

O EAST OREGONIAN

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

A voice for fairness

In an era of bare-knuckled politics, it is instructive to reflect on the career of William Ruckelshaus, the first administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

He died in Seattle in late November at age 87, leaving behind an unblemished career as a voice for environmental reason.

Ruckelshaus was no stranger to pitched political battles. His career in President Richard Nixon’s administration abruptly ended when Ruckelshaus resigned his job at the U.S. Department of Justice instead of firing the Watergate special prosecutor.

But after two turns as EPA administrator — as the agency’s first chief under Nixon and again under President Ronald Reagan — Ruckelshaus probably knew more about how the EPA and statutes such as the Endangered Species Act work than anyone else.

In 2011, *Capital Press* interviewed Ruckelshaus about the EPA, the Endangered Species Act and issues related to the protection of species. Edited for space, here are some of his thoughts:

On the Endangered Species Act: If the law is working properly, the “how to” is an agreement by the people who will be impacted by the necessary changes. It doesn’t work as well as it ought to, because a lot of time the government comes in and imposes habitat requirements that the manager of the land doesn’t find completely reasonable.

On the Clean Air Act: After a



William Ruckelshaus in his Seattle office in 2011.

Capital Press Photo, File

couple of years of administering it, I knew it needed change. ... What has proven really hard is to get these laws changed, and the reason is, I think, the people who lobbied the laws through were primarily outside the government, and the government agencies that administered these laws and the staffs on committees remain in place for a long time — they get a vested interest in the law and they fight furiously against any changes.

The scope of the Endangered Species Act: (Congress) wrote the law broadly enough, and of course it’s been interpreted broadly enough, it encompasses a lot more than they probably originally intended.

Changes needed in the Endan-

gered Species Act: If I’m a landowner and someone is running a highway through my land, I may not like it, but at least I’m being compensated for it. If I’m forced to put buffers alongside streams that run through my land in order to protect salmon, sometimes those buffers take a significant amount of my land, and I think they should be compensated for that. ... If that’s a public good and it’s being asserted against a private property owner, then why shouldn’t the public pay for it the same way they do with a highway?

On environmental regulations: In the first place, some guy writing the regulation down in Olympia or in Salem, and not being on the actual land itself, can’t possibly draft a reg-

ulation that makes sense on every piece of land. So the landowner has the regulator from the government coming on their land, starting to tell him how to manage it. He’s been managing for five generations and this guy’s maybe six months out of school. Well, they’re not going to be very pleased with what they’re told to do. ...

(Let) the individual landowner have a lot more authority about what he should do to manage the land in such a way that it doesn’t adversely impact the environment. And compensating them where there are significant costs involved.

On collaboration: If they’d see themselves as part of a family, they’d begin to make progress. But if they see themselves as adversaries, as enemies, then you don’t make any progress. ... My experience of listening to farmers and environmentalists when they finally let their guard down, they are not nearly as far apart as they think they are. I’ve heard farmers say, “Well, if that’s what you want us to do, that’s not so hard.” And here the environmentalists would say, “Well, I guess that’s not really the problem, is it?” ... Once you see those interests come together, it really is remarkable.

These words, spoken from experience, offer wisdom to all sides of many issues, whether they involve the environment or other topics.

Maybe, just maybe, the world needs more voices for reason like William Ruckelshaus. We’ve seen plenty of the alternative.

OTHER VIEWS

Supporting arts and culture in Oregon

Do you value public radio, music, libraries, museums and monuments? If so, please take advantage of Oregon’s most generous offer to support them.

Every Oregonian has the right to direct a portion of their state taxes to fund arts and culture, but only a small percentage act on it.

Here’s how it works — make a donation to one or more of Oregon’s 1,400-plus cultural nonprofits, then make a matching gift to the Oregon Cultural Trust by Dec. 31. You get 100% of the Cultural Trust donation back when you file your state taxes — by claiming the cultural tax credit — and the state legislature invests that same amount in Oregon culture.

Since its creation in 2001, the Cultural Trust has awarded more than \$30 million to Oregon cultural nonprofits. In Umatilla, Morrow, Union and Wallowa counties those grant awards have exceeded \$1.2 million, including a FY2020 award of \$33,764 to the Athena Gem restoration project. A 10-year impact study by ECONorthwest calls the Trust’s geographic reach “remarkable.”

And now, the Cultural Trust tax credit is an even more important tool for Oregon tax-

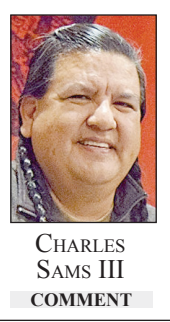
payers. While the new tax laws reduced the number of Oregonians who itemize deductions at the federal level, the benefits of investing in Oregon culture remain the same. Whether or not you itemize, your donation to the Cultural Trust still prompts a 100% tax credit on your state taxes.

