

You can get here from anywhere

Are you famous?" a fourth-grade boy once asked the poet Naomi Shihab Nye. ("The river is famous to the fish!" she would respond.) Every Northwest writer we invite to read at Pendleton Center for the Arts' First Draft Writers' Series has received recognition for their work. But the most "famous" writer to visit First Draft has been Ursula K. Le Guin, recipient of the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters at the 2014 National Book Awards — where she graciously accepted the award for her "fellow authors of fantasy and science fiction, writers of the imagination." When she died last month in Portland at the age of 88, tributes poured in from all over the world. Her loss is most painful for her family and for those who grieve her as a beloved friend. How did I, who am not famous at all, ever become one of these? I can't remember why my friend and fellow BMCC English instructor needed a ride to Portland, but I remember lying on the hide-a-bed Caroline Le Guin had made up for me in her parents' TV room that night and realizing that all the books on the bookcase shelf beside me — the full length of my body — had been written by her mother. It felt like swallowing the sky. I had read some of them — I especially

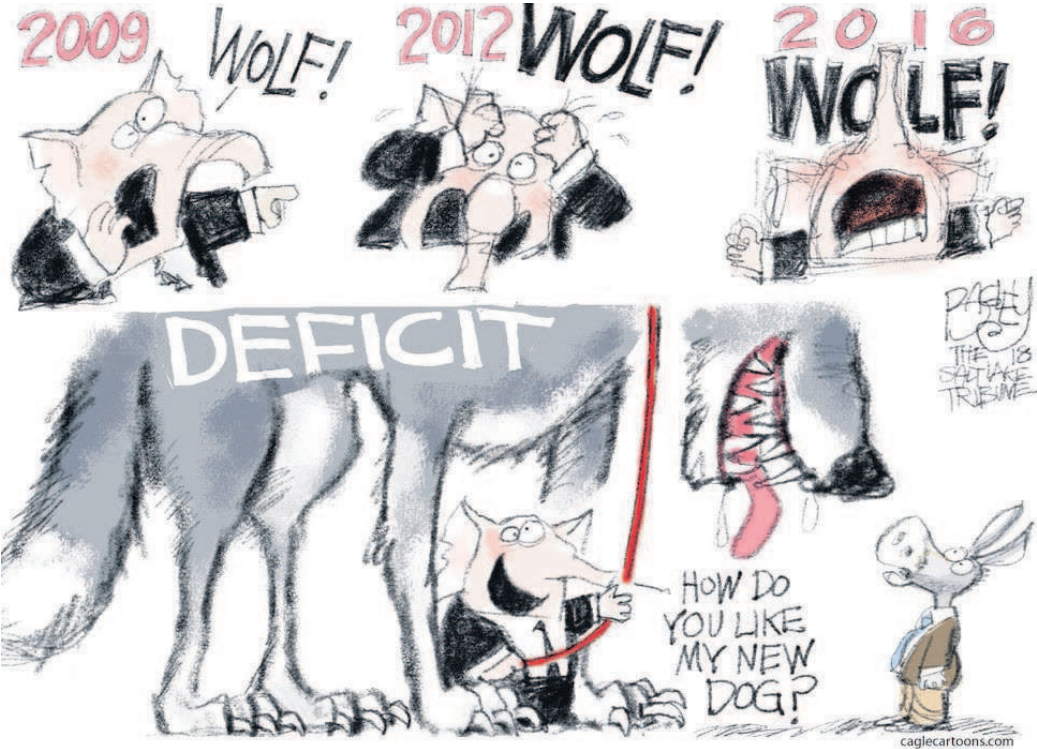
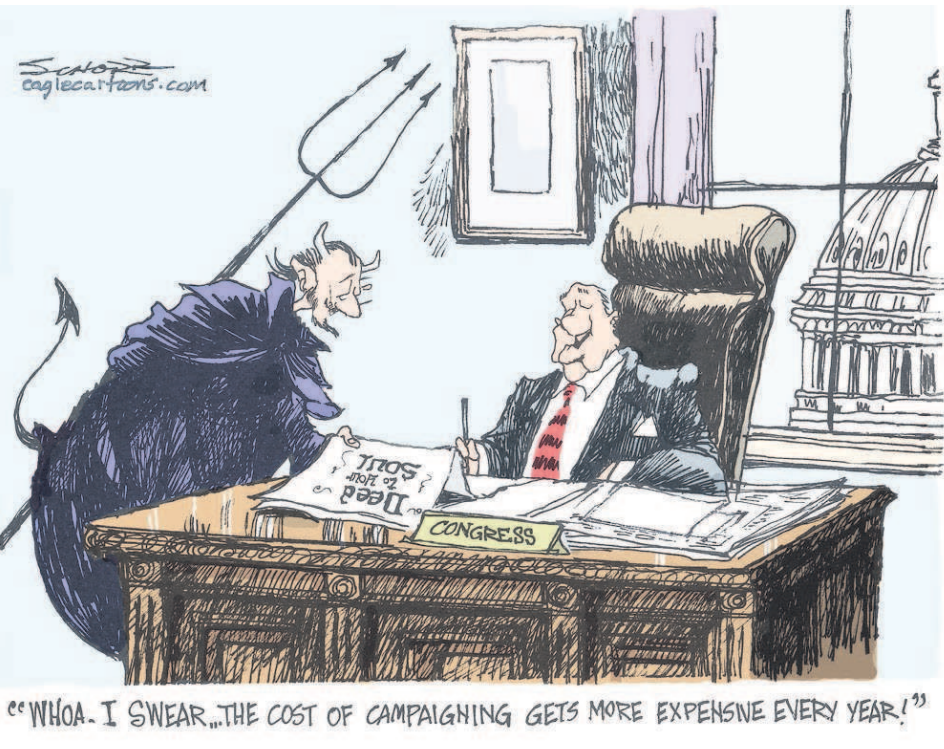
loved the essays, which always set my mind reeling, and her translation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching — and I had shared a few of Ursula's stories in my own classroom. What teacher hasn't read "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas?" But I wasn't a worshipful fan; in fact, I was one of those stubborn unfortunates who thought I didn't like science fiction. Measuring along that bookshelf, I had barely read from my head to my throat. A few years later, Caroline and I were invited to join a poetry workshop group in Portland. We would meet once a month with Ursula and others, critiquing our responses to writing assignments. Could we imagine such an opportunity? We could, and it was wonderful. Some members of this group have been meeting now for nearly 15 years, sharing meals and an annual summer retreat where Ursula sat on Jeannette's side porch sketching the big maple tree and watching the stars come out. And of course we have become friends. Will I ever be able to explain such good fortune? Sometimes blessings fall like rain from a clear sky. So this is why I got to accompany Ursula to a performance of "The Left Hand of Darkness" when Portland Playhouse

