

OUR VIEW

Walkout may result in changing quorum rules

Do you think Gov. Kate Brown should do more to get schools to reopen? Do you think more should be done to vaccinate seniors sooner?

Do you think the state should look to speed up reopening of businesses?

Those are reasons why Oregon Senate Republicans walked out on Feb. 25. They say their efforts to get Brown's attention to these issues have gone unacknowledged. So they walked out to get her attention.

Yes, they got her attention. But Republicans didn't compel her to make any changes. And we can't imagine she will fundamentally change her approach.

Perhaps Senate Republicans did succeed in a few ways. Just getting people's attention these days takes more than making a speech. The walkout got the Oregon public's attention for at least a news cycle. And in that moment Republicans highlighted what the difference might be if they were governing.

They also reminded their fellow legislators that they still have the power to shut down the making of new laws.

Oregon is one of only a handful of states that requires by its constitution that two-thirds of lawmakers must be on the Senate floor and the House floor for work to be done. The narrow Democratic margin in the Senate means the Democratic majority is not walkout-proof. A walkout is some of the only raw power Republicans in Oregon really have.

For how long? Will voters tire of this tactic? It seems inevitable that through a bill or an initiative a measure will be put on the ballot for a constitutional amendment to change Oregon's quorum rules to a simple majority.

That might not be something to celebrate. Yes, it would work in the favor of Democrats now. It is, though, one of the few tools to prevent a tyranny of a simple majority. Oregon voters are roughly evenly split between Democrats, unaffiliated voters and Republicans — in that order. There is probably far more that unites Oregonians than divides them. On some issues at least, majority opinion is slim or hard to find.

Democrats hold power now. They may not always. Democrats have used the power of the walkout before — in 1971, 1995 and 2001.

In these unsettled times, Oregonians need legislators and a governor who find ways to work together, not write new exclusionary rules.

MEANWHILE, AT A TRIAL FOR ONE OF THE CAPITOL RIOTERS:



The River Democracy Act should become law



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

Years ago, in search of my first career job as a biologist, I interviewed with a private firm in Portland. The interviewer me asked a hypothetical question about how I would help to manage a piece of ground, and my reply was a simple question: "What are your objectives?"

At that point he nodded, smiled slightly, and made a note. I felt that this was an impressive start to my interview and, while I didn't get the job, I did learn an important lesson: Good management starts with good objectives.

As I see it, this concept is key to the River Democracy Act of 2021 recently introduced by Sen. Ron Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley. The senators started in October 2019 by asking Oregonians what wild and scenic streams deserved protection, and the resulting public nomination process yielded thousands of responses and stream nominations from people across the state.

After vetting these nominations, the Oregon senators are now proposing adding about 4,700 miles to the list of Wild and Scenic Rivers in Oregon, all on public lands.

What is the practical importance of calling a stream wild or scenic? As I see it, protecting a stream under federal law gives federal land managers their marching orders for managing these areas: Protect water quality and cultural foods and resources while working with thinning and prescribed burning to reduce the risk of damaging wildfire. Again, here we see the value of establishing objectives for management of the

public's land.

What does that mean for those of us that love the Blues? The new proposal adds about 700 miles of local streams to the wild and scenic river system, including the South Fork of the Umatilla and Walla Walla, the Upper and Lower Grande Ronde, Imnaha and John Day rivers. Maybe you are as surprised as me to find that these streams are not already listed as wild and scenic.

The current Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 law is imperfect. My experience implementing this law is that federal land managers often avoid proposing any projects in the identified river corridors. This might be good if you believe that preservation is the best way to manage public lands, but it is not a good long-term strategy in dry, fire-prone forests.

The 2021 law makes it clear that a wild and scenic river designation does not set aside these areas as reserves. The law instructs managers to purposefully evaluate the risk of severe wildfire and work with local and tribal governments to develop a plan that deals with these risks, and then do something about it.

