

OUR VIEW

A tip of the hat, a kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to organ donors, their loved ones who support their choice and the medical professionals that facilitate such an invaluable gift.

Last week, the Pacific Northwest Transplant Bank, which handles all organs donated in Oregon, recognized Good Shepherd Health Care System for helping an organ donation take place at the Hermiston hospital — a rarity for hospitals of that size.

For some, receiving an organ or tissue is lifesaving, allowing them many additional years with their family and friends. For others, it changes their life by lifting the burden of 12 or more hours a week hooked up to a dialysis machine. More than 100,000 people in the United States are on the waiting list.

April is designated as Donate Life Month. In recognition of that, consider placing yourself on the organ donor registry, and having a conversation with family about your wishes.

A kick in the pants to the bill headed to the governor's desk that would no longer require drivers moving to Oregon from another state to take a written test to prove their knowledge of Oregon traffic laws.

The stated intent of the law is to help the Department of Motor Vehicles clear the massive backlog of work it has accumulated during the pandemic. But it seems there were better solutions to that problem than a permanent rule change.

Some of Oregon's traffic laws designed to keep people safe, such as changing to the left lane while passing any vehicles pulled over on the side of the interstate, aren't universal. Incentivizing move-ins to study up on Oregon laws helps keep everyone safer.

A tip of the hat to school districts preparing summer learning options for their students.

Educators tried their best over the past year to make comprehensive distance learning work, but there is no doubt the disruptions of the pandemic has negatively impacted most students' educational growth.

Umatilla School District is hosting summer camps, internships and credit recovery for its students, and we hope to see other districts also look at how they can help facilitate some extra learning over the summer for students who need it.



The angst of Afghanistan



HARRIET ISOM

OTHER VIEWS

President Biden has made a gutsy decision to withdraw all U.S. military from Afghanistan by September. The risk to the U.S. of a restored terrorism base in Afghanistan remains credible but is judged by the President to be containable. A hardline, violence-prone Muslim Taliban may simply grab full power in Kabul or, in the attempt, set off another civil war.

Last minute Kabul and Taliban power sharing negotiations are stalled. The democratic freedoms we helped establish and the rise of an educated class, including many women, are in extreme jeopardy. Have we made the best policy decision?

U.S. exits

Our past record of exits from Afghanistan had consequences. After we heavily armed the Mujahideen factions to expel the Soviets in 1994, we just left. Civil war and the rise of the Taliban, mainly Pashtuns in their southern heartland, took Kabul in 1996 and allowed in Al-Qaeda.

After 9/11 in 2001, we invaded and defeated the Taliban/Al-Qaeda but our attention shifted quickly to Iraq. Again the Taliban rebuilt with key assistance from neighboring Pakistan. As our military began departing already in 2020, the well-armed Taliban surged in capturing more of rural Afghanistan. And today it is engaged in a brutal campaign of killing educated Afghans.

U.S. exit 2021

Possible outcomes: 1) a power sharing agreement between Kabul and the Taliban; 2) a renewed civil war; or 3) a Taliban re-establishment of a caliphate in Kabul. A long overdue, U.S.-backed international effort at a political settlement through power sharing has halted. Taliban military commanders currently prefer outright victory, hence require more international pressure to accept it. Kabul thinks it can hold its own but no one knows for certain.

Strategic location

Complicating stability and peacemaking are other countries besides the U.S., each with their own agendas:

- Pakistan. It uses the Taliban in Afghanistan as a means to counter the influence of its perceived enemy, India. Indeed, the unsolved dilemma of U.S. military strategy has always been the sanctuary and assistance offered to the Taliban by Pakistan. Future risks for Islamabad, however, are an Afghan civil war, resulting refugees and the stoking of Pakistan's own revolutionary Islamic extremists. Pakistan has brought the Taliban to the negotiating table but may lack the influence to keep them there.

- India. With well-developed ties with the Kabul government, New Delhi is deeply worried about the return of a Pakistan-supported Taliban government. While New Delhi is one of the Kabul government's biggest aid providers, it worries that China will replace it with far bigger offers.

