

EVAN  
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OTHER VIEWS

## Legislature was inaccessible for many during the 2021 session

Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney has long praised the Oregon Legislature for its unhampered accessibility. It left visitors and activists from other states nostalgic for a time when citizens could easily approach the people governing their daily lives.

That all came to an end during the 2021 session, yet amazingly, Courtney still claimed that the Oregon Legislature remained accessible.

To an extent that could be a correct assertion, but it shows a large degree of ignorance, especially when many Oregonians lack reliable high-speed internet access to participate in the process. Instead of having their voices heard at the Capitol this session, Oregon's legislative leaders shut out low-income and disenfranchised Oregonians.

Democrats praised the session as one of the most accessible sessions in the state's history because the use of technology made it more accessible. Nevermind that they didn't address the fact that not all Oregonians have the technology to participate in a quasi-virtual legislative session. Ironically, legislators and their staff receive taxpayer-purchased computers and technology that allowed them to participate with little difficulty or personal expense. They also had access to their offices and taxpayer-funded internet. Oregon lawmakers also received their daily \$151 session per diem as if they were in Salem every day during session.

Republican lawmakers had an opportunity to make this a serious issue and question the validity of the 2021 session on moral and ethical grounds. Instead, the messaging and arguments were haphazard and unclear. State Sen. Dallas Heard, R-Roseburg, pledged to vote "no" on every bill until the Capitol was opened back up to the public. This caused Heard to receive some blowback from his colleagues who wished to see some of their token bills pass unanimously. While voting "no" on well-meaning bills may seem unnecessary, Heard's intentions should not have been discredited.

