

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Questions linger over Wyden bill

Sen. Ron Wyden should get kudos for sponsoring a virtual town hall session in August regarding his River Democracy Act, and the esteemed lawmaker did a good job of answering questions and trying to alleviate fears. But his legislation still carries more questions than answers.

The River Democracy Act will add more than 4,000 miles of wild and scenic rivers across the state, but the idea sparked some opposition from rural county elected officials and concerns it will impact grazing, potential timber harvests and affect recreational access.

For the most part, the bill seems to be a good-faith attempt in conservation and carries with it several interesting and valid protections.

Yet, there is a bit of an unease with a piece of legislation that carves out so much acreage based on what is essentially a crowd-sourcing attempt where 15,000 Oregonians delivered their personal choices for what should be protected under the proposed legislation.

Wyden has done a good job of answering questions and has assured the public the bill will have no impact on private land or existing property, grazing or water rights.

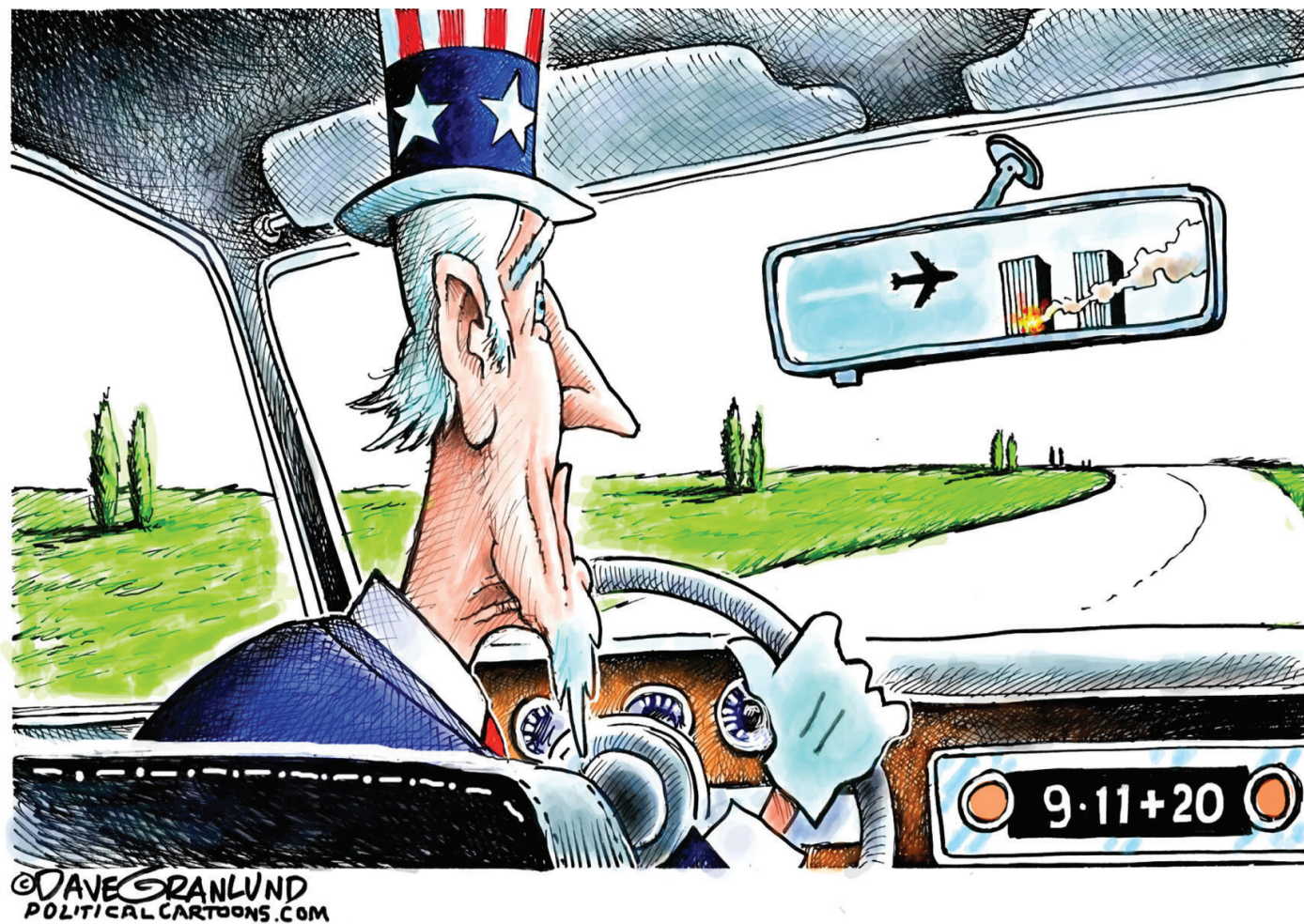
Wyden has stated the bill will apply only to federal lands. The bill also contains provisions that will require the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management to review wildfire risks in wild and scenic river corridors. Each agency then has up to six years to develop a mitigation plan. The bill also would create a \$30 million fund to restore riparian areas that are scorched by wildfires.