Contributions to the Cultural Trust are easy to make and can be done online at www.cultural-trust.org. The Trust can accept appreciated stock as well as IRA distributions, which may provide additional tax ben-

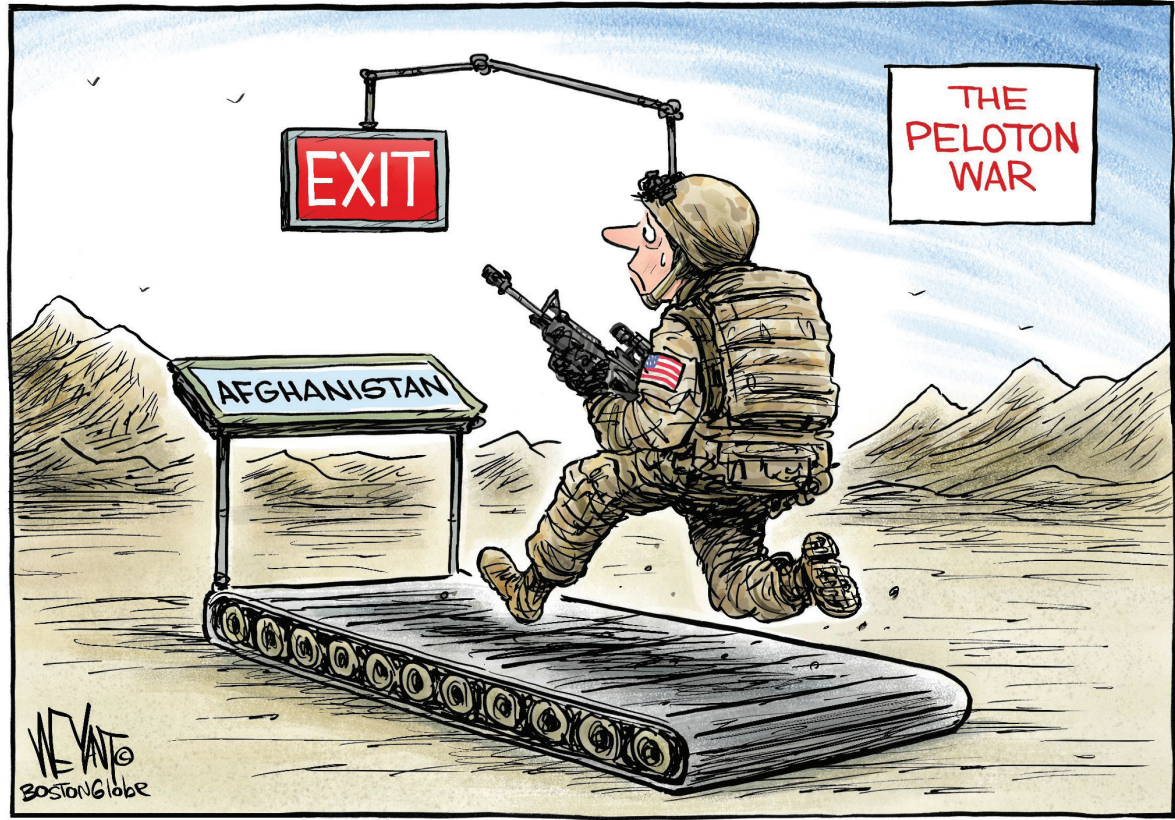
efits. For clients using Donor Advised Funds to make donations, their matching gift to the Trust must come from an alternate source of funds to qualify for the tax credit. The tax credit is limited to \$500 for individual filers, \$1,000 for joint filers and \$2,500 for C-corporations.

If you enjoy Oregon’s arts and culture community, participating in the Cultural Trust tax credit program is the best way to give back. Make sure a portion of your state taxes supports arts and culture. It’s a win-win for everyone in our great state.

Charles Sams III is the board chair of the Oregon Cultural Trust.



CHARLES SAMS III COMMENT



YOUR VIEWS

Walden making a difference in prescription costs

As someone with a long career in nursing, I know how important it is that my patients have access to the prescriptions they need to live healthy lives. I appreciate the good work that Rep. Greg Walden is doing to lower prescription drug costs and increase access for patients.

Walden’s work to help import FDA-approved drugs into the U.S. would help lower the price of critical drugs like

insulin, while providing Americans with greater choice in the marketplace. Walden has also used his post on the Energy and Commerce Committee to get legislation passed that goes after high prescription drug prices. In 2018, he helped pass legislation to increase price transparency and allow pharmacists to inform patients that their drug would be cheaper if they paid for it out of pocket rather than through insurance. This year, he doubled down on that by introducing the “Lower Costs, More Cures Act of 2019.” The bill would lower out of

pocket spending for patients and ensure that the U.S. will continue to lead the world in developing new cures.

I have personally taken part in meetings Greg has held with constituents in his district as well as health care professionals that deal with pharmaceutical drugs every day. The message is always the same — lower prescription drug prices. He has worked hard to carry that message back to D.C. and get results.

Sam Palmer, Grant County commissioner
John Day

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