

EAST OREGONIAN

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KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

MARISSA WILLIAMS
Regional Advertising Director

MARCY ROSENBERG
Circulation Manager

JANNA HEIMGARTNER
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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat, kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to Umatilla and Morrow county commissioners for making the time last week to sit down together in Heppner and discuss the current state of Eastern Oregon.



The agenda was informal and the goal undefined, but just like in a neighborhood, it's important to have open lines of dialogue. Breaking some bread — or grilled chicken, as the case may be — is a good way of checking in.

The discussion predictably covered a lot of ground, from jobs to housing to agriculture to clean energy to health care and all areas in between.

Umatilla County is the big brother in many respects, with about seven times as many residents, but Morrow County has become an economic power in recent years. If the two can coordinate, it only makes our corner of the state a better place.

A kick in the pants to the Department of Homeland Security for ignoring requests by nine states — including Oregon and Washington — for data about immigration arrests.

If you're worried about unaccountable government, this is what it looks like.

The states would like to know about immigration arrests made near courthouses, churches, hospitals and schools.



No matter where you stand on the issue of illegal immigration enforcement, it's hard to account for the lack of accountability by a federal agency. Ignoring requests for simple information like the number of people arrested is not the way any government should function, and certainly not one that pledges to answer to the people.

A tip of the hat to local firefighters who are down in California helping quell the blazes that have ravaged the state this month.



Our own fire season has ended, though we're seeing that flames don't really take a vacation as local agencies have stayed busy even as the weather has cooled.

We know it's their job, and those Umatilla and Union county firefighters will be compensated by other agencies for their effort, but we're glad to share some of our brave and talented personnel for the cause.

The fires have been horrific, taking not just wildlands and homes but scores of human lives. It's comforting to know there's a network in place to bring in resources for that inevitable day when Oregon will need the back up.

In the meantime, we're thankful for the rain in the forecast and hope to see our firefighters back home soon.

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

Time to close the digital divide

Every year, I hold town halls in each of our state's 36 counties to hear directly from Oregonians on the key issues facing rural and urban communities. During these meetings, and traveling between them, I have heard and seen firsthand the importance of getting affordable broadband internet access, high-speed wireless broadband and strong, consistent cell service throughout Oregon.



RON WYDEN
Comment

This past August, Donald Trump's Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chairman, Ajit Pai, proposed to lower the standard speed of internet access in rural America. This is just wrong. The Congress mandated the FCC work to expand access to high-speed internet to every American. Pai believes slower internet speeds are good enough for rural areas. I completely disagree.

In my 850-plus town meetings, Oregonians have told me how frustrated they are by slow internet access. Rural residents make it clear that lack of high-speed internet isn't a trivial matter. High-speed internet access and cell coverage are critical for everything from reaching 911 and accessing health care to selling Made in Oregon products around the world.

But private sector investment has failed to bring wireless service to large parts of rural America. When power companies didn't reach rural communities in the 1930s, Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act and transformed rural lives. Now Congress, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the FCC have a responsibility to offer more consistent internet and voice infrastructure for rural Americans who Big Cable won't serve.

Closing the digital divide is urgent business for five reasons.

First, there should never be an accident victim who cannot reach 911 because there's no cell signal. Limited cell coverage leads to preventable tragedies.

Second, small-town Oregon business owners shouldn't be at a disadvantage in reaching customers beyond their city limits. Entrepreneurs need 24-7 access to their Facebook page or website to connect to the global economy. And in the recreation economy, smartphone access is crucial to connecting visitors with local

small businesses.

Third, U.S. farmers and ranchers are increasingly relying on precision agriculture technologies. High-speed wireless support is a must to keep pace with the ongoing deployment of technology in the field. Today, farmers can control water to their irrigation systems through their smartphones, allowing them to reduce costs, while also practicing responsible agriculture.