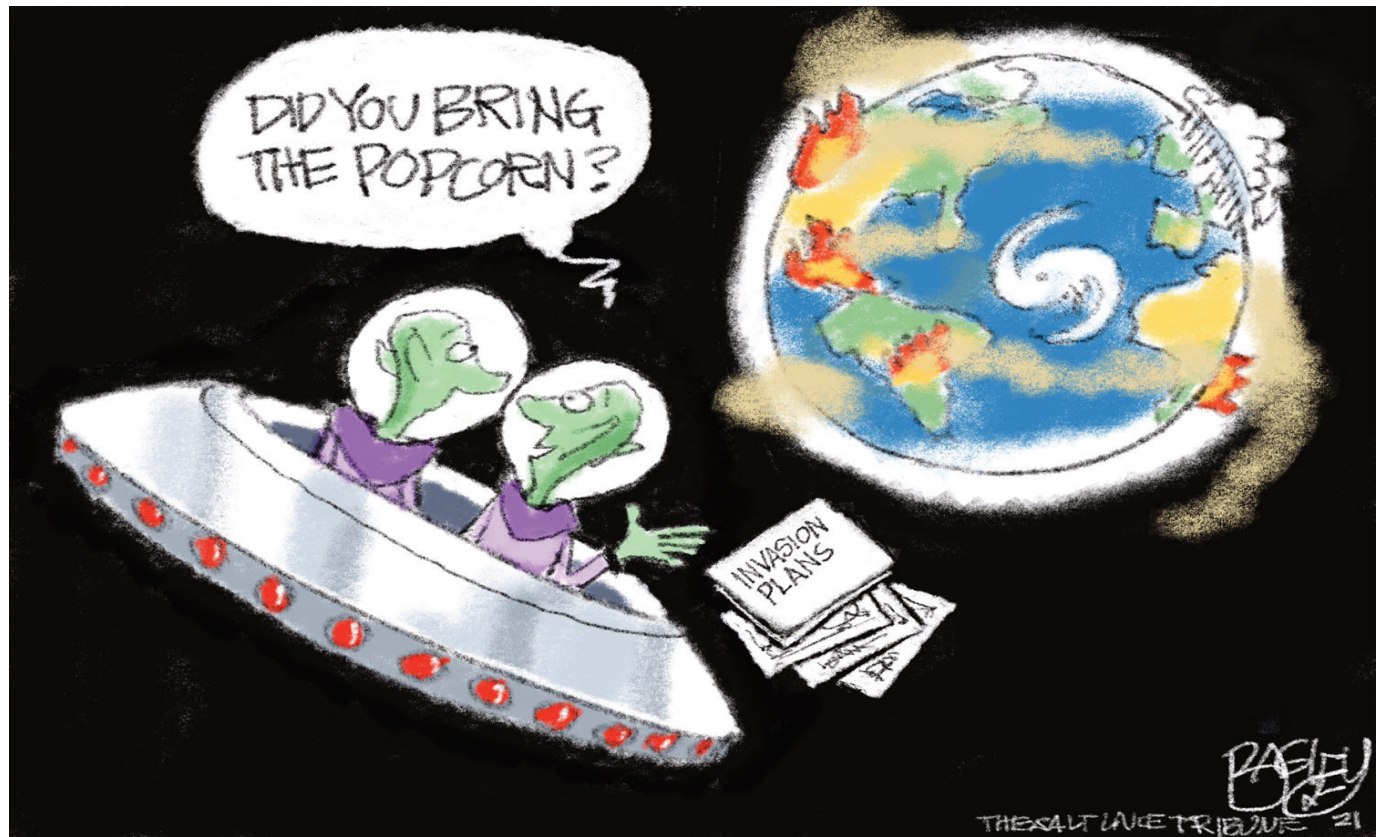
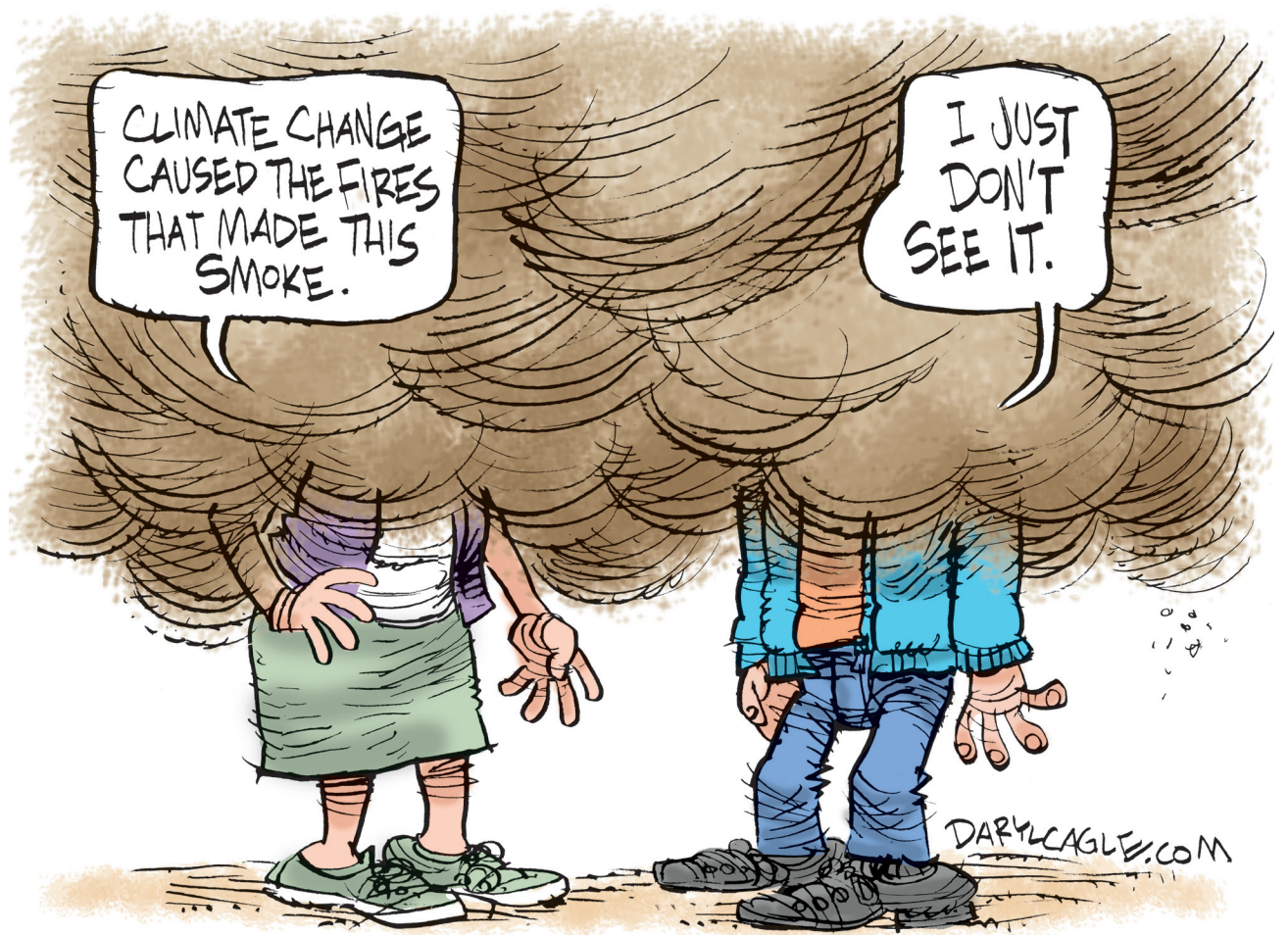
Like many of his Republican colleagues, Heard represents a largely rural district where many of his constituents do not have reliable access to high-speed internet. With COVID-19 restrictions in place, constituents without internet could not go to their local library or an area business to find internet access. Not to mention, that it is difficult and rude to participate in a virtual meeting in a public space shared with others. It was nice to see a rural senator standing up for Oregonians who were put in a bad situation by those who should be making sure their constituents are heard.

It was even more perplexing that two Republican senators appeared to go after their own colleagues for speaking out, namely targeting Heard, who chairs the Oregon Republican Party. Their bill would have made it illegal and punishable by a daily fine of \$250 for a lawmaker to hold a party leadership position while serving in a state office. The Senate Democratic leader joined them in this effort, and I'm sure he welcomed the Republican in-fighting and the distraction.

