

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

CHRISTOPHER RUSH
PublisherKATHRYN B. BROWN
OwnerDANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing EditorWYATT HAUPJT JR.
News Editor

Founded October 16, 1875

OUR VIEW

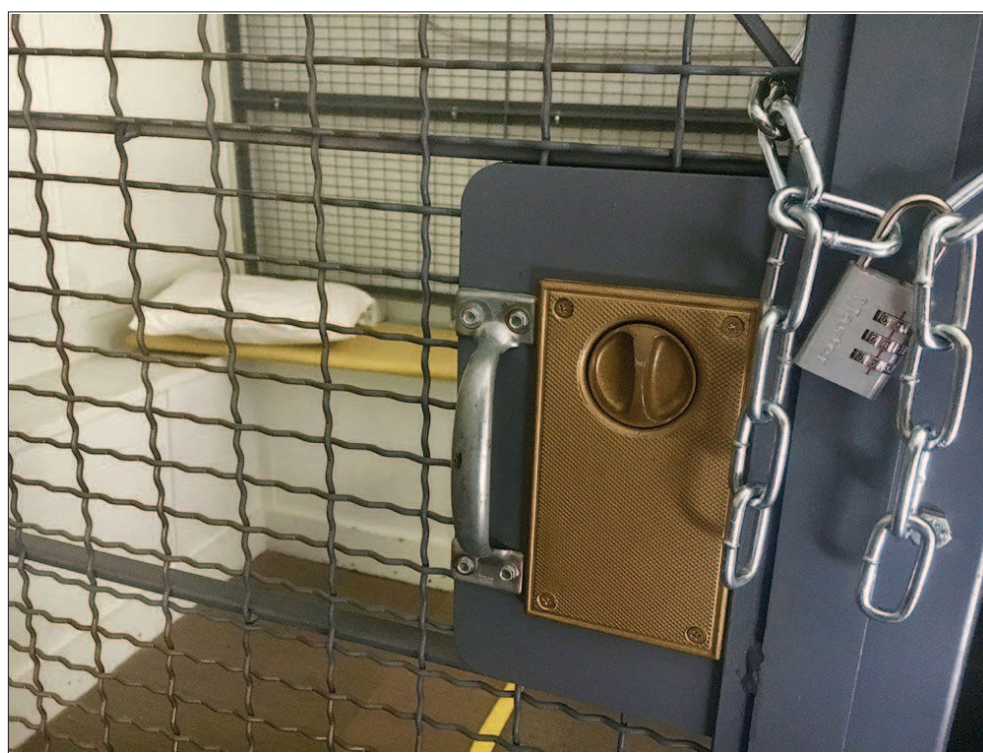
Rural response

The state of Oregon must begin grappling with the lack of reliable emergency response in its wildest and most remote places.

Cash-strapped, tax-burdened rural Oregon counties are playing host to more adventurous visitors, while their own populations age and require more medical care. Meanwhile, the tax base that supports rural emergency responders continues to decline as their economies sputter and their children moves elsewhere to find economic opportunity.

To sum up: Adventurous visitors are getting into more and more trouble, but the places where they find that trouble are having a harder and harder time providing reliable emergency response. As we reported earlier this week, Wheeler County is one of those places. With little economic activity after its logging-based economy collapsed in previous decades, Wheeler has become the least populated and fastest shrinking county in the state. And its aging population is straining the volunteer emergency responders that for generations helped support a thin professional crew of law enforcement professionals.

Those volunteer systems are beginning to collapse under the weight of state and federal regulations, heavier burdens being placed



EO Media Group/Tim Trainor

The Wheeler County Sheriff's Office evidence cage, located in the courthouse basement, must occasionally be emptied so defendants have a place to sit during trial breaks.

on fewer and fewer people, and a lack of institutional resources.

And it's not just Wheeler County. Other poor rural counties in eastern, southern, central and coastal Oregon see the same fate on the horizon. There are no more rocks to squeeze for a little additional funding in many such frontier locales. Tax rates are high while economic prospects are low.

It's hard enough for the profes-

sionals to make it out there. Members of the Wheeler County Sheriff's Department must buy their own boots, guns and bulletproof vests, wear uniforms handed down from other departments and type up their reports on hand-me-down computers. On days off, deputies change the oil and do brake work on their own patrol cars. Police evidence storage areas are used as cells for inmates between hearings.

OTHER VIEWS

Swamp things everywhere

USA Today

"Drain the swamp!" was one of those memorable Donald Trump campaign promises that remains unfulfilled, much like "Mexico will pay for the wall!" and "Repeal and replace Obamacare!" with "something terrific."

Unlike the latter two promises, there's little debate about the need to establish strong ethical standards for government. That makes Trump's failure to keep his swamp-draining pledge — highlighted by the Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday for a former coal industry lobbyist nominated to run the Environmental Protection Agency — all the more disturbing.

Nominee Andrew Wheeler became acting EPA administrator after his predecessor and former boss, Scott Pruitt, resigned in July amid a cloud of self-serving ethics scandals. Wheeler, 54, doesn't carry Pruitt's ethical baggage, but he has devoted himself to a disciplined rollback of environmental safeguards.

