

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Reconnecting with rural America



CHRISTOPHER RUSH
COMMENT

There has been a spate of recent articles and analysis about the challenges facing today's rural America. Building up to the 2020 election cycle, East Coast pundits are busy attempting to get their heads wrapped around "fly over country" in order to craft

political platforms and messaging that will gain traction in places like rural Nebraska, Kentucky, or Eastern Oregon.

Our newspaper recently published a pair of such opinions — from two different *New York Times* columnists, Paul Krugman and David Brooks — side by side in an attempt to convey the emerging conventional wisdom. Krugman's column, while sincere, seemingly smacks of an eastern elitist attempting to instruct his fellow urbanites on the foreign ways and customs of the people who inhabit the continent's interior and why their culture is not thriving.

In contrast, Brooks actually landed in Nebraska and spent time with his subjects, got to know them, their motivations, their aspirations, and portrayed a far more optimistic view of rural America's strengths and its "way of life."

The social ills and economic challenges facing rural America have been well documented: declining populations in rural counties, shrinking tax base to improve or maintain vital infrastructure, and where industries are on the wane (think West Virginia coal country) some parts of rural America can appear like forlorn ghost towns filled with higher than normal chemical dependency,



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

An old bicycle adorns a planter on a street corner on Main Street in Echo.

bad diets, economic despair, and hopelessness. But such problems equally infect many of our largest inner cities as well.

The point is there is both good and bad in rural America. It's a vast, diverse area — from the Appalachians to beyond the Rocky Mountains and all points in between. It is not easily defined and quantified, nor should it be.

The difficulty for many of those who inhabit large population centers on either coast, is that they may rarely experience the real rural America. Yes, our popular national parks like Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and others are part of rural America. But

these federally operated lands set aside for their majestic beauty can often more closely resemble glorified amusement parks during the height of summer vacation season.

The real rural America is found off the interstate, typically along lonely two-lane highways in which few Americans travel in this day and age. Before air travel and the advent of the Interstate highway system, motorists once had a connection to these remote places. They traveled through them on roads like historic Route 66 and stopped in small towns along the way for a gasoline fill-up, a meal, or an overnight stay. Now, we merely fly over them or speed around

them. We can miss towns like Grand Island, Nebraska, or John Day. They disappear from our collective view. Out of sight, out of mind.

But they're still out there and the people who inhabit these out-of-the-way places choose to live there for a strong sense of community or a feeling of independence, or in the case of America's farmers and ranchers, an attachment to the land itself. These small rural towns often represent gathering spots in which rural families carve out a life and endure for generations. Think of the centennial farms and ranches right here in Eastern Oregon.

For city dwellers on each coast, it may be difficult to truly understand and appreciate rural America and the people who live here without engaging in purposeful travel. Plenty of time and an open mind is required. Discovering the heartland should not be viewed as a safari in which the traveler sees some sights, briefly observes the natives and their customs, buys a few trinkets, then returns to their self-satisfied urban existence.

Another recent column on this topic by economist Lawrence Summers, writing for the *Financial Times*, is instructive. He and his wife took a two-week drive from Chicago to Portland across the the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains on exclusively secondary highways. He sees rural America differently now, through a different lens.

Summers's experience shows that rural America can still be found and understood by urbanites if they will but seek it. We're still here and we're not going anywhere.

Chris Rush is the regional publisher for the East Oregonian, Hermiston Herald, Walla Walla County Chieftain and Blue Mountain Eagle.

OTHER VIEWS

It's time for a time change

(Corvallis) *Gazette-Times*

The Oregon Senate last week took a step toward ending our generally pointless (and potentially harmful) twice-annual ritual of changing our clocks, joining a resistance that seems to be gaining momentum across the nation.

By a 23-4 margin, senators approved Senate Bill 320, which would move Oregon to year-round daylight saving time. The bill isn't perfect (we have some quibbles with it), but it still is worth noting as an important first step forward.

Evidence continues to mount that these time switches (spring ahead an hour every spring; fall back an hour every fall) come with risks to our health and wreak havoc with sleep-deprived Americans (which include quite a large number of us).

And the reasons we've been given to justify the time switches simply don't pan out. For starters, daylight saving time never was intended as a boon to farmers: In the words of a memorable report on "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver": "Cows don't care what time it is." And crops get exactly the same amount of light every day, regardless of whether it's daylight saving or standard time.

Daylight saving time wasn't implemented on a large scale until 1916, when Germany and its World War I ally Austria-Hungary set clocks ahead an hour to save on energy costs. Other nations, including the United States, followed suit. After World War I, other nations abandoned the idea, but not the United States. The idea of daylight saving time really picked up steam during the energy crisis of the 1970s.

But here's the deal: Evidence suggests that daylight saving time hasn't saved on energy costs. It may reduce lighting use, but that's offset by increased costs for air conditioning and heating, and increased consumption of gasoline.

So the time was right, so to speak, for

Senate Bill 320, which now moves to the House. If the bill becomes law, all but one of Oregon's 36 counties would move to year-round daylight saving time — in other words, we'd spring forward and never fall back. (Malheur County is the exception; that county actually is on Mountain time so that it syncs with nearby Boise, Idaho. That

county would continue to switch between daylight time and standard time, to stay in sync with Idaho.)

