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KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

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OUR VIEW

Oregon must protect its ag zoning rules

A land use fight is shaping up in Southern Oregon's Douglas County that pits the broader interests of agriculture against the interests of urban developers — and perhaps the interests of specific land owners who might want to sell.

Douglas County commissioners are considering changing the designation of nearly 35,000 acres in farm and forest zones to “non-resource transitional lands.” That would allow up to 2,300 20-acre home sites to be carved out of land now reserved for agriculture and timber harvests.

According to the county, the sites are of low quality for commercial farm production and taken together represent only about 1 percent of farm and forestland in the county.

They speculate that no more than half the lots would ever be developed.

The county contends that current zoning doesn't support the demand for “rural lifestyle” dwellings.

It's unclear who is clamoring for these types of properties, but it's a safe bet there would be demand from wealthy retirees and out-of-towners looking for vacation properties to take advantage of the area's good weather and scenic beauty.

Not so fast. State land use regulators and farmland preservation advocates are concerned by the proposal.

Advocates at 1,000 Friends of Oregon say the county hasn't proven the need for more rural housing stock and is pulling a fast one by misapplying authority it's granted under Oregon's land use laws to meet its objectives.

Oregon's Department of Land Conservation and Development

shares some of the group's concerns.

As in many of these land use issues, we are conflicted.

We have always maintained that private property owners should generally be allowed to use their land for the purpose that provides the highest return. For an owner, land suited for only marginal crop production might well be worth more as a “rural lifestyle” dwelling.

At the same time, we know that once truly productive farmland is used for something other than farming, the soil is often lost forever to agricultural production. Significant loss

of production leads to a loss of infrastructure that supports farming — storage, processing, packing, transportation. And that hurts farmers with otherwise viable operations.

We haven't heard much from the people who own the land, which is scattered around the various cities in the county. That could explain the county's low estimate of just how much of this land could ever go on the block.

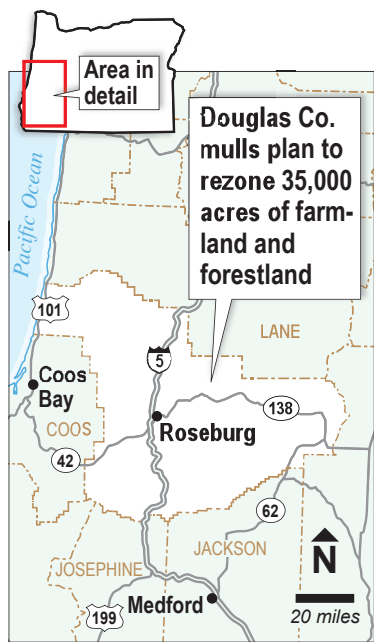
Willing buyers need willing sellers.

Indications are good that this dispute will end up with the state Land Use Board of Appeals.

We'd like to know, on a plot-by-plot basis, the true productive potential of the land. Is any of it improperly categorized?

That question is moot if the county is exceeding its authority.

Anyone hoping to pull up stakes in favor of a prime “rural lifestyle” dwelling — perhaps someday here in Eastern Oregon — will have to wait for these issues to be resolved.



Douglas Co. mulls plan to rezone 35,000 acres of farmland and forestland

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

9 million children need Congress to act on CHIP

The (Rochester, Minn.) Post Bulletin

There's a tendency, whenever Congress isn't doing what we personally would like it to do, to say that the honorables have their priorities mixed up.

But when it comes to funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program, which provides medical care for about 9 million children through Medicaid and other programs, we can say without fear of hyperbole that Congress indeed has its priorities messed up.

In the race to come up with a tax cut plan that lards gifts primarily on corporations and the wealthy, Congress is dragging its feet on renewing funding for a program that benefits the most vulnerable among us.

CHIP provides health coverage for 8.9 million children whose families don't qualify for Medicaid but can't afford insurance. The program is administered by the individual states, several of which are now on the verge of running out of money. That's because the current round of funding for the program, which costs \$16 billion a year, expired Sept. 30 and Congress hasn't gotten around to passing an extension.

Some senators and House members have given lip service to renewing it, but nothing has happened yet.

Among the states hardest hit is

Minnesota, which ran out of CHIP money last month and is keeping it going with state money. Oregon and Colorado will be the next to run out.

Lawmakers from both parties say they intend to pass an extension. But some Republicans want to tie it to an Obamacare repeal or other issues.

Failing that, they warn, an extension for CHIP might have to wait until early 2018.

The United States already trails many other western countries when it comes to children's health. Infant mortality rates are as much as 42 percent higher in the U.S. than in comparable developed countries. Early neo-natal deaths are as much as 66 percent higher, according to the Peterson-Kaiser Health System Tracker. And among 17 developed countries, a 2013 study found that American children are more at risk of dying before age 5 than children elsewhere.

Clearly, we've failed our children too many times in too many ways. Dragging out or, even worse, abandoning CHIP funding is just the latest example. It's an especially egregious oversight in this season of celebrating the birth of a child who changed the world.

It's not too late, and it's the perfect season, for Congress to change course and put CHIP funding, and our children, at the top of the list of year-end priorities.

Infant mortality rates are 42 percent higher in the U.S. than in comparable developed countries.



OTHER VIEWS

The 2017 Sidney Awards, part one

Those of us on the Decision Desk of the Sidney Awards faced a moral dilemma. Could we give a Sidney to an essay the title of which we couldn't quote in a family newspaper? We decided that our mission, celebrating the year's best long-form journalism, is more important than the staid and stifling morality of a patriarchal bourgeois neoliberal society.

