

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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Tip of the hat, kick in the pants



A tip of the hat to a bill before the U.S. Senate that would legalize hemp.

The bipartisan bill — spearheaded by Oregon Democratic senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden along with Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), is known as the Hemp Farming Act of 2018. It would legalize and clearly define hemp as an agricultural commodity and remove it from the list of controlled substances.

This is long overdue — hemp has no intoxicating agents and has a long list of uses in agriculture and manufacturing. It could be a benefit to farmers and entrepreneurs right here in Eastern Oregon.

The legislation would also give states the opportunity to become the primary regulators of hemp, allow hemp researchers to apply for competitive federal grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and make hemp farmers eligible to apply for crop insurance. These are the important steps that kept hemp from being studied and utilized while it was on the list of controlled substances.

And as more Republicans join the growing majority of Americans who support legalizing hemp and marijuana, Oregon will once again be a trailblazer

(cough, cough) in a growing industry.

A kick in the pants to a continued stretch of fatal traffic accidents in our area.

Two people died in accidents in a close radius outside Stanfield this week, one killed while she was trying to cross Interstate 84 in the early morning light. Another man was killed while running across Highway 101 on the coast this week. And a crash Thursday on Interstate 84 near Deadman's Pass closed part of the highway for much of the morning.

These are terrible accidents, resulting in death and destruction. And they are much too common.

We're elated by the multi-million dollar plan to make the stretch of interstate between Pendleton and La Grande a safer route of travel. It's long overdue. Better lighting, better messaging, better snow and ice technology, better infrastructure that keeps out-of-control vehicles from crossing the medians — these are all ways to reduce collisions and death.

But as we've tried to say, much of the responsibility lies with us. Some accidents cannot be helped, but we should do everything in our power to



In this 2016 photo, Dan Dolgin, left, and Mark Justh examine seeds from hemp plants on their JD Farms in Eaton, N.Y. The crop is the first legal hemp harvested in the state in a pilot program that's part of a national resurgence of the hemp industry.

AP Photo/Mary Esch

focus on the job at hand when we are behind the wheel or near a roadway. Our lives, and the lives of others, depend on it.

A tip of the hat to the "text to 911" service now available in Umatilla County.

Texting has become the critical way of communication via cell phones, and it is helpful for people who cannot use

standard phones — either because they are in an emergency situation and that is not possible, or they are hearing or speech impaired.

Old-fashioned voice calls should remain the standard for those able to make such an action — it's the best way to get important information out quickly. But for people who cannot do so, texting is a critical alternative. We're happy local residents now have that option.



"OR... I COULD SPEND MORE TIME WITH MY OWN KIDS."

YOUR VIEWS

Idaho Power project is old technology

I own property in La Grande that is in the crosshairs of at least two of the proposed Boardman to Hemingway routes between Hilgard and Ladd Canyon. I am also a NIMBY. Initially this fueled my opposition to Boardman to Hemingway. Over the last 10 years, having taken note of advances in nascent technologies (including but not limited to storage, conservation, rooftop solar and microgrids), and the proponents' seeming aversion to them, I greatly oppose this project turning up in anyone's back yard.

At one point, the proponents told us California, having the highest mandate for renewable power sources, needed connection to this new grid. At another point they told us demand was rising. The former didn't pan out, and the latter isn't.

Preferring to build a multi-billion dollar project, instead of embracing the new innovations, seems tantamount to not switching to an AC powered grid a century ago. It also seems likely that transmission will become less problematic than previously conceived.

Pursuing this project in lieu of real modernization indicates an indifference to fish and wildlife habitat, cultural and archaeological landmarks, as well as views. Ceding stewardship of some 9,000 acres of Oregon to those who care so little about them would be more than folly.

John Williams
La Grande

Rob Collins for circuit court judge

I am writing in support of Rob Collins to be our next circuit court judge. I believe that he has the right combination of broad legal experience, judicial temperament and community involvement to be an outstanding judge.

Rob has practiced law in Pendleton

since 1981. He has represented clients in a broad cross-section of cases, both civil and criminal. He knows his way around a courtroom, and as a judge he would "hit the ground running." He has served as a pro-tem judge for many years, and is knowledgeable about courtroom procedure and Oregon law.

Rob Collins has deep roots in this community, serving on the Round-Up Board of Directors and the Oregon East Symphony, as well as many other Umatilla County activities. Having served as a judge myself, I appreciate the fact that a good trial judge is one who treats all litigants, attorneys and jurors who come into court with courtesy and respect. I believe that will be one of Rob's greatest assets as a judge — the ability to listen, and have people feel that they have truly had "their day in court."

Having known Rob Collins and his family for many years, I can vouch for his integrity, his deep knowledge of the law and his sense of fairness and justice. I would highly recommend him to you as our next circuit court judge.