Fourth, schools depend increasingly on the internet to improve education with innovative coursework. Yet substandard internet access currently leaves many students at a great disadvantage. Students lacking 24-7 internet access at home must depend on limited hours at local libraries, friends' houses or community centers to do research online.

Fifth, tele-health promises to transform how rural and remote communities access health care. For example, a health care provider can now examine a patient via an in-home video consultation, and diabetes patients can remotely monitor their blood glucose levels. These options rely on reliable, fast and low-cost internet coverage.

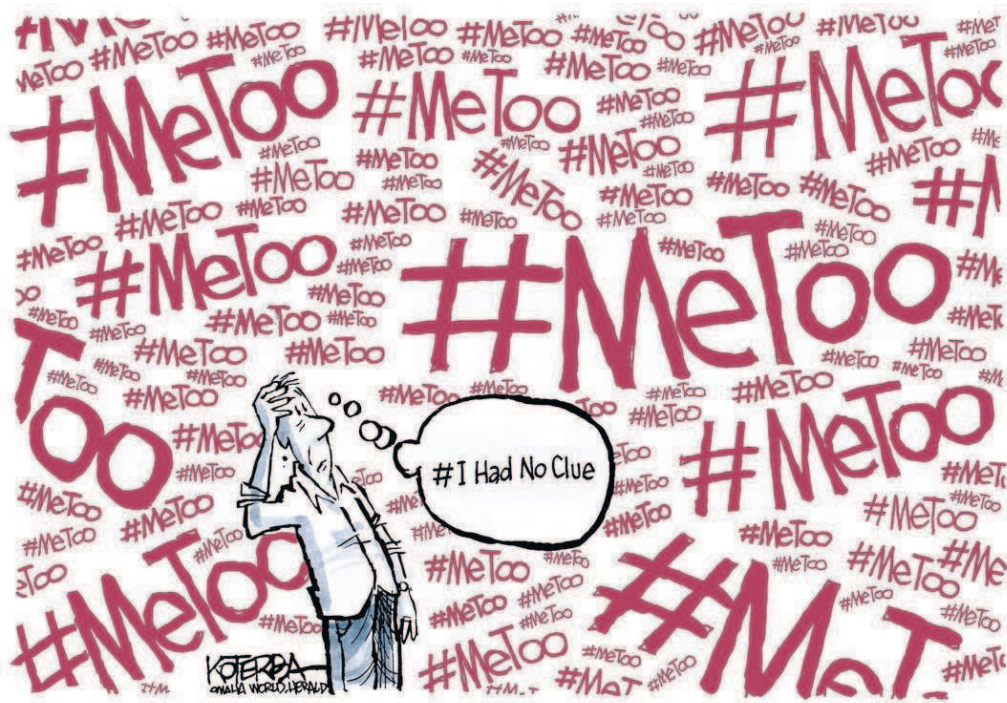
What's the solution? The first step is finding out who has coverage now. I'm co-sponsoring a bill to require the FCC to create more accurate mobile service maps, especially in rural areas. That will ensure the government more accurately directs resources to the communities that need access the most.

Next, if Big Cable won't serve rural areas, communities should have the right to build their own high-speed networks. I introduced The Community Broadband Act this year with Sen. Cory Booker to do just that.

And finally, our country needs robust investment for broadband internet buildout, which I've called for as part of an upgrade to America's infrastructure.

Trump's FCC wants to tell rural Americans that they don't need faster internet or increased internet access. I believe that Congress, the Department of Agriculture and the FCC should expand access to high-speed internet to everyone, not tell rural America its current marginal service is good enough.

Ron Wyden is the senior U.S. senator for Oregon.



OTHER VIEWS

Trump, trade and tantrums

MEXICO CITY — Everyone here wants to know what's going to happen to NAFTA — the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has closely linked the economies of Mexico, Canada and the United States for more than two decades. President Donald Trump has described NAFTA as the "worst trade deal ever made." But will he actually destroy it?



