



LINDSAY
MURDOCK
FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN

Keeping an eye on the gauges

The low fuel light appeared out of nowhere, or had it? I stared at the dash questioning how it was possible that I was once again running on empty and then laughed out loud, thankful I was alone.

In my heart and soul, I knew full well that my fuel gauge was a very accurate reading of where I was, not just in my vehicle, but in my mind and spirit as well. Honestly, nearly depleted, and in need of fuel is a place where many of us are right now.

Normally, finding myself in a situation that might possibly leave me stranded on the side of the highway needing help from strangers wouldn't be something I'd be thankful for. However, the last thing I needed that night was a reprimand. I could almost hear my husband and teenage sons lecturing me about the somewhat dangerous habit I had of driving under a quarter of a tank, and the fact I often forgot to check the fuel gauge prior to leaving town.

Running low on milk, bread and fuel were three things they didn't take lightly, and their patience with me was growing thinner and thinner in my attempts to push things to the limit.

The piercing sound that only whistles at me when I have forgotten to buckle my seatbelt or when the fuel that keeps me moving forward is at a minimum seemed to be the only lecture I needed. The high-pitched sound instantly had my heart racing, its piercing warning pumping through my body. I found myself counting the miles at each exit, praying my way past every sign, every phone pole and every familiar landmark that had safely carried me home so many times before.

My mind flooded with memories from my childhood. Memories of driving north on Highway 97, and then connecting with Interstate 5 from our home in Central Oregon to my grandparents in Seattle multiple times a year. I secretly think my dad enjoyed watching me squirm as the needle on the fuel gauge dropped from a quarter of a tank to the empty.

I would beg and plead with him to stop at each exit we passed, while my mom would do her best to lovingly reassure me that we would, in fact, make it to our destination with no trouble. I vividly remember so many of those trips when I thought for sure we had been so very, very close to running out of gas, but never once did it actually happen.

Why had I worried so much as a teenager? Was it because I was so far away from home? Why was I willing to put myself in similar situations now as an adult? Why are panic and frantic two emotions I even want to have hold of me? I've learned over the years as I've found myself in similar situations that my dad had not purposefully put us in a predicament. He knew exactly where he was going and how much was needed to get there. And, now, it finally makes sense. I know how far I can go, I know that if I do get into trouble, help is close, and I also know that he was probably a lot like me — trusting in what he knew to be true, even when he couldn't quite see it.

The roads I've been traveling on the past several months have me buckling up faster and faster with each passing day, completely unsure of what kind of terrain I may have to navigate, but honestly, I haven't done a very good job of keeping myself fueled the way I know I need to.

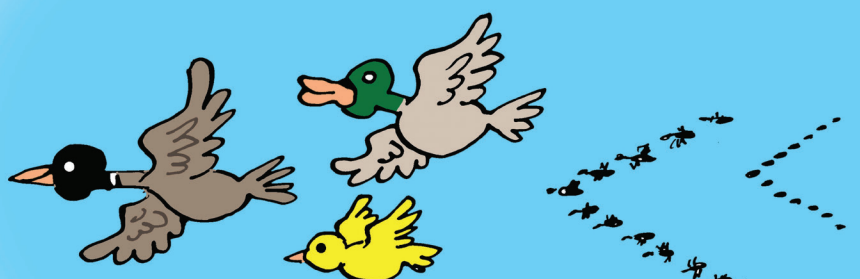
That evening was a wake-up call as I watched the fuel pump blink on the dash in front of me all the way home. I made it home safely and the fuel left in the tank had been just enough to get me where I needed to go. I was lucky that time — and I knew it. We aren't always given a chance to rest and refuel without completely running out, so when we are, I firmly believe we need to take it.

I don't know if and when that will happen again, but I do know that I'm going to fill up whenever I can, I'm going to watch the gauges a little more closely, and I'm going to trust that wherever the road I'm on takes me, I'll have more than enough to get me where I'm going.

Lindsay Murdock lives and teaches in Echo.

IF IT'S
AUTUMN...

