

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

‘Undies’ demonstrate a fun way to learn science

Who says soil science can't be fun?

That appears to be at least part of the thinking behind an exercise the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service organized earlier this year. In the “Soil Your Undies” Challenge, six Eastern Oregon farmers and ranchers “planted” in their fields cotton underwear, which they left in place about four months.

When they dug up the underwear, not much remained. In fact, nearly everything was gone except the elastic bands.

That's exactly what they wanted to see.

The point of the challenge was simple, if not highly entertaining. The reason the cotton deteriorated into almost nothing was that tiny microbes had dined on it. The more active microbes there were, the less cotton remained.

Massive numbers of microbes live in healthy soil — billions of them per teaspoon. They thrive on carbon — which can be found in organic matter such as cotton underwear. If adequate amounts of organic matter are not available, the microbes go dormant. In no-till soil, microbes tend to be more active than when the soil is tilled.

Because microbial activity is an indicator of healthy soil, the challenge highlighted the fact that the microbes are doing their jobs.

Though it certainly won't replace soil tests as a way to monitor soil health, the challenge opens the door to an in-depth discussion about how farmers and ranchers can put microbes to work for them. Now that Joe McElligott and Corey Miller of Morrow County and Woody Wolfe, Joe Dawson, Alan Klages and Mark Butterfield of Wallowa County have taken the



NRCS/Capital Press

Joe McElligott, who farms dryland wheat in Morrow County, participated in the “Soil Your Undies” challenge through NRCS Oregon, burying 100 percent cotton underwear in his field to test the presence of microbes in healthy soil.

challenge, NRCS Oregon soil scientist Corey Owens hopes other farmers around the state will plant their underwear, too.

“... It's a fun way to start thinking about what's going on in the soil,” Owens said.

He is “challenging” farmers and ranchers to plant their own underwear for at least 60 days, taking “before” and “after” photos. The photos and

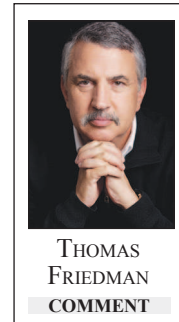
information about the farm and growing practices should then be sent via email to orinfo@nrcs.usda.gov or taken in person to any NRCS office.

But participants should be aware of a stumbling block one of the previous participants encountered. When he went back to retrieve the underwear, Butterfield couldn't find where he had planted it. The reason: one of his cows had made off with the marker.

OTHER VIEWS

Time for the GOP to threaten to fire Trump

Up to now I have not favored removing President Donald Trump from office. I felt strongly that it would be best for the country that he leave the way he came in, through the ballot box. But last week was a watershed moment for me, and I think for many Americans, including some Republicans.



THOMAS FRIEDMAN
COMMENT

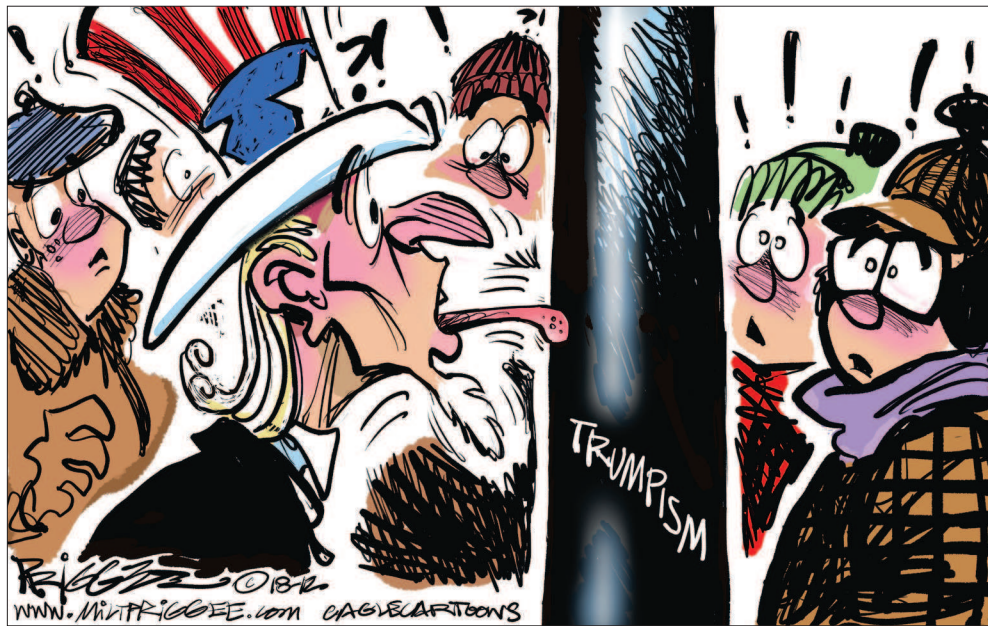
It was the moment when you had to ask whether we really can survive two more years of Trump as president, whether this man and his demented behavior — which will get only worse as the Mueller investigation concludes — are going to destabilize our country, our markets, our key institutions and, by extension, the world. And therefore his removal from office now has to be on the table.

I believe that the only responsible choice for the Republican Party today is an intervention with the president that makes clear that if there is not a radical change in how he conducts himself — and I think that is unlikely — the party's leadership will have no choice but to press for his resignation or join calls for his impeachment.