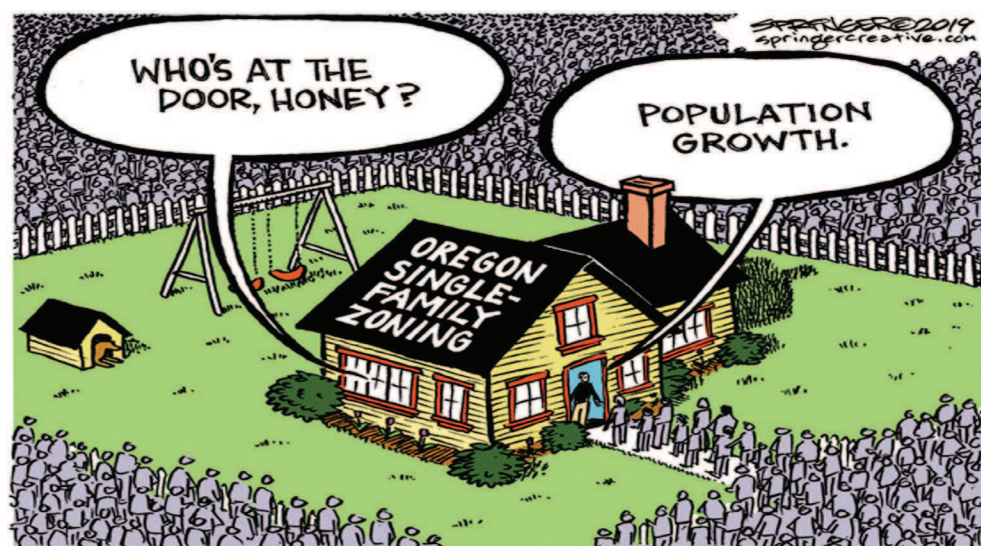
The bill that passed the Senate isn't exactly a stirring denunciation of the changing of the clocks: It would only become effective if Congress approves the time change and if Washington and California also adopt daylight time on a permanent basis (the good news there is that proposals to do exactly that

are making progress in both those states). And a provision originally in the bill, calling for a public vote on the issue, was eliminated. While we appreciate the Senate's willingness to take this matter into its own hands, we have to admit that we thought a vote on this would have been fun.

In such a vote, we could have gauged popular sentiment on the main dispute that faced senators in last week's deliberations: whether the state should shift permanently to daylight or standard time.

While most senators favored daylight time (which is our preference as well), the arguments raised by others supporting standard time have some merit. For one thing, staying on daylight time year-round could have an effect on some religious observances. In Judaism, for example, the daily morning prayer is held shortly after sunrise. In January, the sun wouldn't rise until nearly 9 a.m. in western Oregon, making it difficult for some worshippers to make it to work on time.

But, really, on some level, the question of daylight vs. standard time doesn't matter that much: The point here is to do away with the time switch. Senate Bill 320 helps loosen the bonds of this time tyranny.



YOUR VIEWS

SB 978 and its ramifications

I have had it with the antics of the loonies that are pushing anti-gun legislation that, taken in toto, are directed to restrict usage of firearms to the point of law-abiding citizens not being able to possess and use firearms as protected by the Second Amendment to the Bill Of Rights.

I have lived in the state of Oregon 77 years. SB978, if passed, is the "straw that broke the camel's back." I will join many others in Eastern Oregon and will advocate for the secession of that part of the present state of Oregon east of the crestline of the Cascade Mountains and whatever counties laying west of the Cascade Mountains that wish to join us and form a state that will be noted as a "common sense" political division.

Hopefully, the residents of Eastern Washington will join us and a new state can be born, perhaps named the "State of Columbia" for the great river that flows through the area. The possibility exists that Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington could unite with the state of Idaho to form a formidable political entity.

Bill Timmermann
Helix

Let residents decide on streets vs. airport

The mayor stated that the number one concern of the residents was street repair. Why, then, is the city borrowing millions of dollars for the airport again? So far the

return on the investment has been poor at best, and now they want another \$11 million. They will want more money for new fire trucks and building upgrades for the station at the airport also, wait and see.

Did the people of Pendleton get a say in borrowing that money? No, the city decided to put all its eggs in one basket. Their words, not mine.

When will the money flow to the airport stop and a good return start to flow back into city coffers?

The road to nowhere has almost zero traffic; it was supposed to bring in new customers to the airport and that never panned out. That money could have fixed streets for 10 years or more.

Sooner or later all these loans will have to be paid. How much per year will be spent repaying these loans? Will the rents at the airport cover the payments? There is a point where the city will go broke — how much longer? All the extra fees that the city can levy without a vote will also reach the point that even the silent majority will start to speak, or quit paying taxes. "Taxation without representation" ring a bell?

Pendleton must start living within its financial means, just like all its residents, or it too will fall into bankruptcy — and if the people want streets fixed as a priority the city must put its efforts to the task. And maybe the city should borrow \$11 million for street repairs instead of for the airport.

Tell the people what the loan would cost per year on their taxes and let them choose between the airport or city streets.

Randy Holman
Pendleton