

A dream of walking alone

March 8 was International Women’s Day. Did you celebrate? Originating early in the 20th century and recognized by the United Nations in 1975 during International Women’s Year, March 8 is now an official holiday in some countries, though not in ours. In fact, you may not have known it exists.

I’m guilty, too. I’ve been aware of International Women’s Day for a long time — having skin in the game, as they say — but Wikipedia tells me that there’s also an International Men’s Day, on November 19. It too exists at least in part to promote better lives for men and women through gender equality.

Gender equality. Meaning, as the Equal Rights Amendment puts it, equality of rights. In its most recently proposed form, the Equal Rights Amendment reads, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex.”

Of course, the Equal Rights Amendment has not passed. It came close. Then five states of the three-quarters necessary to approve what two-thirds of Congress had approved began to have second thoughts and rescinded their approval.

So how are we all doing in 2019? What do we have to celebrate? All those women dressed in white at the State of

the Union address, for starters. There are 102 of them in the House of Representatives now, the largest number ever. That’s 23.4 percent, not 50 percent, but it’s encouraging. The U.S. is 62nd in the ranking of equal rights for men and women in the workplace. Only six countries, according to the World Bank — Belgium, Denmark, France, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Sweden — have achieved that kind of equality. Overall, as rated by the World Economic Forum, Iceland is the most equal country in the world. We came in at 51st, between Mexico and Peru.

What does it mean to want equality?

June Jordan, in “Poem About My Rights” — shared by the Poetry Foundation on International Women’s Day — puts it this way: “suppose it was not here in the city but down on the beach/or far into the woods and I wanted to go there by myself thinking about God/or thinking about children or thinking about the world/all of it disclosed by the stars and the silence: I could not go and I could not think and I could not/stay there/alone/ as I need to be/ alone because I can’t do what I want to do with my/own/body.”

Of course, Jordan is talking about race as well as gender. (The African-American writer Alice Walker said she was told, “Never be alone. Except, perhaps, in your own house.”)

Another poem people shared on March 8 was Ursula K. Le Guin’s “Werewomen.” “I want to go moonwalking / under it or on it I don’t care / I just want to go moonwalking / alone ... what I want O what I want is to be not afraid. / Listen what I need is freedom.”

Let me be clear: These were brave women. Yes, some women do go walking, even backpacking, alone — I’ve done it myself — but awareness of the danger of what I was doing in my own body never left me.

Would passing the Equal Rights Amendment mean a woman could walk in the world without fear? Probably not, though that might be a gradual effect as attitudes change.

Maybe what equality really means is mutual respect.

And mutual respect is possible. The people of Harney County have shown us that as they work together to find ways to share public land. Respect for each other has been the key — respect for ranchers, for migrating birds, for birders and other recreational users as well the employees of federal agencies like the BLM and Department of Fish and Wildlife. Collaboration requires patience. But they keep talking until they find solutions that work best for everyone.

Next week’s First Draft Writers’ Series will feature Peter Walker, the University of Oregon geography professor whose field work took him to Harney County before, during, and after the takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge. He’ll be sharing insights from his book “Sagebrush Collaboration: How



BETTE HUSTED
FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

Harney County Defeated the Takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge” (OSU Press, 2018).

Now that’s something to celebrate. I hope you can come.

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Bette Husted is a writer and a student of T’ai Chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.

Scourge of animal cruelty must stop

Chicago Tribune

The news stories and photos from a Berrien County, Georgia, puppy mill are half past maddening: In recent days, authorities have removed more than 700 dogs from the wretched facility. Rescuers reported that the dogs had been living in tiny crates stacked one atop another. Many of the canines were unwashed and covered in feces and were never exercised.

Georgia authorities arrested the breeder, who faces criminal charges. But as anyone who monitors these cruelty cases knows too well, the next horrific one will erupt soon. And the one after that. And ...

At times these days, it feels as though Americans can’t agree on anything. But cruelty to animals is one topic that unifies young and old, all races, Republicans and Democrats, red counties and blue cities, and even humans and other creatures. All 50 states make it illegal and treat some offenses as felonies. Most Americans can’t bear to see animals abused or neglected, and that powerful sentiment has led to valuable protections for our fellow inhabitants.

Congress has generally deferred to the states to punish this sort of conduct, with some exceptions. In 2010, in response to public disgust for videos showing dog fights or the sadistic torture and killing of animals, Congress passed the Animal Crush Video Prohibition Act to outlaw such recordings. An earlier ban, struck down by the Supreme Court, “almost immediately dried up the crush video industry,” according to Wayne Pacelle, then president of the Humane Society of the United States.

The law is deficient in one notable way: Though it bans videos of such cruelty, it doesn’t ban the cruelty itself. That’s one reason Congress is considering a bill called the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act (PACT). State laws may not apply when abuse occurs on federal property, such as national parks and military bases, and this reform would close that loophole.

