

OUR VIEW

Bentz has bright future in Congress

O ntario lawyer Cliff Bentz has some big shoes to fill.

The newly elected congressman — who will replace longtime Hood River lawmaker Greg Walden — steps into the hallowed halls of the U.S. Congress at a key point in history. The nation is still locked in a deadly pandemic while many congressional GOP lawmakers are openly proclaiming they will work to revoke Joe Biden's victory over President Trump.

Bentz, a staunch Republican with a long political history in the Oregon House and Senate, won his seat by 25%, a sure indication that most voters on the eastern side of the state believe he can make a difference.

Bentz probably will not be able to become a political powerhouse his first term. Freshman congressmen and women face an array of hurdles — mainly inexperience at the federal level — to be able to make a big impact right off.

Still, Bentz will be in a good position to do what remains the most important part of his job: look out for the interests of the Oregonians he represents.

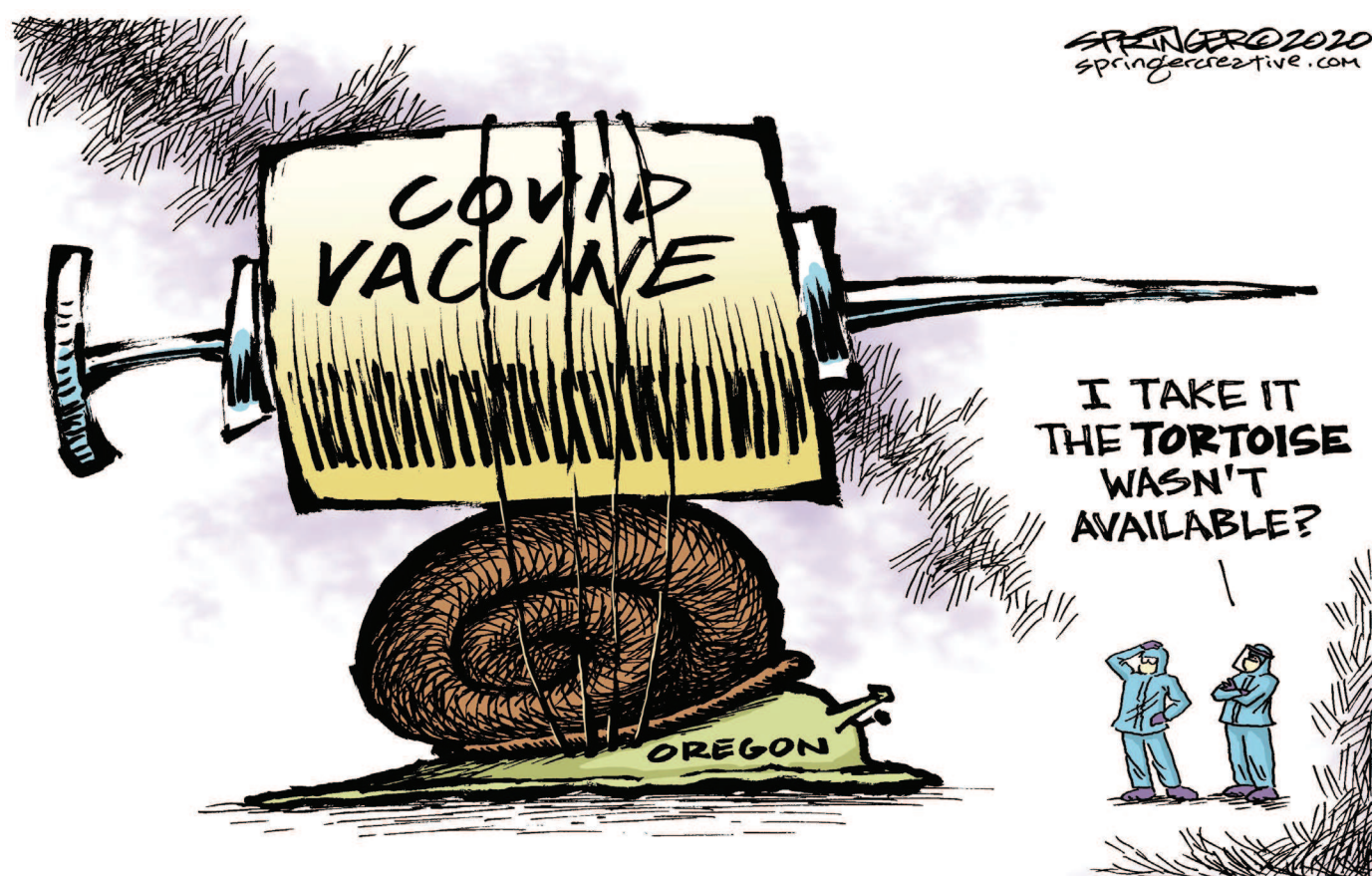
That, by itself, isn't an easy job. Still, the big issues for Oregonians in his district — which includes all of Eastern Oregon — remain stable. Access to and protection of natural resources and careful, but continued, use of water in our region. Preservation and expansion of existing infrastructure across the region, such as better roads, highways and internet access, should also be an important topic for the first-term congressman.