It has to start with Republicans, reflecting both the numbers needed in the Senate and political reality. Removing this president has to be an act of national unity as much as possible — otherwise it will tear the country apart even more. I know that such an action is very difficult for today's GOP, but the time is long past for it to rise to confront this crisis of American leadership.

Trump's behavior has become so erratic, his lying so persistent, his willingness to fulfill the basic functions of the presidency — like reading briefing books, consulting government experts before making major changes and appointing a competent staff — so absent, his readiness to accommodate Russia and spurn allies so disturbing and his obsession with himself and his ego over all other considerations so consistent, two more years of him in office could pose a real threat to our nation. Vice President Mike Pence could not possibly be worse.

The damage an out-of-control Trump can do goes well beyond our borders. America is the keystone of global stability. Our world



is the way it is today — a place that, despite all its problems, still enjoys more peace and prosperity than at any time in history — because America is the way it is (or at least was). And that is a nation that at its best has always stood up for the universal values of freedom and human rights, has always paid extra to stabilize the global system from which we were the biggest beneficiary and has always nurtured and protected alliances with like-minded nations.

Donald Trump has proved time and again that he knows nothing of the history or importance of this America. That was made starkly clear in Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis' resignation letter.

Trump is in the grip of a mad notion that the entire web of global institutions and alliances built after World War II — which, with all their imperfections, have provided the connective tissues that have created this unprecedented era of peace and prosperity — threatens American sovereignty and prosperity and that we are better off without them.

So Trump gloats at the troubles facing the European Union, urges Britain to exit and leaks that he'd consider quitting NATO. These are institutions that all need to be improved, but not scrapped. If America becomes a predator on all the treaties, multilateral institutions and alliances holding the world together; if America goes from being the world's anchor of stability to an

engine of instability; if America goes from a democracy built on the twin pillars of truth and trust to a country where it is acceptable for the president to attack truth and trust on a daily basis, watch out: Your kids won't just grow up in a different America. They will grow up in a different world.

The last time America disengaged from the world remotely in this manner was in the 1930s, and you remember what followed: World War II.

You have no idea how quickly institutions like NATO and the EU and the World Trade Organization and just basic global norms — like thou shalt not kill and dismember a journalist in your own consulate — can unravel when America goes AWOL or haywire under a shameless isolated president.

But this is not just about the world, it's about the minimum decorum and stability we expect from our president. If the CEO of any public company in America behaved like Trump has over the past two years — constantly lying, tossing out aides like they were Kleenex, tweeting endlessly like a teenager, ignoring the advice of experts — he or she would have been fired by the board of directors long ago. Should we expect less for our president?

The instability Trump is generating — including his attacks on the chairman of the Federal Reserve — is causing investors to wonder where the economic and geo-

political management will come from as the economy slows down. What if we're plunged into an economic crisis and we have a president whose first instinct is always to blame others and who's already purged from his side the most sober adults willing to tell him that his vaunted “gut instincts” have no grounding in economics or in law or in common sense. Mattis was the last one.

We are now left with the B team — all the people who were ready to take the jobs that Trump's first team either resigned from — because they could not countenance his lying, chaos and ignorance — or were fired from for the same reasons.

Ah, we are told, but Trump is a different kind of president. “He's a disrupter.” Well, I respect those who voted for Trump because they thought the system needed “a disrupter.” It did in some areas. I agree with Trump on the need to disrupt the status quo in U.S.-China trade relations, to rethink our presence in places like Syria and Afghanistan and to eliminate some choking regulations on business.

But too often Trump has given us disruption without any plan for what comes next. He has worked to destroy Obamacare with no plan for the morning after. He announced a pullout from Syria and Afghanistan without even consulting the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or the State Department's top expert, let alone our allies.

People wanted disruption, but too often Trump has given us destruction, distraction, debasement and sheer ignorance. Trump's biggest disruption has been to undermine the norms and values we associate with a U.S. president and U.S. leadership. And now that Trump has freed himself of all restraints from within his White House staff, his Cabinet and his party — so that “Trump can be Trump,” we are told — he is freer than ever to remake America in his image.

And what is that image? According to *The Washington Post's* latest tally, Trump has made 7,546 false or misleading claims, an average of five a day, through Dec. 20, the 700th day of his term in office. And all that was supposedly before “we let Trump be Trump.”

Thomas Friedman is a columnist for the *New York Times*.

YOUR VIEWS

Beware of Medicare scare in the mail

If you're retired and on Medicare, in recent days you may have received the same mailing that came to ours and our neighbors' houses. It states, “Your Medicare Benefits are at Risk...” on the font

page, followed by “Seniors Need Congress to STOP the Trump Medicare Plan.”

Before reaching for your phone or emailing Greg Walden as this mailing urges, find out about the organization behind the scary and vague claims — The Alliance for Patient Access (AfPA).

HealthNewsReview.org (whose tag

line is Improving Your Critical Thinking About Health Care) has investigated AfPA and found most of the non-profit organization's funding comes from drug industry companies, not physicians.

Also dig into the proposals put forward by Trump's Health and Human Services department to modify Medicare for pre-

scription drugs. AARP is a good place to start.

Health care and associated costs are a complex issue. There are no simple answers. Research before you react.

Ron Fonger
Pendleton

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