Both are excellent measures that are, in fact, long overdue. And yet, Wyden's ambitious plan leaves a sense of disquiet.

For one, there doesn't seem to be as much interaction with local officials on the broad strokes of the blueprint as one would expect. Some county commissioners in some portions of Eastern Oregon have said they were never consulted about the bill, a piece of legislation that will impact their areas of responsibility.

Secondly, the bills such as these have a bad habit of creating unintended consequences. What appears right and proper now, may evolve into a problem down the road. Not for the senator, nor for environmentalists who want the legislation, but for people who live in the areas where the bill will make its biggest impact.

We laude Wyden for his effort, and we want to get behind this bill. But to do so the sense of unease needs to be quelled.



Improving quality of life should be priority

“The overriding challenge of the decade is quality — quality of life in Oregon,” that was true when Gov. Tom McCall first voiced those words in 1967, as well as when he repeated the phrase in 1971, and it rings true today.

Quality-of-life concerns are top of mind for Oregonians. A full 51% of Oregonians identified homelessness as the single most important topic for the state to address, according to a recent Oregon Values and Beliefs Center survey.

Similarly, Oregonians identified affordable housing as a priority — 49% percent of respondents listed it as one of the top three issues they'd like leaders to take on. Finally, another 10% of Oregonians listed other quality of life issues as the most important issue: traffic congestion (3%), vandalism and graffiti (3%) and litter (1%).

“Quality of life” isn't an easy concept to define, but people know it when they experience it, and, perhaps even more so, know when it's on the decline. McCall broadly referred to quality of life as “the sum total of the fairness of our tax structure; the caliber of our homes; the cleanliness of our air and water; and the provision of affirmative assistance to those who cannot assist themselves.”

Sensing a potential decline in the 1970s, McCall acknowledged a “war against the despoilment of nature.” His response was a list of more than 30 measures to protect the state's air, water and lands. He also advocated for sustainable economic growth, going as far as to ask Oregonians to “extend [a warm] welcome to Hollywood producers” to bring more motion picture production to the state; an economic sector that



KEVIN
FRAZIER

OTHER VIEWS

had grown as more filmmakers tried to capture Oregon's “scenic wonders.”

Finally, he convened corporate executives and local officials in these efforts — leaning on them to spot waste in state government and solutions for making Oregon an even better place to call home.

Contemporary Oregonians can and should learn from McCall's actions to restore and maintain Oregon's quality of life. The same “love for ... traditions and beauty of our home” that allowed for progress in the era of McCall exists today. That love, once tapped into, can unite Oregonians around meaningful efforts to ensure housing security for every resident of the state.

The first step to preserving quality of life in Oregon is making it a priority. McCall could have chosen to let myriad cultural and political issues distract his administration from focusing on the state's “social, economic and environmental climate,” which he listed as the core aspects of quality of life.

Instead, McCall specified to the Legislature and the people of Oregon that he was not capable of solving every problem; he admitted the Legislature could not solve every problem in one session.

That sort of honesty and humility is too frequently missing in politics today, but it can be restored.