Eastern Oregon also needs help economically, but not with pie-in-the-sky concepts that only benefit the few. The eastern portion of the state has continued to lag behind the rest of Oregon in the years after the Great Recession and the pandemic has only made things worse. Since 2014, and up to the pandemic, large parts of the state enjoyed a relative period of economic growth, but in rural Oregon the recovery from the recession lagged significantly.

No one, of course, expects Bentz to work miracles. Instead we hope the first-term congressional lawmaker can do what he can, what is reasonable and obtainable, to help voters. He will be shackled, to some extent, by his Republican Party overlords but he can do good things.

He will face, in the end, a choice between joining the shrill voices of discontent or of buckling down and working on issues that will impact people in Eastern Oregon.

We believe Bentz is not just another politician, but a lawmaker with a bright future in Congress.



2020 in hindsight — what did we learn?



DANIEL WATTENBURGER
HOMEGROWN

Rather than starting by looking directly at 2020, let's go back two decades. It may help put things in perspective.

In the waning years of the 20th century, we faced potential disaster. Many of the computer systems entrusted to run our critical services — power plants, banks, medical facilities, air traffic control, etc. — had been programmed to understand dates in six digits. This was expected to become a problem when 12/31/99 turned to 01/01/00 and automated calculations were scrambled, causing shutdowns and meltdowns as computers reset to 100 years prior.

The problem was dubbed “Y2K” as a shorthand for the forthcoming year, and nations across the world spent billions of dollars reprogramming critical systems to allow for eight-digit dates, allowing computers to smoothly transition into the new century on 01/01/2000.

If you've thought about Y2K at all in the past 20 years, it's probably been as a punchline. I think of the 1999 comedy “Office Space,” in which the main characters have the mind-numbing job of reprogramming millions of lines of code in preparation for the year 2000. The task seemed like a futilely stupid effort, especially in retrospect as there

were no major disasters on New Year's Day.

So what did we learn? That overreaction to a perceived problem is a waste of time and energy? That Y2K was a hoax created to sell software patches? Or that by collectively addressing a problem, we can nullify and avoid it altogether?

About 21 months later, on Sept. 11, 2001, the U.S. suffered a blow we seemingly hadn't foreseen or prepared for. Nearly 3,000 people were killed as terrorists flew commercial jets into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It was a horrific day that resulted in two foreign wars, the Patriot Act, and extensive precautionary measures in air travel that we still abide by today.

We vowed to never forget. But what did we learn? That we are more vulnerable than we thought? That we are stronger when standing together? Or that by collectively addressing a disaster, we can prevent it from happening again?

The answers aren't black and white. Complex problems often require complex solutions, and the best solutions often make it appear the problem never existed in the first place. We can only rely on the best available information and move forward.

Now, using that lens, let's look at 2020.

Just as with Y2K, much of the work done to mitigate pain and turmoil of the coronavirus will be overlooked. Fifty-seven people died of COVID-19 in Umatilla County and more than 5,500 tested positive in 2020 — and that's

with nine months of public measures to stop its spread. Without these measures, the toll would have certainly been much worse.