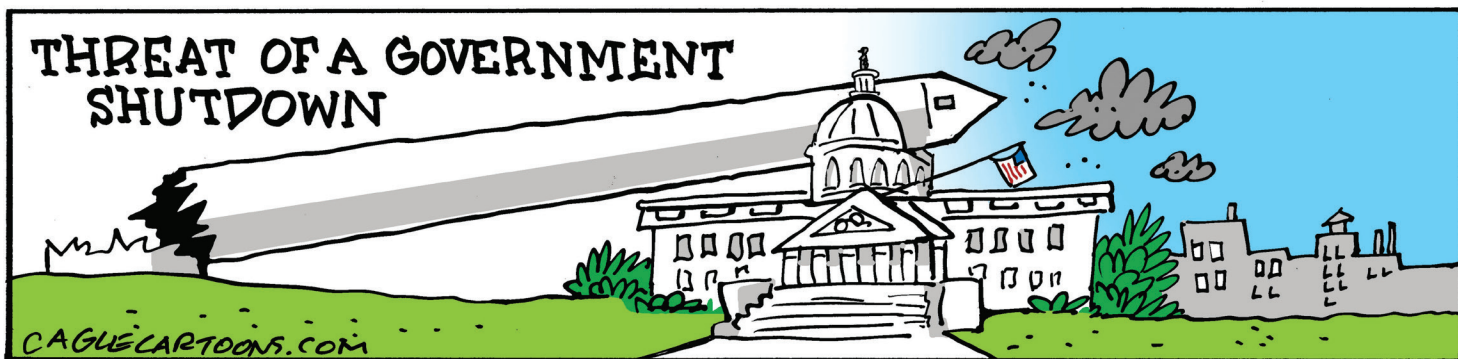
BIRDS FLYING
SOUTH



FALLING
LEAVES



THREAT OF A GOVERNMENT
SHUTDOWN



Lawsuit is about equal treatment



JAMES
DUNLAP
OTHER VIEWS

My family's cattle ranching heritage dates back to California's Gold Rush. Today, my wife, Katie, and I are still going strong, and one day we hope to have a ranch of our own that our daughter can inherit.

We also want our daughter to inherit a country where government treats people equally. COVID-19-related federal farm loan forgiveness does just the opposite, treating people as members of their racial group.

Right now, we live and tend cattle on my parents' ranch in Baker City. At the same time, we're buying equipment and building our herd, so we're ready to start our own farm when we can afford to buy property.

We've taken out federal loans to pay for equipment and cattle and which we're repaying with income from other full-time jobs — Katie works in sales, and I have a job as a railroad engineer. Between our second jobs and the ranch, we easily put in 100-hour workweeks.

As demanding as that had been, it was nothing compared to the pandemic. Meat packing houses shut down last year, affecting our supply chain. Now we have rising fuel prices, no seasonal workers willing to help with our cattle, and the worst drought in Eastern Oregon's history.

On top of all that, we have a new baby and more than \$200,000 in outstanding

loans. It sounds ludicrous, but the reality is the government considers us good enough for federal farm loans, not loan forgiveness, because we have the wrong skin color.

Katie and I heard about the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, and we were excited because the COVID-19 relief funding included \$4 billion in loan forgiveness up to 120% of USDA loan amounts.

That would have been life-changing for us.

Then one day, while I was on the tractor — where I listen to news and podcasts — I heard that the loan forgiveness was only for "socially disadvantaged farmers," which, in the government's eyes, are racial minority farmers and ranchers.

My first thought was, "Socially disadvantaged farmers? Isn't that anyone like us who has an FSA loan?"

Farm Service Agency, or FSA, operating loans are designed for people who have already been turned down by other lending institutions and cannot get traditional financing anywhere else. We are in our mid-30s, we didn't have a lot of cash, and we were still building up equity, so the FSA was our only choice.

If Congress decides to forgive these loans, I'll cheer them on. But there's no logic behind the use of race to make that decision.

