

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Let's help each other cope with the perils of aging

America's growing population of older people is often in the news. Nationwide, an estimated 10,000 Baby Boomers retire every day. And although many have years of good life ahead, there's no getting around the fact that eventually we all need an increasing level of assistance. Since different generations of families often now live far apart, there is more need for locally provided aid, especially in relatively isolated areas like ours.

Physical isolation is a fact of life in rural America. The percentage of Umatilla and Morrow County residents living alone increased considerably from 1990 to 2010, when the last formal census was conducted. And the percentage of people 65 and older jumped by more than 11 percent in Umatilla County from 2000 to 2010 alone.

### People power

As we consider our aging population, especially those who become afflicted with dementia and/or Alzheimer's, we know some who are fortunate to have a robust and caring group of friends. This undoubtedly helps people remain independent at an age when others might have been forced to move in with family or seek a professional care setting. Neither option is easy. What used to be called "old folks homes" are few and far between, victims of a changing labor market, more stringent regulations and other factors. At the same time, a lot of seniors are understandably reluctant to leave familiar and well-loved settings. Few want institutional care or to inconvenience family members.

Rural places — including much of Eastern Oregon — have to do an ever-better job of creating and supporting informal networks of people to watch out for one another. Faced with astronomical increases in elder-care costs, governments at every level must support such hometown efforts by adding visiting nurses, coordinators, mentors and

trainers. Ensuring that most seniors remain safe and content in their own homes will be expensive, but might be only a small fraction of what institutional care could total.

### Emergency response

There are strengths and weaknesses to the "Silver Alerts," which are issued for people who are older than 60, suffering from dementia, and known to be driving. When a vulnerable adult goes missing, local police can choose to alert state authorities. Alerts can then be shared between law enforcement agencies, the media and citizens who have signed up for notifications.

Yet its main tools — illuminated signs on highway overpasses and text messages to cellphones — aren't adapted to sparsely populated areas. At best, perhaps issuing an alert can inspire more intense on-the-ground efforts near a missing person's home. Volunteer search and rescue groups might be key in some future local lost-person case. It's possible to imagine a phone-tree system that would essentially create a posse to fan out and walk every trail and road looking for clues to the missing person.

### Planning and prevention

Planning and coordination in the early stages can prevent tragedy later on. Relatives should make sure friends, neighbors and church members know whom to contact in an emergency involving a person whose memory is lapsing. It's also helpful to have people check in on a consistent, predictable schedule.

ID bracelets and GPS navigation devices for affected people who are still driving can make relocating and identifying them much more likely.

As a society, we must not try to pretend these issues won't become more common in the years just ahead. Ours is a place with a proud tradition of self-help, but that doesn't mean we should allow anyone to be forgotten or go without the care they obviously need.



Florida Department of Elder Affairs

The Silver Alert program is more useful for finding missing senior citizens in urban areas, where signs can reach many motorists, than in rural areas like ours.

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.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Starkey wolf killing needs thorough investigation

The wolf shot and killed near Starkey Experimental Station Nov. 2 deserved a thorough investigation before Union County's District Attorney gave the story any credence. The hunter's claim of self-defense goes against all science regarding wolf behavior in North America. These facts should have triggered serious skepticism and a thorough investigation before conclusions were drawn.

