

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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NOTE TO READERS

The East Oregonian editorial on Tuesday, Jan. 4, "Bentz has bright future in Congress" was written before our editorial board became aware of Rep. Cliff Bentz's Dec. 15, 2020, statement in a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, stating he supports GOP efforts to investigate election irregularities.

We find this alignment with the so-called "sedition caucus" intent on overthrowing the election deeply alarming. Bentz has declined to comment on how he planned to vote on Jan. 6, before rioters shut down the U.S. Capitol. We urge him to join with the Republican members of Congress who respect the choice of American voters, and allow for the peaceful inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden on Jan. 20.

OUR VIEW

Single-payer plan in the works for Oregon

A state task force is meeting regularly, charged by the Oregon Legislature to figure out how a single-payer health care plan might work in Oregon. It's a big deal.

Single payer is often called "Medicare for all." It would be a lot like Medicare in that everyone would have the same health insurance plan, though people get to choose where they get care.

Could it be an improvement? Yes. There's sure room for improvement. But there are also complicated problems to sort out, and others that such a program could create.

The first obstacle is public opinion. Try telling people: Your health plan is going away. And we have some new taxes. The new system will be better. Your state government will get it right just like always!

Oregon's Joint Task Force on Universal Health Care is looking at the big questions. How would Oregon pay for it? How much care is the "right" amount? How would eligibility work if people come to the state? Would it be allowed under federal law?

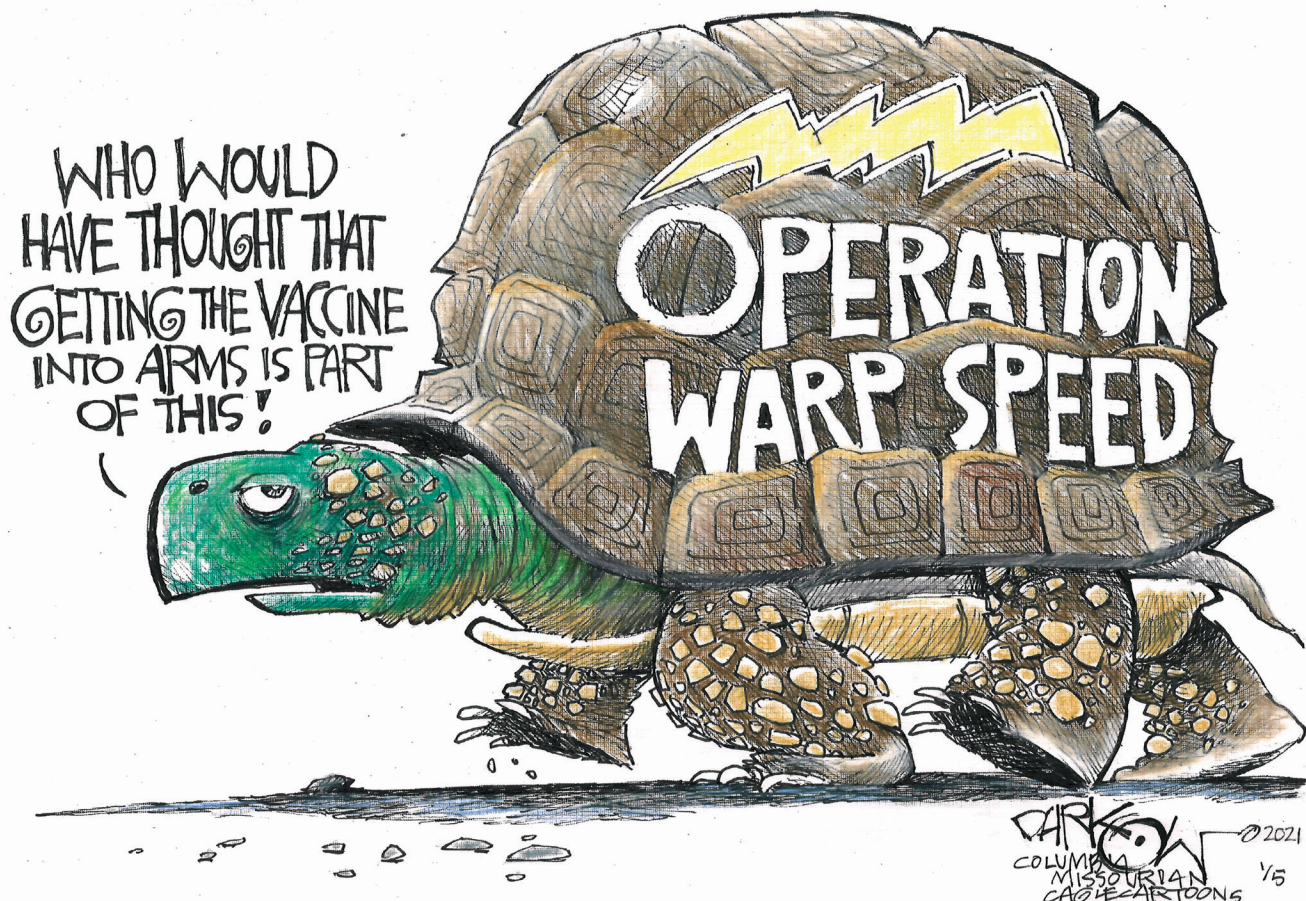
This week the task force takes on the issue of the federal ERISA law. The Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 sets standards for retirement and health plans in private industry. ERISA also sort of creates a roadblock, stopping states from experimenting with health care reform.