Wheeler is one of 188 former lobbyists working in the administration, according to ProPublica, and a fox-guarding-the-hen-house example of someone regulating an industry that once paid him handsomely.

Others include the acting secretary of the Interior, David Bernhardt, previously an influential lobbyist for the fossil fuel industry, and EPA senior attorney Erik Baptist, who used to work as a lobbyist and lawyer for the American Petroleum Institute.

Trump replaced President Barack Obama's ethics rules with a set he said were tougher, but which in fact allow for the liberal granting of waivers so that the swamp once again can fill with water.

Among Wheeler's consulting duties, according to the Project on Government Oversight, was hosting a fundraiser for key Republican Sen. John Barrasso, now the chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. ...

After more than a decade working for the Senate's premier denier of human-caused climate change, James Inhofe of Oklahoma, Wheeler joined a consulting firm working against environmental restrictions on behalf of his top client, coal magnate Robert Murray.

"He's spent his career carrying out someone else's agenda," Joseph Goffman, executive director of Harvard Law School's environmental law program, says of Wheeler.

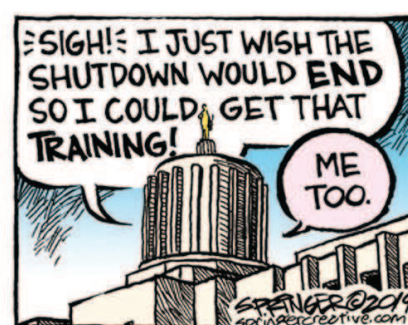
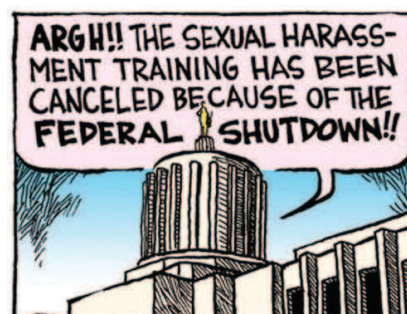
Since Wheeler joined EPA, first as deputy and then acting administrator, the agency has worked to roll back fuel efficiency standards on vehicles, ease greenhouse-gas restrictions on coal-burning power plants and, in December, rescinding regulations that reduce coal-plant release of mercury and other poisons.

Given the Republican majority in the Senate and Trump's avid support, Wheeler's confirmation might be a foregone conclusion. But that doesn't mean senators can't use the confirmation hearing to press the nominee on a variety of important issues.

After all, Wheeler isn't a lobbyist anymore. If confirmed, he'll be in charge of implementing environmental laws designed to protect the quality of the air Americans breathe and the water they drink.

Moreover, history will judge him for what he did — or didn't do — to head off catastrophic impacts from human-induced climate change. A daily drumbeat of reports confirms that warming oceans, melting icecaps and rising sea levels are more likely to drown coastal swamps than to drain them.

Given the Republican majority in the Senate and Trump's avid support, Wheeler's confirmation might be a foregone conclusion.



OTHER VIEWS

Real 'Green Deal' taxes would hit middle class

The Wall Street Journal

By now readers have heard that progressive luminary Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC for groupies) supports a 70 percent top marginal tax rate, which she says will help finance a "green new deal." Higher taxes on the rich is the stock socialist answer on how to pay for any project, though a reminder arrived this week that soaking the wealthy will barely register as a down payment.

The Tax Foundation on Monday did Ms. Ocasio-Cortez the favor of taking her proposal seriously and asked: How much money would the government reap from a 70 percent tax rate on income above \$10 million? Authors Kyle Pomerleau and Huaqun Li looked at two scenarios — one if the rate applied only to ordinary income like wages and interest, and another if it also applied to income from capital gains.

The best case scenario: a 70 percent rate would raise less than \$300 billion in revenue over 10 years, which is less than half of the \$700 billion that has been cited in press reports. Progressives aren't eager to put a price tag on the green new deal, which includes modest proposals like a universal jobs guarantee. But you can bet that ridding

the economy of carbon will cost into the trillions of dollars.

A 70 percent top rate would generate even less revenue if extended to capital gains. Investors only pay when they realize gains by selling assets, and they are especially sensitive to tax rates when deciding whether to sell. High rates can leave money locked into a current asset instead of flowing to the next good idea.

When the Tax Foundation authors considered the effect on behavior and incentives — why bother with that extra investment if most of the money will go to government? — they found that a 70 percent top rate on all income would lose the government \$63.5 billion over 10 years.

Ms. Ocasio-Cortez won't admit it, but she and her socialist friends will eventually have to go where the real money is: the middle class. That means higher tax rates on even modest wage earners; taxes on retirement savings like 401(k)s or college savings accounts.

Remember this the next time a Democrat or columnist who claims to be conservative says he'll finance a program by hitting the 1 percent of earners who already pay more than a third of America's income taxes. Sooner or later they're coming after you.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

Send letters to managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801, or email editor@eastoregonian.com.