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OPINION

CHRISTOPHER RUSH
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OUR VIEW

Oversight needed of state forest division

You can be savoring an IPA along the Umatilla River after a long day of adventuring in Oregon’s forests and honestly wonder if things couldn’t get much better. But sometimes those charged with managing this beautiful state let us all down. State government is not a place brimming with simple problems with easy answers. Still, *The Oregonian* reported over the weekend the Oregon Department of Forestry’s state forest division is “failing on almost every front.”

The division manages approximately 745,000 acres of forestlands across Oregon. Its budget is a mess and getting worse. That’s because, in part, it is funded solely by timber sales that aren’t happening. That’s led to cuts in staff. Fewer staff, in turn, makes it harder for the division to solve its problems. On top of everything, the agency is facing a lawsuit from 14 Oregon counties who claim they have not been getting the revenue they are



Photo contributed by Katy Nesbitt

Oregon’s state forests are supposed to be managed to deliver a balance of benefits, from sustainable timber harvests to habitat for fish and wildlife, from clean air and drinking water to well-managed recreation spaces.

entitled to from timber sales. They say they’ve been shortchanged \$1.4 billion.

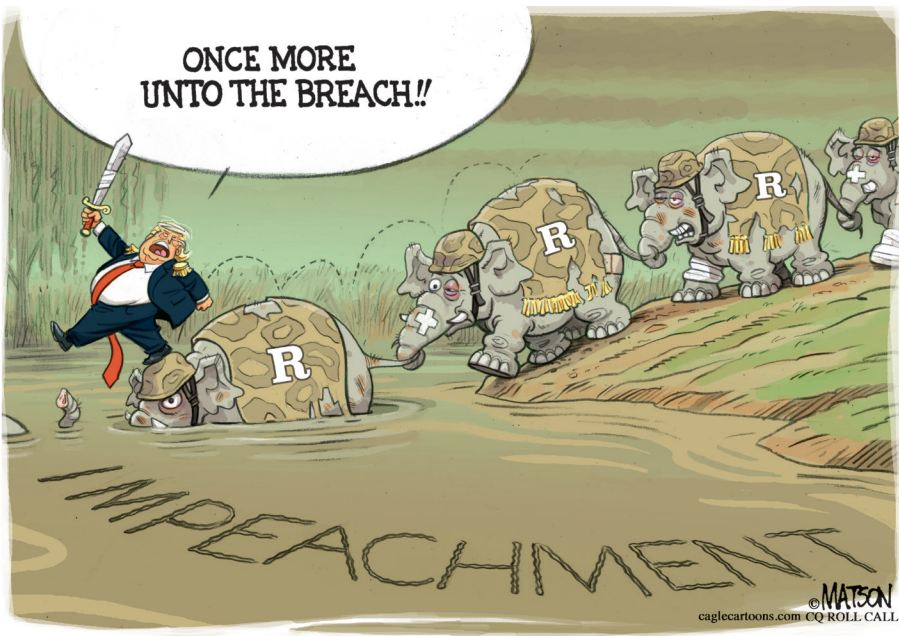
Legislators and Gov. Kate

Brown have failed to provide adequate oversight of the division. Do you remember the special series of hearings called this past session by

our legislative leaders to get to the bottom of this? Nope. They didn’t happen. What are they going to do about it?

Even members of the forestry board have grown frustrated. Brenda McComb, a board member and former forestry professor at Oregon State University, has “repeatedly asked staff members for more information around the existing inventory of trees and whether current harvest levels are sustainable,” according to *The Oregonian*. That’s a fundamental piece of knowing how well any management plan would work. She has not gotten it.

Forest policy is going to be divisive. There is no shared, statewide vision of how a state-owned forest should be managed. That may help explain but does not excuse the absence of oversight and leadership from the Legislature and Gov. Brown in managing the state’s forests.