Regardless of the merits behind those Republican senators' efforts, imagine if they had joined forces with Heard and their caucus to call out the Democratic supermajority for ostracizing Oregonians out of the legislative process, especially rural and low-income Oregonians. Such an effort would have undoubtedly put Democrats on the defensive and probably would have created some positive change to the openness of the session.

Unfortunately, that never took place and the session concluded with no one from the public in the building they're paying for. As a state, we can and should do better.

*Evan Bryan is a former legislative director at the Oregon State Senate. He holds a master's degree in legislative affairs from George Washington University.*



## Stay informed on Oregon wildfires

ANDREW  
CUTLER

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

We've added a new feature to our websites across the six eastside newspapers of EO Media Group that I think is timely and, unfortunately, necessary.

On each of our news websites there is a tab where all our fire coverage is collected. Click on the tab and readers will be able to catch up on what is going on across the state and see updates on the progress of blazes.

I think the feature is a good one and will help give our readers a sense of the magnitude of the fires that are scorching huge chunks of forest across Oregon.

While the new feature is a great asset, I, of course, wish it wasn't necessary. The vast size of this summer's blazes took me by surprise,

and when I read our great coverage on the fires I always feel a little sad. That's because I have spent more than enough time recreating in this great region of ours, and it pains me to see the areas I've considered as places of refuge go up in flames.

Yet, part of our job is to ensure our readers are informed. That can be a challenge when we are trying to cover a breaking news story like fires. First, we want to make sure we get the most accurate information available to our readers. Then we want to deliver comprehensive coverage, news stories that provide context and background on how the fires started and the damage each one inflicts upon our fellow Oregonians.

In our modern era we are in many ways more connected to each other than ever before, but in some ways I'd argue we also are further apart.

Social media provides a platform of connectivity unlike anything seen before, but we also live in a secluded region of the state where cities and

towns are spaced far apart. Yet, what occurs in say, Baker City, can eventually have an impact on a place like Pendleton. The recent forest fires are a good case in point. While the Bootleg Fire — one of the largest in the U.S. — is burning in Southern Oregon the residual impact of the blaze — smoke — is impacting not only Oregon but most of the nation.

That is a different kind of connectivity but a real one that we all must live with when the sky becomes choked with smoke.

I believe our new forest fire landing page furnishes our readers with an up-to-date resource so they can stay informed and understand what's happening around them.

So don't forget to check it out.

*Andrew Cutler is the publisher/editor of the East Oregonian and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing the East Oregonian and five more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.*

## Mega-dairies and our mega-drought

KRISTINA  
BEGGEN

OTHER VIEWS

Oregon, like the rest of the West, is staring down a dry summer. In an executive order, Gov. Kate Brown instructed state agencies to trim water use in preparation for what can only be called a mega-drought.

Across the West, residents hunker down in anticipation of water restrictions and in some regions farmers have started reevaluating the viability of water-intensive crops. In the Klamath Basin in southern Oregon, indigenous communities are facing the potential demise of sacred and federally protected endangered fish, and irrigation water has been shut off due to the lowest levels the river has ever seen.

Yet, in Oregon's northeastern Morrow County, the state may welcome one of the largest and most notorious guzzlers of water — a mega-dairy. Easterday Dairy would bring 28,000 cows to the same land as the former Lost Valley Farm in Boardman, joining four other mega-dairies in Morrow County.

The Easterdays' multimillion dollar fraud case involving hundreds of thou-

sands of imaginary cattle and subsequent bankruptcies put a pause on the permitting process for the dairy until Oregon's Department of Agriculture found that Cody Easterday — listed as the owner of Easterday Dairy on the permit — passed on ownership to his son, Cole.

The original application was withdrawn per ODA's July 15 deadline, but a decision on the subsequent permit submission from Cole is still pending. Although the financial troubles affecting the Easterdays' various companies call their ability to responsibly manage a mega-dairy into question, clearly warranting denial of the dairy's permit, yet another pressing case for denial stares us in the face — our persistent drought. Easterday Dairy's permit application estimates its water usage would average approximately 20 million gallons per day.

Twenty-two of Oregon's 36 counties have requested drought declarations from Brown this year. Morrow was granted its request and is under a drought declaration. As crops and pastures wither, the threat of devastating wildfires grows. According to the National Drought Mitigation Center, county residents will likely have a "significantly shortened" window for water access this year. These conditions represent a "new normal" for the area, and will undoubtedly worsen in

time if the proposed Easterday mega-dairy is granted a permit.

Morrow County's mega-dairies source their water from local groundwater and the Columbia River, but both are finite resources. Migrating fish depend on the river's flow, and experts have said these fish need as much water from the Columbia as it has left from April until September.

As we wade further into a summer that only promises to get drier and hotter, this water will become infinitely more precious and quite possibly scarcer than ever before. Several parts of Morrow County are already designated as critical groundwater areas in response to serious groundwater decline.

Mega-dairies routinely use untold gallons of water in water-stressed regions. Despite the drought, Oregon agencies continue to elevate the interests of industrial agriculture over the basic needs of communities and ecosystems to access clean water.

ODA must deny the proposed Easterday Dairy's permit. Our water is too limited and too precious to waste it on mega-dairies in a drought.

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