I may be a rancher, but I also have a history degree and a passion for the bedrock principles of our nation's founding: fairness, justice, liberty. This loan forgiveness is everything but.

It's discriminatory and violates the Constitution's guarantee of equal protec-

tion before the law.

To be sure, racial discrimination for any reason is unacceptable. In this case, the government insists it's making up for the USDA's past discrimination against Black farmers and ranchers. But the government has already paid billions of dollars to do just that. In any case, past discrimination cannot be remedied with more discrimination.

I credit my wife for what happened next. She and my daughter were shuttling me around to do routine chores, and I told her how farmers in other states are suing to end the USDA's discrimination. I wanted to do the same in Oregon but suing the federal government seemed too daunting, time-consuming, and expensive.

"I can't," I said.

"Yes, you can!" she shot back.

"Because right now, you still have a voice in this country and the opportunity and the right to speak your voice."

The next day, I contacted Pacific Legal Foundation, and soon afterward, Katie and I filed a federal lawsuit.

To be perfectly clear, our lawsuit is not about money, or loan forgiveness, or the hard-working people who would have received it. It's about equal treatment for all farmers and ranchers and fighting back when the government does the opposite. For us, it's also about setting an example for our daughter so that she might someday exercise embrace her right as an American to stand up and speak out for her beliefs.

James Dunlap is a farmer residing near Baker City.

We play a part for future generations



JEFF
BLACKWOOD
OTHER VIEWS

Recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its latest assessment regarding the increasing risks of climate change. The IPCC report was developed by 234 climate scientists from 66 countries.

The report says the connection between human emissions of greenhouse gases and global warming is "unequivocal." The report goes on to state, "Atmospheric CO2 concentrations were higher in 2019 than at any time in at least 2 million years, and the past 50 years saw the fastest temperature increases in at least 2,000 years."

So, what does this mean for us locally, and what can we do?

Climate scientists tell us that climate change will present itself to us primarily through weather extremes. It may seem unfortunate or unfair, but climate trends and future projections show that dry areas are getting drier and wet areas are getting wetter. We are seeing this pattern play out here in the United States. The western half of the country is becoming progressively drier, and the eastern half of the country is becoming wetter and more prone to flooding.

Locally, we are now starting to see weather extremes, with recent flooding along McKay Creek and the Umatilla River, and with a severe drought and heat wave this summer. Last fall's devastating wildfires are also still on our minds, coupled with large wildfires this past summer.

Whatever our political, economic, or cultural beliefs may be, our changing climate will affect us all. Since humans and the burning of fossil fuels, among other things, are widely known to be causing these climatic changes, it is up to us to deal with our actions. Recent global polls have revealed that climate change is of high concern for our younger generations. A large part of that concern is distress with the lack of action by governments. What we leave for them, and what we do or not do will be our legacy.

It will take action from locally to internationally to slow the advance of these adverse effects of a warming planet. If we believe there is not much we can do, nothing will change other than continued warming and the resulting consequences for us all. If we believe we cannot or do not have the will to modify our behaviors, again, nothing will change these warming trends.

We can do better, though. Although our economy is based on consumption, we can reduce what we buy, what we throw away

and support industries and businesses committed to sustainable growth and production. We can recycle more. We can travel less in our vehicles and by airplanes. If space allows, we can grow more of our own food and increase plant-based diets. We can take advantage of the incentives for home and business solar power and electric vehicles. And we can vote. We can vote at all political levels for those with vision and commitment to take positive action to reduce the adverse effects of climate change.

As weather extremes continue to affect us, we must find our political and personal will to act. Americans represent 5% of the world population, yet we consume 30% of world resources. We have the luxury of being able to buy, to travel and to behave as we please.

Let us use this enormous privilege to do something positive and aggressive both personally and politically to combat the sources and adverse effects of a changing climate before our options dwindle.

We all have responsibilities for these climate trends, and we can all play a part in what we leave to our children and future generations.

Jeff Blackwood retired from a career with the U.S. Forest Service and is a member of the Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition.

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