YOUR VIEWS

Hermiston schools in need of updates, expansion

When I came to Hermiston as superintendent of schools in 1991, we had about 3,500 students in six schools. Today, 28 years later, we have almost 6,000 students in seven schools. Though some remodeling has been accomplished, four replacement schools built and many temporary portable classrooms brought in, our student population is almost 2,500 more than in 1991, with only one additional school. Classrooms are needed, and schools are over capacity.

As I recall, Rocky Heights Elementary is sneaking up on 60 years old. By the way, 60 years is the average lifespan of a school in America. A school gets a great deal of wear and tear from its use by students as well as the many community groups who use the

schools well into the night. I can assure you that the maintenance needs of old schools are a money pit, not to mention the unmet safety needs for students, staff and the community. To draw an analogy, I don’t see many of us driving a 1959 car as our daily driver.

Our schools are in need of more capacity for our present student population and some room for future growth. Plus, our schools need to be safe, up-to-date and efficient.

As an educator in Oregon since 1967, I have seen a great many school bond plans presented to the public by superintendents and school boards. This is a very good plan. I urge you to vote for capacity, safety and efficiency in our Hermiston schools.

**Jer Pratton
Hermiston**

OTHER VIEWS

Oregon’s rural patients deserve access to quality hospice care

I come from eight generations of Oregonians, many of whom have worked in the medical field, so choosing a career as a nurse here in Burns was an easy decision. While being a nurse has created some of my fondest memories, it has also opened my eyes to the difficult decisions that many rural residents face in order to access high-quality, compassionate end-of-life care.

As one of the first coordinated models of care, hospice is an example of how person-centered care can and should work. Expert medical care and pain management is combined with emotional and spiritual support to address the unique end-of-life needs of patients and their families. Unfortunately, due to our aging population, shrinking resources, and a stretched-thin workforce, hospice providers face growing difficulties meeting the care needs of our community. These problems are only further aggravated by Medicare reimbursement policies, which stifle access to hospice care for Oregonians living in rural and underserved areas.

Our small hospice agency serves the largest county in Oregon. Caring for those at the end of life who are spread across over 10,000 square miles is a challenge, but what makes this difficult situation worse is a current Medicare reimbursement policy that prevents doctors at rural health clinics from serving as a hospice patient’s attending physician.



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trust their doctor at the local health clinic are incapable of keeping that physician as their end-of-life care provider.

Needless to say, given the already severe healthcare obstacles rural patients face, this unnecessary barrier to care must end. And while I have seen caregivers at RHCs go above and beyond to provide uncompensated hospice care to patients and families in need, this should not be the norm. We should not penalize those who are willing to sacrifice their own well-being to care for the dying. We also should not penalize patients by blocking them from accessing their trusted physician at the most vulnerable point of life.

Fortunately, U.S. lawmakers from both sides of the political aisle have recognized this problem and introduced a simple legislative fix. The Rural Access to Hospice Act was introduced in both the House and Senate earlier this year to allow physicians employed in RHCs and FQHCs to receive equitable reimbursement for providing person-centered hospice services when acting as the attending hospice physician for rural patients.

This bipartisan bill represents a practical, common sense legislative fix that is long overdue.

Here in Oregon, we need our members of Congress, including Sen. Ron Wyden, to step up as a champion for our state’s rural population and the amazing hospice professionals who care for them.

Patients deserve the best care for their end-of-life journey, regardless of where they live. That means protecting patients from the impossible decision of keeping their doctor or electing hospice. I call on Oregon’s delegation to support the Rural Access to Hospice Act so that patients across our state can access the quality end-of-life-services they need and deserve.

Jodi McLean is executive director of Harney County Home Health and Hospice.

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

U.S. SENATORS

Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5244
La Grande office: 541-962-7691

Jeff Merkley
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3753
Pendleton office: 541-278-1129

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

Greg Walden
185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6730
La Grande office: 541-624-2400

REPRESENTATIVES

Greg Barreto, District 58
900 Court St. NE, H-38
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1458
Rep.GregBarreto@state.or.us

Greg Smith, District 57
900 Court St. NE, H-482
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1457
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

SENATOR

Bill Hansell, District 29
900 Court St. NE, S-423
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1729
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us