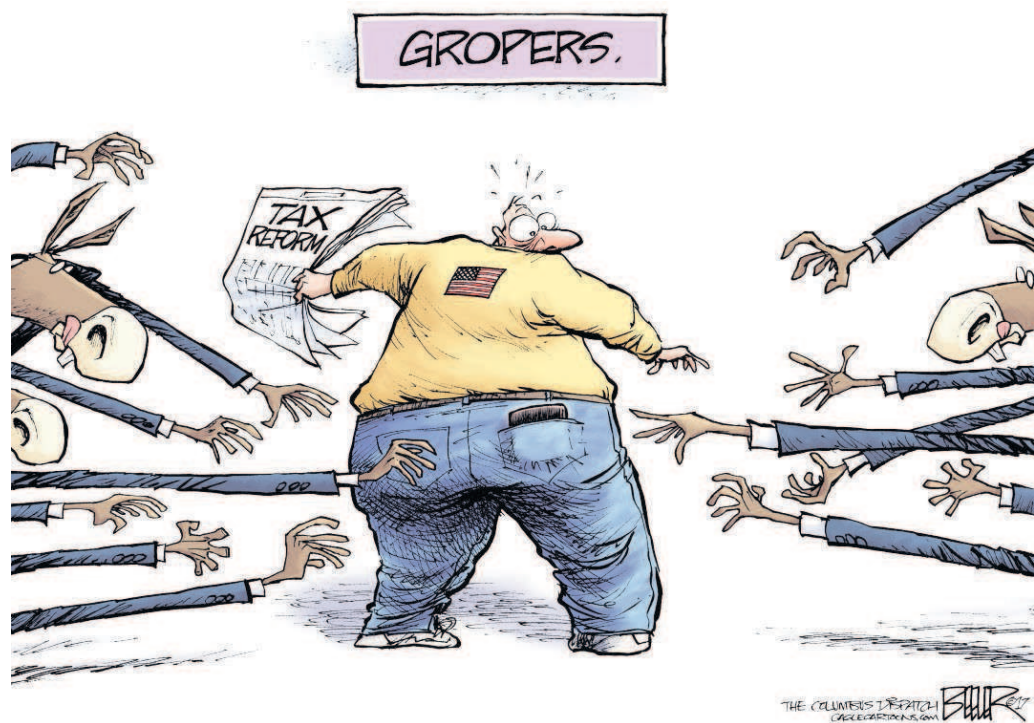
Giving this hunter what appears to be a pass sends the wrong message to everyone. Little Red Riding Hood and the three little pigs are wrong. Now that wolves are being given a second chance around the West there is a need to educate the public, not perpetuate false fears.

The greatest danger to human safety during hunting season is hunters themselves. There are numerous incidents annually of hunters killing or injuring themselves or innocent bystanders. The Starkey wolf was as innocent as the woman in Maine shot and killed Nov. 3 by a hunter while walking on her own property.

The hunter's story about being attacked by a wolf has to be rescinded and replaced with factual, scientific information about wolf and human interactions. In nature, wolves do not attack humans.

The wolf situation is rough enough with rancher issues about predation. This shooting must be readdressed to bring some truth and justice to this tragic killing.

Mary McCracken  
La Grande



## OTHER VIEWS

# America is now an outlier on driving deaths

This week, millions of Americans will climb into their cars to visit family. Unfortunately, they will have to travel on the most dangerous roads in the industrialized world.

It didn't used to be this way. A generation ago, driving in the United States was relatively safe. Fatality rates here in 1990 were roughly 10 percent lower than in Canada and Australia, two other affluent nations with a lot of open road.

Over the last few decades, however, other countries have embarked on evidence-based campaigns to reduce vehicle crashes. The United States has not. The fatality rate has still fallen here, thanks partly to safer vehicles, but it's fallen far less than anywhere else.

As a result, this country has turned into a disturbing outlier. Our vehicle fatality rate is about 40 percent higher than Canada's or Australia's. The comparison with Slovenia is embarrassing. In 1990, its death rate was more than five times as high as ours. Today, the Slovenians have safer roads.

If you find statistics abstract, you can instead read the heart-rending stories. Erin Kaplan, a 39-year-old mother in Ashburn, Virginia, was killed in a September crash that also seriously injured her three teenage children. They and their father are now heroically trying to put their lives back together, as *The Washington Post* has detailed.

Had the United States kept pace with the rest of the world, about 10,000 fewer Americans each year — or almost 30 every day — would be killed. Instead, more people die in crashes than from gun violence. Many of the victims, like Erin Kaplan, were young and healthy.

I was unaware of this country's newfound outlier status until I recently started reporting on the rise of driverless cars. I've become convinced they represent one of the biggest changes in day-to-day life that most of us will experience. Within a decade, car travel will be fundamentally altered. "This is every bit as big a change as when the first car came off the assembly line," Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan told me.