The economic and social pain may be what's remembered most vividly, especially for those who don't suffer the loss of a loved one. In reality, these maladies are a by-product of our collective failure to stop the virus' spread, not a direct effect of the biological enemy.

We can look at the presidential election in the same way, assuming we uphold the legal and fair results of the open electoral process. Will we remember and reinforce the steps it took to ensure the will of the people and pre-emption of the Constitution prevailed against the spurious claims of the powerful? Or will we forget the threat to our democracy because it didn't end in a full-blown crisis?

History books are full of things that have happened. It's harder to understand what could have happened, both good and bad, and which actions made the difference.

As we leave 2020 behind, we know 2021 will bring challenges of its own. But time will move on, and the details will blur. This is the time to start taking the lessons of 2020 to heart, before we forget what was at stake.

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YOUR VIEWS

Americans at least deserve to have a fair election

I'm frustrated and discouraged. As a conservative Republican in a, sadly, liberal Democrat state, I'm typically disappointed on Election Day. However, this presidential election is significantly different and way beyond disappointing. I'm among the 77% of Trump voters who see a fraudulent process. Yes, I'm aware that the Trump legal team has been dismissed in 59 of 60 lawsuits, but I don't understand how these suits can be so blithely dismissed without a fair hearing.

Aside from the compelling arguments made by the Trump legal team, there has been witness after witness describing what they saw as fraud, or at least very questionable acts. Also, people reported they were victims of fraud when they showed up to vote, but were told they had already voted. A man stated he had hauled a trailer loaded with ballots from New York to Pennsylvania. Republican poll watchers were forced to leave polling locations. One state mailed out 1.8 million absentee ballots, but received and counted 2.5 million. Dead people voted. Experts have provided amazing information about the questionable accuracy of Dominion voting machines. All of these issues needed to be thoroughly and honestly investigated and given their day in court. And the arguments that recounts have been completed are superfluous: recounting fraudulent ballots doesn't prove anything.

I understand that some people don't like President Trump. I understand that the media want him out of office and that there have been constant efforts over the last four years to remove him. I understand that Democrats never accepted his presidency and also attacked him like the liberal press. Somehow, an American means of fairness needs to overcome the prejudice against President Trump and convince me and others that the election wrongs will be investigated and right will prevail. I may not like, but can certainly accept, a Democrat president if fairly elected. It would take great effort to convince me Biden's election was fair and that he is fit for the office given his, and his family's, reported business ties to communist China.

I don't agree with all of President Trump's style, opinions and actions but, overall, he has achieved very good results for America. At the very least, he deserves fairness.

Jim Carnahan
Baker City

Climate change threatens all of us

The climate crisis threatens us all. The dangers are real and familiar and upon us: unprecedented storms, fires, drought, climate-ignited conflict, too many more. Fortunately, there are solutions that steer us toward a healthier, safer, more climate-resistant future. One exciting and transformative

solution is “30 by 30,” a national and local effort to protect 30% of America's land and oceans by 2030. “30 by 30” prevents the destruction of natural ecosystems, preserves the miracle of biodiversity and, critically, sequesters vast amounts of carbon while simultaneously creating economic opportunity. “30 by 30” is a key component of the incoming Biden/Harris administration's science-based, economically astute, forward-thinking environmental policy platform and is embraced by many national and local conservation organizations, including The Nature Conservancy, The Wilderness Society and the Oregon Natural Desert Association, as well as businesses, such as Patagonia and REI.

Part of this endeavor includes protecting our public lands. Oregon has the opportunity to again lead due to the efforts of Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. The Malheur Community Empowerment for Owyhee Act (S. 2828) is making its way through Congress. This pragmatic bill addresses climate change impact by safeguarding large areas of public land and preserving natural wildlife corridors.

There are many ways to address the climate crisis; they include protecting our public lands and waters. I implore Oregon's elected leaders to refine and pass the Malheur Community Empowerment Act for Owyhee Act as soon as possible.

Mark Molner
Bend

EDITORIALS

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