So the first Sidney goes to Thomas Golianopoulos' essay “(Expletive) That Gator” from BuzzFeed. The essay is nominally about the death of Tommie Woodward. He was out drinking beers at his local bar in Orange, Texas, when he decided to take a swim in the nearby bayou. Somebody warned him that a large gator had been seen in it days before. He shouted out the exclamation that is the title of this article, jumped in the bayou and was promptly killed by said gator.

But the piece is really an engaging description of a slice of American life that, when it is described at all, is usually done so in a patronizing anthropological manner. Tommie and his surviving twin, Brian, were manual laborers who went through life working hard, partying hard and doing crazy stuff. Brian worked in a shipyard and now installs air-conditioners and likes eating odd things. “You've ever eaten cat?” he asks. There was a big stray cat that kept hanging around bothering him so he killed and barbecued it. How'd it taste? “Oily, man. Oily.”

Golianopoulos beautifully captures the culture of the bar where the Woodwards hung out. Brian's grief and a part of the country where people are fully eccentric and know how to take care of things on their own.

For demographic consistency, I'm moving next to Christopher Caldwell's essay “American Carnage” in First Things. Caldwell writes one of the most comprehensive depictions of the opioid crisis. He captures how alluring the drugs are. “If a heroin addict sees on the news that a user or two has died from an overly strong batch of heroin in some housing project somewhere, his first thought is, ‘Where is that? That's the stuff I want.’” Caldwell explains how the crisis has touched even the small elements of life. Addicts need to make money to feed their habit. “Some neighborhood bodegas — the addicts know which ones — will pay 50 cents on the dollar for anything stolen from CVS. That is why razor blades, printer cartridges and other expensive portable items are now kept under lock and key.”

At this point I'll pause to recognize the two monster essays of the year. Alex Tizon's “My Family's Slave” in The Atlantic occupied readers' time more than any other piece of English-language journalism on the internet this year. It's about a woman who worked as a slave in modern America. When Tizon's mother was a girl she spoke to a boy her father



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

disapproved of. Her father announced she would have to take a beating as punishment. She told her father that Lola, the family slave, would take it for her. Lola silently stepped forward: “Tom raised the belt and delivered 12 lashes, punctuating each one with a word. You. Do. Not. Lie. To. Me.” Lola made no sound.

The other monster essay is Ronan Farrow's portrait of Harvey Weinstein's victims in The New Yorker that, together with Jodi Kantor and Megan

Twohey's work for *The New York Times*, sparked this national re-norming. Farrow's piece is marked by its understated directness. “I just sort of gave up,” one woman told him, describing what it felt like as Weinstein forced sex upon her. “That's the most horrible part of it, and that's why he's been able to do this for so long to so many women: People give up, and then they feel like it's their fault.”

I can't stop telling people about the factoids I learned from Amia Srinivasan's book review essay “The Sucker, the Sucker!” in The London Review of Books about the

personality of octopuses. An octopus' arms have more neurons than its brain, so each arm can taste and smell on its own and exhibit short-term memory. An octopus can change color to mimic other animals, but it cannot itself see color. So

how does it know which color to change into? Good question.

Octopuses are curious but sometimes ornery. When researchers tried to train an octopus to pull a lever to get food, the octopus kept breaking off the lever. Octopuses try hard to escape from captivity, waiting for those moments when they aren't being watched. One octopus persistently shot jets of water at the nearby aquarium light bulbs, repeatedly short-circuiting the electricity supply until it was finally released into the wild.

Lastly, Gary Saul Morson's essay “Solzhenitsyn's Cathedrals” in The New Criterion takes us back to one of the greatest minds of the 20th century. Morson shows how spiritually ambitious Alexander Solzhenitsyn was. “Once you give up survival at any price, then imprisonment begins to transform your former character in astonishing ways,” Morson writes, quoting Solzhenitsyn. It teaches friendship. You learn the most valuable thing is “the development of the soul.” And so Solzhenitsyn concluded, “Bless you, prison, for having been in my life.”

The second batch of Sidneys will be out on Friday — a child-friendly edition, sans expletives.

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

Defeat Greg Walden in 2018

As the new year arrives it is time that we took a look at who is representing us in Washington, D.C., from the Second Congressional District.

It is totally apparent that U.S. Rep. Greg Walden is about as out of touch with his constituents as any representative from this district has ever been. He votes to end the Affordable Health Care Act, then he votes for the biggest tax reform bill in history (which won't help most of his district), and when it comes to helping the vets he could care less.

Ladies and gentlemen, is that the kind of representation we want in Washington, D.C.? I sure believe we can do better.

Recently Rep. Walden was invited to hear the concerns of a group of volunteer veterans advocates from all over the U.S. when they were in the Rayburn Building holding a forum on vets' issues, and never bothered to send a representative or show up himself. That told me he could care less about the vet and

his or her problems. When spending for vets issues is one of the biggest bills in the Defense Department's budget, I would think that Rep. Walden would at least have the common decency to send someone from his office to listen and take notes. But no, he couldn't be bothered, and yes, he knew 6-8 weeks in advance that the meeting was taking place.

I personally have dealt with Rep. Walden's office and found that they could care less if they helped or not. I believe it's time to send Walden packing like we did Gordon Smith and get someone to represent us in Washington, D.C., who isn't afraid to ruffle feathers and make waves if it helps someone in their district.

Whether you vote for Jim Cray or Tim White or one of the others, it's time to tell Greg Walden: “You're through. Pack up and go home.” We need someone in Washington, D.C., that represents rural Oregon, not his big campaign contributors.

Barbara Wright Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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