Once Oregon's leaders embrace the people's desire for substantial action on homelessness and housing affordability,

they'll be better able to earn the people's trust in making big decisions.

Oregonians are ready for major action to solve these major problems. For instance, we're ready for a regional approach to housing affordability — no one community can build enough housing to lower rents across the state. We're also ready for more collaborative and consolidated government action — having every city and county develop their own strategies is duplicative and wasteful. Finally, we're ready for actions that prioritize individuals, not institutions. McCall frequently cited the strong individualistic streak in Oregonians — he didn't see it as a fault, but rather as a strength to embrace and invest in. Today's leaders should do the same by listening to what individuals need rather than what special interests demand from the state.

Oregonians want to do more than just get by. As McCall made clear, we want to “earn ... a living (and) have living that is worthwhile.” The OVBC survey didn't report surprising information — for decades Oregonians have signaled that quality of life concerns are their priority. It's long past time the state's leaders listened and followed McCall's playback for providing a better social, economic and environmental climate by taking immediate and drastic action to put roofs over heads and drive rents below paychecks.

Kevin Frazier formerly led Passport Oregon, which helped young Oregonians explore the state's outdoors. He currently operates No One Left Offline, which has distributed nearly 100 Wi-Fi hot spots throughout Oregon, especially Central Oregon.

YOUR VIEWS

Is the city courting disaster from Mother Nature?

The most recent destruction left in the wake of Hurricane Ida in Louisiana and New York was a real wakeup call to residents in the Northeast. Could that happen to Pendleton?

If you're a longtime resident, the Columbus Day Storm in 1964 should ring a bell, both hurricane force winds and rain. Fortunately, most of the damages — other than uprooted trees and downed power lines — were lost shingles, a few fences and small sheds.

Times have changed. Trees are a lot larger and more abundant. Miles of overhead fiber-optic cables are going up daily. So, what's being done to prepare for another Columbus Day Storm? The answer is pretty simple, nothing.

Several years ago, I mentioned to our city management that, as more overhead cables were installed, our skyline was beginning to resemble that of a third world nation, hoping that a program would materialize to relocate overhead utilities underground in the older parts of town, especially in areas designated as the Urban Renewal District where funds were available.

Suggestions fell on deaf ears. Street trees and dog parks received a higher

priority. Besides, public works felt that the structural integrity of our power poles had reached design limits and more overhead lines would not be permitted, but there they are.

Our city management team, not being native residents of Pendleton, seem to be unaware of our historical relationship with Mother Nature. They were astounded at recent flooding, oblivious to the possibility that it could even happen locally. They were cavalier in their attitude that because millions were spent on the aquifer recovery system, that our city was drought resistant, so no additional water conservation measures were needed, despite the alarming drop in the water table over the years.

In his enthusiastic effort to get city council approval for a new fire station, a former fire chief stressed that the old station was not earthquake proof. At the same briefing, the chief building inspector stressed that history clearly showed wind damage was the primary concern in our area.

Will the failure to properly upgrade our city's infrastructure make us more or less vulnerable to the wrath of Mother Nature in the future, or are we going to rely on new dog parks and infant daycare centers to combat future disasters?

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

Vote now for additions to Wild & Scenic Rivers

The wild rivers and streams east of the Cascades are lifelines — giving us the gift of cold, clean water to drink, late season flows for farms, havens for fish and wildlife, and places to fish, boat, camp, and rejuvenate our souls.

When I moved from Eugene to Prairie City back in the early 1980s, I fell in love with the John Day River — one of Oregon's 70-plus designated Wild & Scenic Rivers (just 2% of the state's river miles). I also explored the not-yet-designated forks and tributaries — once finding a massive bull elk skeleton in a forested stream bottom off trail.

Decades later, I'm grateful to Sen. Ron Wyden for the opportunity to nominate favorite streams and rivers to be considered for additions to congressionally designated Wild & Scenic Rivers. His leadership and belief in the grassroots to rise up and shape history are a heartening way to begin 2020. Please send in your river and stream entries through January 20th to: rivers@wyden.senate.gov.

Marina Richie
Bend

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.

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