and Hand2Mouth Theater adapted her powerful novel to the stage. By this time I had realized that the science in her science fiction isn't "robots and laser guns," as Molly Gloss told OPB last month, but anthropology, psychology. Philosophy. She asks us to imagine new ideas and question old ones as she leads us word by word toward deeper, richer lives. "We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable — but then, so did the divine right of kings," she told the National Book Award audience. Watching her that night on my computer's live stream, I stood up, my heart pounding. We need books, art, for reasons beyond profit, she was insisting. "Hard times are coming, when we'll be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine real grounds for hope." Grounds for hope: her gift to all of us. Because she loved Eastern Oregon and especially Harney County, when she came to First Draft Ursula and photographer Roger Dorband shared photos and poems from their book "Out Here." It's a stunning book — you can find it in our library — from a stunning landscape. "You can get anywhere from here," I once heard someone say in Harney County. Or here from anywhere, Ursula might suggest. Use your imagination. Like countless others, I've been reading



BETTE HUSTED FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

and rereading the books Ursula left us. I've finally reached the level of my heart, but even if I have enough years left to read to all my length, that's where she will remain. ■ *Bette Husted is a writer and a student of T'ai Chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.*



Soaring firefighting costs limit funds for other important work

Across the nation, the 2017 wildfire season was unprecedented in terms of dollars spent, acres burned, and the increased duration of wildfires. Even now, months later, we're still feeling the impacts from these fires, especially financially. As wildfires grow more severe — and costly — the USDA Forest Service is struggling to adequately fund projects that are important to our communities because of soaring firefighting costs. Each year, firefighting costs consume more and more of the USDA Forest Service's budget. In 1995, firefighting costs accounted for 15 percent of the Forest Service budget. In 2017, it was 57 percent. At the rate things are going, firefighting will consume 67 percent of our budget by 2021. This means less money for other priority USDA Forest Service programs and services, including recreation, visitor services, and much-needed fire prevention work that reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfires in the first place. The Forest Service is the only federal agency that is required to fund its entire emergency management program through its regular appropriations. This includes wildfires that are truly natural disasters — lightning starts rapidly driven by wind that burn faster and more intensely than firefighters can control. In the Pacific Northwest, this funding model means that projects designed to actually decrease the severity of wildfire are being delayed, deferred maintenance is growing for recreation sites and critical infrastructure, and damaged roads from fire or storms are going unrepaired. This may mean that trails at campgrounds goes unemptied, toilets uncleaned, and we are forced to make hard decisions on whether we can safely keep roads and recreation sites open. The funding challenges directly impact our ability to provide excellent and safe visitor experiences. With an enhancement to the way wildfire suppression efforts are funded in the Blue Mountains, the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests could focus funding



STEVE BEVERLIN
Comment



A helicopter drops a load of Thermo-Gel on the leading edge of the 970-acre Vinegar Fire on Tuesday, Aug. 20, 2013 near the small town of Greenhorn.

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on managing the land toward more resilient conditions by completing important restoration and thinning projects, such as implementation of some of our recently completed projects including the Malheur Ten Year Stewardship Contract, the Ten Cent Community Wildfire Protection Project and the Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project. Additionally, we could focus on opportunities to increase the pace and scale of restoration in those watersheds that have been identified as most at risk to wildfires

and insect and disease outbreaks. USDA is dedicated to fostering the productive and sustainable use of your national forests and grasslands. If you can't use and enjoy your public lands to the fullest, that's a problem. While the Forest Service is working more closely with partners and volunteers to leverage resources and accomplish more than we could by ourselves, our current fiscal path is simply unsustainable. We deeply appreciate the ongoing work of Congress to pass new legislation to reform the way wildfire suppression is funded. A commonsense approach would let us get back to the work we care about most — meeting the many different needs of the communities we serve, for the benefit of generations to come. ■ *Steve Beverlin is the forest supervisor for the Malheur National Forest, Jeff Tomac is the acting forest supervisor for the Umatilla National Forest and Tom Montoya is the forest supervisor for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.*

Don't ration Medicaid

The Eugene Register-Guard, Feb. 7

A proposal by the Trump administration to impose lifetime limits on adults' access to Medicaid coverage is a recipe for disaster. Medicaid, which is a joint state and federal program, provides health care coverage to low-income and disabled people. Recipients are the working poor, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. They have no other option for adequate care. Oregon's Medicaid program, which is called the Oregon Health Plan, covers about 1 million people, 40 percent of whom are children. (Eligibility for Medicaid is highest among children and pregnant women in Oregon.) Another 17 percent of the people receiving Medicaid are elderly and disabled. They account for a disproportionate share of Medicaid costs — 41 percent, according to a study by the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation. The vast majority of people receiving Medicaid in Oregon are the working poor. Eighty-one percent of the people on the Oregon Health Plan are in families with at least one member who is working. These families just don't have access to health care through an employer and can't afford to buy it on the private market. Cutting off Medicaid at an arbitrary limit would result in a sentence of suffering, and potentially a shortened life span, for people whose only crime is to be ill and poor. Some with serious ailments or injuries would no doubt show up in emergency rooms in search of relief, as was more common in the past, creating the double negative of increasing health care costs for everyone while depriving these patients of the comprehensive care they need to become, or stay, healthy. Setting aside the sheer inhumanity of this, it makes no economic sense. People who have no health care coverage and so resort to hospital emergency rooms as their only recourse impose higher costs upon hospitals. By extension, other patients see increased charges for the services they receive, and insurance premiums go up as a result. Rising health care costs are a problem — locally, statewide and nationally. There have been increasing calls for a complete overhaul of the U.S. health care system to contain costs and improve service, including growing support for some sort of single-payer system, which has problems of its own. There also have been some problems that need to be cleaned up. For example, Oregon found last year that tens of thousands of people who were not eligible for Medicaid, or were no longer eligible, were receiving it. This needs to be dealt with, quickly. But rationing health care to the most vulnerable Americans — primarily poor people with chronic disabilities and illnesses that require expensive care — is not the way to reform health care. It raises the specter of citizens of one of the richest countries in the world growing sicker, or suffering from worsening disabilities, even dying, because their government says they have reached the limit of their health care benefits.