PAUL KRUGMAN
Comment

Until just a few days ago I was pretty sure that he wouldn't. My guess was that he would negotiate some minor changes to the agreement, declare victory and move on. Markets seemed to agree: The Mexican peso plunged after Trump's election but then rebounded, effectively reaching the verdict that nothing terrible would happen.

But I've been revising that view in light of recent events — especially Trump's health care temper tantrum. Breaking up NAFTA would be terrible for Mexico and bad for the U.S. It would horrify major U.S. business interests, which have spent two decades building their competitive strategies around an integrated North American market. But it might be good for Trump's fragile ego. And that's a reason to fear the worst.

Let's start by admitting that NAFTA, although it led to rapid growth in both Mexican exports to the U.S. and U.S. exports to Mexico, hasn't lived up to the expectations of some of its proponents.

In 1994, when the agreement went into effect, many people hoped that it would jump-start rapid growth in the Mexican economy; it didn't. Some proponents also argued that the United States would run large surpluses in its trade with Mexico; in fact, after its 1995 financial crisis Mexico began running surpluses instead.

Furthermore, growing trade definitely hurt some U.S. workers. Some U.S. companies laid off workers and moved production to Mexico (although others added jobs to produce goods for Mexican markets, or gained a competitive advantage from the ability to purchase components from Mexican suppliers).

By any measure, the costs inflicted by NAFTA were far smaller than those created by imports from China — and these in turn were far smaller than those created by changing technology. For example, the decline in coal-mining employment — caused almost entirely by technological change — or the collapse in truckers' wages — reflecting deregulation and the collapse of union power — had nothing to do with NAFTA. Still, the trade deal caused some real pain.

But admitting this unpleasant reality has almost no bearing on the question of what to do now. NAFTA's disruptions are mostly in the rearview mirror.

We now live in a North American economy built around the reality of free trade. In particular, U.S., Canadian and Mexican

manufacturing are deeply enmeshed with one another. Many industrial plants were built precisely to take advantage of our economic integration, buying from or selling to other industrial plants across the borders.

As a result, breaking up or degrading NAFTA would have the same disruptive effects that came from NAFTA's creation: Plants would close, jobs would disappear, communities would lose their livelihoods. And, yes, many businesses, small, large and in some cases huge, would lose many billions of dollars.

Oh, and it's not just manufacturing. What do you think would happen to the farmers of Iowa if they lost one of the most important markets for their corn?

So what I and others have been assuming is that these realities would stay Trump's hand. No matter how ignorant he may be about the realities of North American trade, we assumed that he would in the end balk at alienating big businesses and big money.

But now I'm not so sure.

For one thing, NAFTA negotiations are going very badly. America's demands — requiring renewal every five years, taking away the ability of businesses to appeal government actions — would undermine the predictability, the assurance of future market access, that was the trade agreement's main point.

Meanwhile, documents leaked to The Washington Post show key administration advisers attributing virtually every social ill, from spousal abuse to divorce, to the loss of manufacturing jobs — and we know that the administration, wrongly, believes that trade treaties are the cause of those job losses.

Most important, look at what Trump has been doing with his open, indeed gleeful sabotage of the U.S. health care system. Never mind the huge human costs he's imposing; he isn't even following any plausible political strategy, since he and his party are likely, with good reason, to be blamed for the damage. Furthermore, his actions will cost big businesses — insurers and health providers — billions; he's even boasting about how much he has hurt their stock prices.

So we've now seen Trump deliberately hurt millions of people and inflict billions of losses on a major industry out of sheer spite. If he's willing to do that on health care, why assume he won't do the same thing on international trade policy?

NAFTA, then, is at real risk. And if it does get destroyed, the only question is whether the consequences will be ugly, or extremely ugly.

Paul Krugman joined The New York Times in 1999 as a columnist on the Op-Ed Page and continues as professor of Economics and International Affairs at Princeton University.



LETTERS POLICY

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