If a single-payer option was created in Oregon, it might be challenged under ERISA. Employers that are self-insured might argue that a state, single-payer plan funded by a payroll tax would put pressure on employers to drop their coverage for their employees or they would be effectively paying twice. That happened in Maryland and the plan was struck down, according to documents for this week's meeting.

It's not clear that Oregon would stick to that script. What Oregon would likely do is seek a waiver from the federal government from certain requirements of ERISA. If that was granted, one problem could be solved.

As problems go with creating a single-payer system, dealing with ERISA may be one of the easier ones. It would be a mistake for legislators to assume that because there are clear Democratic majorities in both houses of the Legislature and in Oregon's top elected offices that Oregonians are ready for a state takeover of health care. That's still a tough sell.

Smaller steps would probably be smarter than one big swooping change, to build trust and to build government competency. We're not saying that's what the state should do. Just that it would be smarter.



Pondering electric bikes and nonmotorized roads and trails



BILL ANEY

THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

Imagine it's early September and you hold a coveted Mount Emily archery elk tag. After a restless night, you rise three hours before dawn and drive 45 minutes to a trailhead where you are happy to see no other vehicles. Loading up your hunting pack and bow, you walk past a closed road gate for a 3-mile hike into your secret elk hunting spot, far from the disturbance of motor vehicles. You and the elk have an affinity for this place, and the quiet and solitude it provides.

The eastern horizon is just starting to turn pale pink as you near the familiar saddle where elk trails cross the still dark ridge. Ears, eyes, nose — all senses are on full hunting alert when you become aware of the crunch of tires on the road coming up quickly from behind. You are no longer the only human in these woods.

A bicyclist, also carrying a pack and hunting bow, glides effortlessly past you on the steady uphill grade. Other than the tires rolling over the ground, the only sound you hear is a low whir.

You've just been overtaken by a hunter on an e-bike, a bicycle powered by an electric motor. You curse under your breath, realizing that this hunter has invested less boot leather and effort than you, and slept more last night, while accessing the same remote backcountry.

This scene plays out more and more on our public lands as land managers and forest users sort out the latest development allowing more people to easily access the deep backcountry. As owners of these public lands, we should be thinking about this

new tool and how it impacts our natural resources and recreational pursuits.

To be clear, this is not about Wilderness with a capital "W." By law, federally designated wilderness areas are off-limits to mechanized travel of all sorts. E-bikes, ATVs, motorcycles, mountain bikes and, yes, even wheeled deer carts are not permitted in wilderness. This is not really open for debate, although some people are using this as part of a fallacious slippery slope argument against allowing e-bikes on public trails and roads.

More than 90% of federal land in Oregon and Washington is not designated wilderness, but not all this area is treated the same. Some areas are not open to any motor vehicles, some are open only to motorcycles and/or ATVs, and some are open to motor vehicles only in certain seasons (like snowmobile trails or dry season ATV trails). Where do e-bikes fit? Are they just an easier and faster cousin of mountain bikes? Or are they more like quiet motorcycles and only appropriate where motor vehicles are allowed?

