electric love for the enlarged individual, celebrating the infinite variety of life, feeling part of an endless and ancient web of connections: "I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America/ and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies, I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,/By the love of comrades."

These days I often ask people what percentage of our nation's problems can be solved through policy and politics. Most people say that most of America's problems are pre-political. What's needed is a revival of values, fraternity and a binding American story.

I don't know all the ways that revival of spirit can come about, but even in the age of the driverless car and Reddit, I suspect some of the answers are to be found in reconnecting with our ancient ideals and reconnecting with the land.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at The Weekly Standard, a contributing editor at Newsweek and the Atlantic Monthly, and is currently a commentator on PBS.

YOUR VIEWS

Forest collaboratives need to welcome all input

Forest Service collaboratives do not want to grant Eastern Oregon residents a vote at the table. They want people to participate, but not to ask for a vote in the process.

That's why now, finally, when residents of Grant County ask for voting status, the Blue Mountains Forest Partners come out with defamatory statements of residents being untrustworthy, hoping to marginalize those trying to participate in a meaningful manner.

My mom had to sit through a shaming by the Blue Mountains Forest Partners because she was "untrustworthy" because I question the collaboratives, and how they use economic hardship to justify restricting motorized access to the mountains of Eastern Oregon.

The collaboratives are supposed to be civil and open to diverse public input. But if that input does not align with the collaboratives stated goals, they become personal, nasty and petty.

The question is, can we get logs to the mills

without "rewilding" Eastern Oregon? We did it for decades, and grew some of the healthiest wildlife populations around.

Unfortunately, the environmental community turned that on its head with their litigation strategy, and they now get to drive their message through these collaboratives, while excluding public input through voting membership.

To paraphrase a collaborative board member, "My grandmother always told me, you are the company you keep." The other lesson most of us learned from our grandparents was "the only thing you have is your word." Unfortunately, collaboratives members never learned that lesson, because every time they give you their word, they backtrack from it.

Eastern Oregonians should not be shamed upon requesting voting member status to "diverse and inclusive" groups, but unfortunately, that's how Eastern Oregon collaboratives operate.

John D. George
Bates

LETTERS POLICY

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