- Russia. Not to be ignored, Russia has revived old Soviet-era contacts, supplied light weapons to the Taliban since 2015 and joined in the disinformation campaigns portraying the U.S. with

evil intentions.

- Iran. Shiite Iran initially supported the U.S. invasion in 2001 and the ouster of the Sunni Taliban. But that cooperation changed when the USG called it an evil empire. It thereafter joined the Taliban in agitating for a U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. Interesting will be Iran's attitude after U.S. troops leave.

- China. China shares a tiny border in the northeast. It opposes any refuge base for its own Muslim group, the Uighurs. While China seems to eschew military involvement, it reportedly has been courting the Taliban with promised future investments and plans to connect Afghanistan with its China/Pakistan economic development corridor.

- Stan countries. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are northern neighbors with ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Reportedly, the USG is thinking one of them might be a regional military base substitute for Afghanistan. Is so, we will be up against China's and Russia's own efforts to dominate them.

Maybe we have underestimated the value to U.S. global interests of a limited but sustainable military deterrence role in a geographic area where China, Pakistan, India, Russia and Iran — and multiple extremist groups including Al-Qaeda and ISIS — all seek a foothold.

Ironically, China now has the best prospect of replacing ours and India's influence in Kabul through promises of significant investment/aid and a trade outlet to the sea through Pakistan.

Harriet Isom, a former U.S. ambassador and career diplomat who served in Asia and Africa from 1961-96, grew up in Pendleton and has retired to the family ranch.

Preventing wildfires starts at home



GEORGE WUERTHNER

OTHER VIEWS

A recent study concluded that much of the West is experiencing the second-most severe drought recorded in the past 1,200 years. Currently, 80% of Oregon is experiencing drought. Severe fire weather, of which drought is a significant factor, explains the spate of large blazes that have charred much of the West.

What drives all large blazes is extreme fire weather which consists of drought, combined with high temperatures, low humidity and most importantly wind. All these conditions are exacerbated by climate change.

One hears continually that "fire suppression" and "fuel buildup" are the prime factors in the rising acreage burned annually, but fuels do not drive large fires. If that were the case, we would expect the largest and most frequent fires on the coasts of Oregon and Washington where there is more "fuel" (biomass) than anywhere else in the West.

Despite the assertions from the timber industry and its supporters that

thinning and other forest management will reduce fire spread, most "active forest management" enhances fire spread.

Almost all of the largest blazes in the West occurred under extreme fire weather conditions. They burned aggressively on lands that were logged, thinned, or otherwise managed, whether it is the recent fires that charred the western slope of the Oregon Cascades, or the Camp Fire that destroyed 19,000 homes and killed 87 people in Paradise, California.

All significant blazes occurred during episodes of high temperatures, low humidity, drought and high winds. Logging does nothing to change the climate/weather.

This is one reason why more than 200 scientists (whose jobs do not depend on logging) signed a letter to Congress a few years ago that said: "Thinning large trees, including overstory trees in a stand, can increase the rate of fire spread by opening up the forest to increased wind velocity, damage soils, introduce invasive species that increase flammable understory vegetation and impact wildlife habitat."

The Congressional Research Service reached a similar conclusion: "From a quantitative perspective, the CRS study indicates a very weak relation-

ship between acres logged and the extent and severity of forest fires. ... The data indicate that fewer acres burned in areas where logging activity was limited."

I could provide many more such quotes and conclusions.

What this suggests is the need to focus attention on fire-safe procedures for communities, not trying to modify the forest.

If the home cannot ignite, it won't burn. Typically, any fuel reduction that is more than 100 feet from a home provides no benefit.

Reducing ignitions is relatively simple. Remove fine fuels like pine needles from roof and gutters. Keep flammable grass, pine needles and dead shrubs away from the home. Get rid of combustible lawn furniture. Put screens on attic vents. These and other measures will significantly reduce the chance of home loss or fire spread through the community.

Chain saws don't change the climate/weather. Given the current mega-drought, we need to rethink how we adapt to the inevitable wildfires. We must start at the home and work outward.

George Wuerthner is an ecologist who specializes in fire ecology and livestock issues.

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