To work through this puzzle, it helps to understand why some areas are closed to motorized travel in the first place. I see two broad sets of reasoning. First, reducing disturbance provides areas of security for wildlife and a place for humans to find quiet and spiritual renewal. Traffic, noise, safety, security and solitude are all good reasons to have areas far from motor vehicles, and as our ambitious archery hunter knows, such areas can hold more elk.

Second, natural resource damage can occur when the rubber meets the mud, creating rutting and erosion, impacts to soils and sensitive vegetation, and in general tends to put mud in the crick. Motor vehicles are among the worst culprits.

So where do e-bikes fit? They are quiet, less powerful and slower than motorcycles or ATVs. Still, our early-rising bow hunter

would argue that his or her solitude and backcountry experience was ruined by this technology. And while e-bikes can't do the same kind of damage to soils, water and vegetation as motorcycles or ATVs, they can probably do more damage than mountain bikes or foot traffic.

The biggest impact of e-bikes may be the way they allow easier access into the deep back country. Motorcycles, three-wheelers, four-wheelers, side-by-sides and e-bikes each represent an incremental evolution of technology with impacts that we may not fully appreciate at first. Opportunities for solitude and adventure should require some commitment of time, energy and discomfort, and whether it is new ultralight backpacking gear, satellite communications or vehicles, people are using technology to get further, and more easily, into the backcountry.

As land managers wrestle with e-bikes and the next new type of vehicle, it helps to have a bright line of distinction. For example, with respect to designated wilderness areas, mechanized equipment is not allowed. Wheeled equipment is mechanized and wheels don't belong in wilderness. Simple.

I suggest there is another useful bright line with respect to e-bikes. If it has a motor, it is a motorized vehicle. Roads, trails and areas that are open only to nonmotorized travel should be off limits to e-bikes because they have a motor. Simple, clearly understood and without nuance.

Stick to the established standard and keep motorized vehicles out of nonmotorized areas, no matter how quiet. This is better for backcountry, better for wildlife, and better for the pursuit of peace and quiet.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

YOUR VIEWS

Trump's behavior a threat to democracy

I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my two daughters 40 years ago telling them, "This is a very special day." It was Jan. 20, and we were watching the inauguration of the president of the United States. I emphasized it was a special day because we were one of the few countries to have a peaceful, orderly and respectful passage of presidential power.

The girls, now grown women, wonder, "What happened to that democratic process?"

Never in my wildest dreams could I imagine a narcissistic, serial-lying demagogue refusing to relinquish presidential power. Trump has taken a timeout from playing golf and ignoring the pandemic to motivate 140 members of the House and 12 senators to contest the election that he lost, stoking insurrection and the far right to arm up and protest on Wednesday, Jan. 6.

Harvard professors Levitsky and Ziblatt spent 20 years studying the death of democracies in Europe and Latin America and published "How Democra-

cies Die" in 2018. They note that democracy no longer dies with a revolution or coup, but with the slow, steady weakening of critical institutions, the judiciary, the press, and the gradual erosion of long-standing political norms.

Trump's behavior, with the support of many Republicans, is the biggest threat to our democracy since World War II.

Chuck Wood
Pendleton

Oregonians support you, governor

Despite the harangues of a couple hundred uninformed, misguided, and radicalized protestors in Salem on Jan. 1, I believe the overwhelming message to Gov. Kate Brown and Oregon public health authorities is that the vast majority of Oregonians support the measures taken to control the spread of COVID-19. Oregon's rank as 45th among the 50 states in terms of infection rate is a testament to the success of state policies and the assumption of responsibility in the absence of national leadership.

But the continuation of this performance still depends on the acceptance of proven and medically unanimous procedures enacted by the state. Such procedures, even though mandated, are not 100% enforceable, but we only need review examples where they are either not in place, or have been neglected, to observe soaring contagion, overwhelmed hospital facilities, and rapidly increasing mortality. Most of us do not want that for Oregon.

No system is perfect, and business should work with public health services to discover ways to innovate and safely continue their activities. The media reports almost daily examples of these occurrences.

Importantly, this is not a basis for political divide. This is not about constitutional rights, or the last election. It is about defeating the pandemic. We have the knowledge of the methods required to best contain the virus and now the vaccines to suppress it. With some patience, and a level of trust, there is a rational way forward.

Donald Fisher
Powell Butte