Reducing the risk of high-intensity fire does not mean high-intensity commercial logging. Since almost all water in Oregon originates on national forests, maintaining the quality, quantity and timing of runoff is one of the most important purposes of the public's land. Through the careful use of tree thinning and prescribed fire we can maintain healthy forests and water quality.

There are plenty of bad examples of commercial logging on private lands that have devastated stream courses. Oregon's somewhat anemic, or perhaps poorly enforced, Forest Practices Act fails to protect these values. I can take anyone up on Mount Emily to see firsthand what bad management of private industrial forest lands means to headwater streams.

The new rivers bill was introduced in

January and there is already predictable reaction from some quarters. The *East Oregonian* editorial page included two pieces on Tuesday, Feb. 23, that expressed suspicion or outright opposition to the law, concerned about unintended consequences or adverse effects on water and private property rights.

To be clear, the law does not affect private property or any existing water rights. The law does withdraw federal stream corridors from mineral entry, meaning that no new mining claims can be made in these areas. This is a good development in my mind, as mining and water quality go together like oil and water.

We should also anticipate some opposition to management of these areas from the preservationist camp, such as the opinions expressed regularly by George Wuerthner, who starts and ends all of his letters with the proposition that all federal forest lands should be off-limits to logging. This ignores the fact that these lands are part of the public estate specifically because they can provide resources for the American people.

Open spaces, clean water, wildlife habitat and, yes, wood products and forage are all legitimate products of federal lands when managed properly. That's why we have national forests.

Much of the outdoor recreation we enjoy in Northeast Oregon is focused around good water for camping, fishing, hiking and boating. For this reason alone, protection and sound management of these areas should appeal to us all.

Yes, this law is a big and bold step forward for conservation. Good management starts with solid objectives, and the Rivers Democracy Act provides those objectives and deserves to become law.

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

YOUR VIEWS

River Democracy Act benefits Oregon's forests, rivers, wildlife

As an Eastern Oregonian who values public lands, clean water, and wildlife habitat, I was appalled by the *East Oregonian* editorial "New river protections may have unintended consequences" (Monday, Feb. 23). The piece claims: "We are not in opposition to the bill."

Yet, the entire editorial raises vague suspicions about government in general and the broad groups of people who support the bill.

The editorial notes that politicians are always trying to get reelected. That is certainly true. Most of us want to keep our jobs. Some politicians get reelected by goading and manipulating voters' fears while serving special interests. Special interest groups fund electioneering in exchange for future decisions that provide profit for their executives. In Oregon, the timber industry has bought politicians on both sides of the aisle for

short-term profit.

Truly democratic lawmakers appeal instead to everyday constituents. They make decisions toward long-term goals for healthy ecosystems and sustainable economies. Most outdoor people support the River Democracy Act. People working to combat climate change and restore healthy ecosystems are the opposite of a special interest group.

The editorial warns that, if passed, this bill may negatively impact "the people on the ground" or "someone somewhere."

Really? Could you be a bit more specific?

I know many of my neighbors reflexively oppose anything that might make environmentalists happy, but this bill doesn't affect private property rights. It doesn't restrict existing grazing or water use privileges or mining. It doesn't stop future logging. Quite frankly, I wish it did. And as "historic" as this bill may be, it still leaves 94% of the waterways in our state undesignated and underprotected. Senators Wyden and Merkley and

most Oregonians recognize the enduring benefits the River Democracy Act will extend to Oregon's forests, rivers, wildlife and communities. We encourage them to stand for the public interest and against reflexive fears by turning this bill into law as soon as possible.

Mary McCracken
Island City

Mixed signals make no sense

This is pure insanity. Salem is trying its best to close up our bars by raising the tax on beer 2,800% with House Bill 3296. The Pendleton Police Department is helping by handing out those high-dollar DUI tickets and threats of prison time. All this revenue promised to be used for treatment programs that aren't even free.

The city council has, on the other hand, decided to hand out cash to the bar owners in an effort to keep their businesses open.

Does any of this make sense?

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

LETTERS

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