Jeff Wallace, retired Circuit Court judge
The Dalles

Re-elect Larry Givens county commissioner

I encourage all Umatilla County voters to reelect Larry Givens to his fourth term as county commissioner. Mr. Givens is a practical and common sense man who has done an admirable job as commissioner. He also is highly regarded throughout the state and nation and has served as president of the Association of Oregon Counties and is a board member of the National Association of Counties.

Mr. Givens is exactly the type of commissioner we need. He patiently listens to everyone and then takes sensible actions for the betterment of all the county. I could not recommend him higher.

George Anderson
Hermiston

OTHER VIEWS

Staring down on Syria

On Saturday I took my family to have a closer look at Syria.

This was on the Golan Heights, from a roadside promontory overlooking the abandoned Syrian town of Quneitra. The border is very green at this time of year, a serene patchwork of orchards and grassland, and it was hard to impress on our kids that hell on earth was visible in the quiet distance.

But I wanted them to see it — to know that Syria is a place, not an abstraction; that the agonies of its people are near, not far; that we should not look away. Later that day, in a suburb of Damascus, Syrian forces apparently again gassed their own people.

It's fortunate for Israel that it did not bargain the Heights away during the ill-fated peace processes of the 1990s: Had it done so, the Islamic State, Hezbollah or Iran might in time have trained their guns on Israeli towns below. The strategy of withdrawal-for-peace has not been vindicated in recent years, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan or the Gaza Strip. It's a point Donald Trump obviously missed when he insisted last month on U.S. withdrawal from Syria, likely encouraging the apparent chemical attack he now threatens to punish.

As it is, the chances of a wider and bloodier war over Syria have grown in recent days. Syrian tanks and artillery have reportedly entered the demilitarized buffer zone near the Israeli border, in brazen violation of the 1974 disengagement agreement, as they prepare to sweep rebel forces from the rest of the border area. Israel did very little to deny its attack Monday on an air base used by Iran in central Syria, and Jerusalem is threatening more aggressive steps to keep Tehran from further entrenching itself militarily in its client state. The Iranians have vowed retaliation for the attack, which they are sure to make good on, probably via their proxies in Hezbollah. And tensions between Israel and Russia are at their highest point since the Cold War, in part because Israel did not notify Russia in advance of Monday's attack.

So where is the United States in all of this?

As Michael Doran pointed out in an astute *New York Times* op-ed on Tuesday, Trump seems to have violated his own ostensible rules for winning in recent days. First he promised to withdraw U.S. forces, which would eliminate what little military leverage we have with Syria (and Turkey), and then he telegraphed the kind of feckless missile strike he seems intent on carrying out sometime in the coming



BRET STEPHENS
Comment

hours or days.

But the truth about current U.S. policy is worse. For starters, there is no policy: The president and his commanding general in the Middle East, Joseph Votel, have offered flatly contradictory statements about what the U.S. intends to do in Syria. We long ago pulled the plug on supporting relatively moderate Syrian rebels fighting President Bashar Assad. And the absence of policy itself runs counter to what is supposed to be Trump's overarching goal of blunting Iran's regional ambitions and forcing a renegotiation of the nuclear deal. To adapt Churchill's line about Russia, Trump's approach to Syria is an impulse wrapped in indifference inside an incoherence. It makes Barack Obama's failed Syria policy look savvy, since at least the former president's reluctance to get involved was consonant with his overarching desire to improve relations with Tehran.

A limited missile strike that slightly degrades Assad's military capabilities will change none of this, just as last year's U.S. strike changed nothing. What could work? In a column I wrote for *The Wall Street Journal* in 2013, I argued that the U.S. should target Assad and his senior lieutenants directly in a decapitation strike, just as the U.S. attempted in Iraq in 2003, and against Osama bin Laden in 2011.

Nothing that has happened in the intervening five years has changed my view about this. If we are serious about restoring an international norm against the use of chemical weapons, then the penalty for violating the norm must be severe. And if we are serious about confronting Iran, Syria remains the most important battlefield. An extended U.S. air campaign to destroy Tehran's military assets in the country would send the message that we will not tolerate its attempt to colonize Syria and threaten its neighbors. It could also help avert the looming war on Israel's north and persuade Russia that its adventure in Syria won't pay long-term results, especially if Assad is gone.

None of this will solve Syria's problems. But it can begin to solve the problems Syria has caused for us — as a violator of moral norms, a threat to our regional allies, and an opportunity for our most dedicated enemies. There's a new national security adviser in the White House, and a final chance for American initiative in this devastated land.

Bret Stephens won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2013. He began working as a columnist at *The New York Times* in April.

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