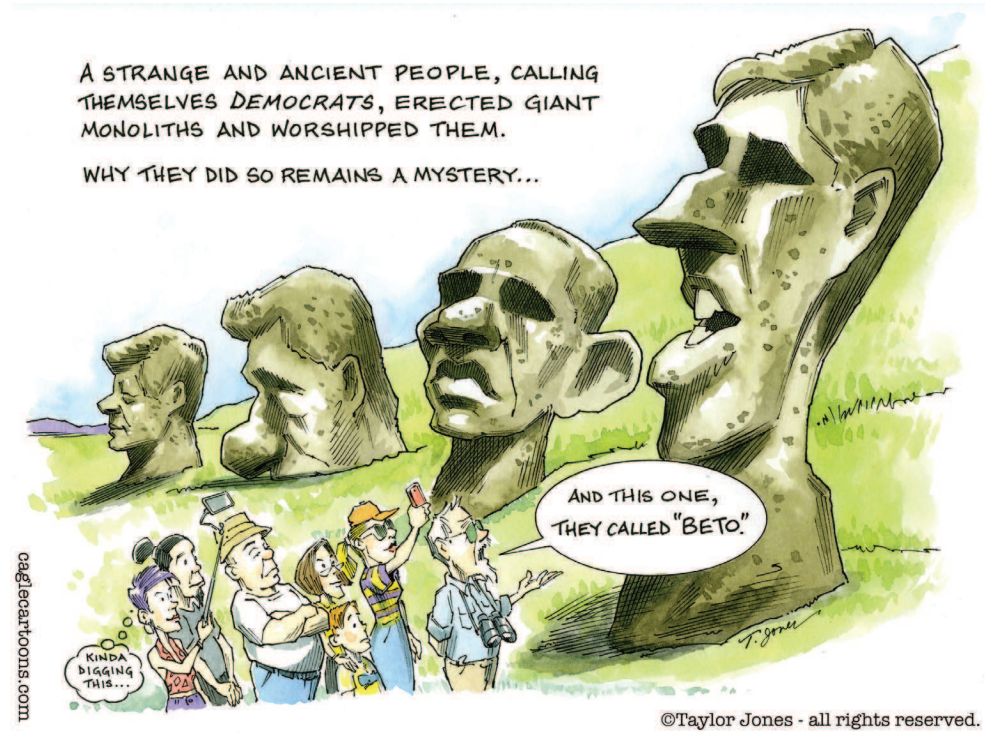
It would also allow the feds to go after anyone who facilitates bestiality by trafficking animals for that vile purpose in interstate channels. “Craigslisr,” reports the Humane Society Legislative Fund, “has numerous ads from people soliciting or offering animals for sex, often to be transported across state lines.”

The bill wouldn’t deprive the states of their primary responsibility for policing animal cruelty. But it would allow the U.S. Department of Justice to step in if local prosecutors drop the ball or plead that they’re too busy with other crimes.

With Congress divided between a Democratic House and a Republican Senate, you might figure there is little chance of action. In fact, a version of this legislation passed the Senate unanimously in 2017, and the House companion bill attracted 283 co-sponsors. It died in the House only because it was bottled up by then-Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte, R-Va. But with Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., a supporter, now in charge, the bill has brighter prospects.

It would provide a crucial extra layer of protection for creatures that cannot speak up for themselves. Americans are virtually unanimous in rejecting the needless abuse of animals. Our laws should leave it no safe harbor. Pass PACT.

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Increased aid to Central America would solve problems at border

Boston Globe

The sharp rise in the number of unauthorized migrants apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border in February seemed to confirm one of President Trump’s loudest claims — that the nation faces a full-blown migrant crisis that requires a border wall. More than 76,000 unauthorized migrants crossed the border in February, a 31 percent jump from January.

But what’s really happening at the southern border undercuts the president’s central claims. Last month, when he declared a national emergency to build a wall, he said “(W)e have an invasion of drugs, invasion of gangs, invasion of people, and it’s unacceptable.” Yet the number of people apprehended is still below historical highs, and 40,325 of them are parents and children. And the people entering are overwhelmingly not criminals.

The migrants mostly come from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras — the area known as the Northern Triangle. They’re coming to seek refuge from brutal socioeconomic forces in Central America.

While homicide rates have fallen in El Salvador and Honduras in recent years, they still had the world’s highest and second-highest rates in 2016. Guatemala ranked 10th. In addition to facing the pervasive threat of violence, people in these countries must live under governments that have largely failed to provide fundamental rights and protections for their citizens. There’s a high incidence of gender-based violence, extortion by organized crime, and gang recruitment, as well as hate crimes committed against the region’s gay and lesbian population.

Impunity is commonplace, due to weakened institutions deeply infected by corruption. For instance, about 90 percent of crimes in Guatemala go unpunished, with similar rates in Honduras and El Salvador.

Helping those countries grow economically and providing opportunity and security to their residents would help stem the tide of migrants. But U.S. aid to Central America has hovered between only \$500 million and \$1 billion in recent years. Trump has tried to slash that funding, but Congress has largely rejected his attempts.

How aid money is spent is also critical. The administration has focused on security, with funds going mostly to rule-of-law efforts and to fight organized crime and drug trafficking. In contrast, the Obama administration had a broader approach. “They recognized that there were other factors driving people to migrate — poverty, high rates of inequality, lack of economic opportunity, and systemic corruption,” said Adriana Beltran, director of citizen security at the Washington Office on Latin America, a human rights advocacy group. “They were also financing programs related to violence prevention, workforce development, anti-corruption initiatives.” There’s evidence those programs were working.

The flow of individuals from Central America to the United States will continue to rise unless there’s a clear shift in the American response to the “crisis at the border.” Walls don’t dissuade people who are suffering through a humanitarian disaster. Rather, a solution requires political will, and not just from the United States but from the Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Honduran governments.

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