Many people remain afraid of driverless



DAVID LEONHARDT  
Comment

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cars, because trusting your life to a computer — allowing it to hurtle you down a highway — can feel a little crazy. But the status quo is crazier, and the rest of the world refuses to accept it.

We don't need to wait for the arrival of futuristic self-driving machines to do better. Other countries have systematically analyzed the main causes of crashes and then gone after them, one by one. Canada started a national campaign in 1996.

"The overwhelming factor is speed," says Leonard Evans, an automotive researcher.

Small differences in speed cause large differences in harm. Other countries tend to have lower speed limits (despite the famous German autobahn) and more speed cameras. Install enough cameras, and speeding really will decline.

But it's not just speed. Seat belt use is also more common elsewhere: One in seven American drivers still don't use one. In other countries, 16-year-olds often aren't allowed to drive. And "buzzed driving" tends to be considered drunken driving.

Here, only heavily Mormon Utah has moved toward a sensible threshold, and the liquor and restaurant lobbies are trying to stop it.

The political problem with all of these steps, of course, is that they restrict freedom, and we Americans like freedom. To me, the freedom to have a third beer before getting behind the wheel — or to drive 15 mph above the limit — is not worth 30 lives a day. But I recognize that not everyone sees it this way.

Which is part of the reason I'm so excited about driverless technology. It will let us overcome self-destructive behavior, without having to change a lot of laws. A few years from now, sophisticated crash-avoidance systems will probably be the norm. Cars will use computers and cameras to avoid other objects. And the United States will stand to benefit much more than the rest of the industrialized world.

Until then, be careful out there.

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

## OTHER VIEWS

# Farmers, ranchers need NAFTA

Lincoln (Neb.) Journal Star

With the fifth round of negotiations on the North American Free Trade Agreement set to begin Thursday, Nebraskans whose livelihoods are in or tied to agriculture have reason to be nervous.

Uncertainty surrounding the fate of the pact between the United States, Canada and Mexico — from which President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to withdraw, possibly as a last-ditch bargaining chip — has caused Mexican buyers to begin searching for other sources in case they lose access to the American producers they've long trusted.

If Trump truly wants to put America first, as he reiterated during his recent visit to Asia, he'd be best served by doing so in a manner that protects the financial interests of America's farmers and ranchers, whose output benefits the country as a whole — particularly at a time of strain in their industry.

Canada and Mexico have been the biggest customers of American farm commodities, with *The Washington Post* reporting agricultural exports more than quadrupled from \$8.9 billion in 1993 to \$38.1 billion in 2016.

For as much as Trump frets about and equates a trade deficit as being unfair, giving short shrift to agriculture would only compound matters. Nebraska alone recorded a \$2.8 billion trade surplus in 2016, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, with \$6.4 billion in goods exported — more than

half sold to Canada and Mexico — compared to \$3.6 billion in imports.

Without the market access that currently exists for Canada and Mexico, the current slump in U.S. agriculture would be even worse. High supply has depressed commodity prices;

NAFTA has served a critical role in mitigating it, at least somewhat, by making it easy to export within the continent.

And, in a state where agriculture supports one in four jobs, the timing to potentially pull the rug out from the leading industry couldn't be worse.

Nebraska's personal income has declined by 0.3 percent through the first two quarters of 2017, according to the Pew Charitable Trusts. The country as a whole, meanwhile, has seen 1.3 percent growth in that time. Among the 10 states to see declines, seven are in the central U.S.; Colorado and Missouri are the only states bordering Nebraska to report growth.

This spring, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue convinced Trump not to withdraw from NAFTA by showing him an editorial map, Politico reported. With farm and ranch country being among the president's most loyal strongholds, a move to leave the pact could endanger the livelihoods of many who supported Trump.

With only two more rounds of negotiations scheduled, the upcoming meeting carries significant weight for Nebraska and the Midwest — and the president must heed their concerns about the potential damage a senseless exit would do to agriculture.

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