

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Learning from the past

Important people can get lost inside the twisting channels of history and that is why the recent unveiling of a mural on Southwest Dorion Avenue celebrating Black cowboy and Pendleton Round-Up competitor George Fletcher is so appropriate.

Travel Oregon revealed the mural of Fletcher on a bucking bronc last week in a ceremony with high-profile dignitaries, including Chuck Sams, a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation who also is in the final part of a confirmation process to become the next National Park Service director.

Sams' grandfather rode with Fletcher creating a solid link between the past and the present.

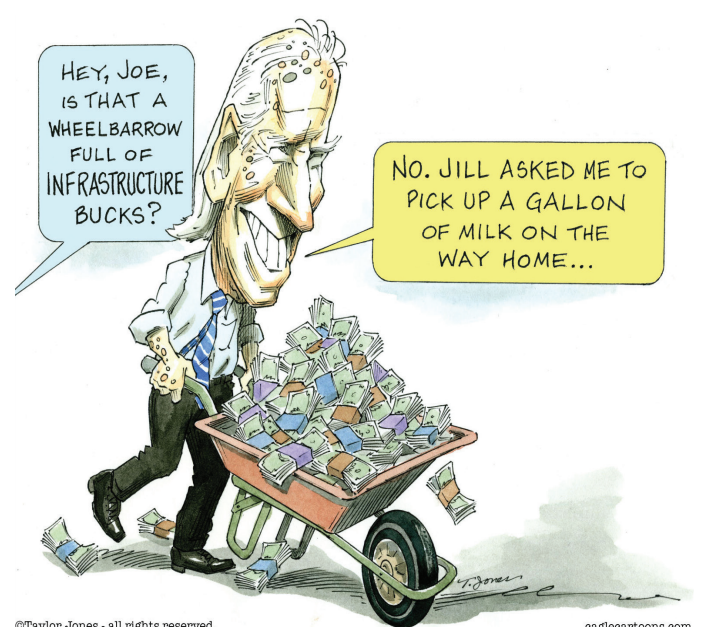
Yet while the mural is an outstanding addition to our local landscape, the story of Fletcher is one of racism and overcoming adversity. Fletcher competed in the storied 1911 Round-Up where he made it to the bronc riding finals. While his final ride wooed the crowd, the judges ultimately awarded first prize to a white cowboy named John Spain. However, Fletcher was quickly labeled the "people's champion" and a fast fundraiser generated \$700 for the cowboy.

A lot of different people and organizations came together to make the mural reality, not the least of which was Mariotta Gary-Smith, the chair of the Oregon Commission on Black Affairs. Travel Oregon also played an important role. Without such dedication from such people and organizations a piece of history — which was, for the most part, oral — would be lost.

History is important. Americans, generally, don't like to look back. We are a nation that has shown its overwhelming focus always to be on the future. Yet we cannot move forward, cannot strive to live up to the high ideals set by the founders, by ignoring pieces of our history we find to be repellant.

We should review our past and celebrate the progress we've made as a great nation. George Fletcher's story is a tale of discrimination in a time when racism was an accepted social more. He succeeded, but against big odds. His legacy is one we must always remember because it shows us a side of our culture that is distasteful in many ways but still a part of our history.

We must remember George Fletcher and recall how much progress we've made as a nation. There still is a long way to go in the United States regarding equality, but the mural of Fletcher reminds of our shortcomings in the past and our opportunity for better things in the future.



YOUR VIEWS

Pendleton is losing an American hero

Pendleton and the great state of Oregon is losing an American hero, Mr. Herb Bork ("Pendleton World War II vet leaves home after more than 50 years," Nov. 9 edition of the East Oregonian). During the war against fascism, Mr. Bork put his life on the line for American freedom. I honor and revere him.

Only 1% of the American people serve in the military. As a combat veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11, I can tell you that being deployed to a combat theater is not like the movies. Death is omnipresent. It is hungry and devoid of mercy. The soldier, Marine, or airman stares violence in the face and does not blink. Mr. Bork never blinked. For that, he's an American hero.

I fear for our future. Will our youth look to moral titans like Mr. Bork? Or will they pursue selfish and rapid goals? I am an optimist and hope for the former. Mr. Bork is carrying the torch of liberty into the future.

I have once heard it said that the meaning of life is shining light into dark places. Some 80-plus years ago our world was plunged into darkness, World War II. America could have embraced isolationism and selfishness, but it didn't. It chose sacrifice. Mr. Bork is an Olympic torch, bringing light and goodness to our fallen world.

Brian Fitzgerald
Happy Valley

BLM can protect more of Oregon's public lands

This spring I volunteered in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Adopt-A-Lek program. Hiking

across the vast sagebrush sea in the predawn light to watch the greater sage-grouse perform their elaborate mating dance is an experience I hope every Oregonian gets to witness.

Unfortunately, their populations have declined significantly with an 80% range wide decline since 1965. The 4.6 million acres of public lands that are part of the vast Vale Bureau of Land Management District in the southeast corner of Oregon provide some of the best remaining sage grouse habitat left in the West and are important to this bird's future.

Right now, the Vale BLM is updating their Resource Management Plan, an important plan that guides and balances multiple land uses across this entire area. Due to top-down meddling from Washington, D.C., during the previous administration, the current version of the plan falls far short of conserving some of our last, best and most intact fish and wildlife habitats in this area.

In the current version of the plan, not even one acre of 1.2 million acres of wilderness-quality lands would be managed to protect their wild and intact nature. The plan also needs to include more science-based, forward-looking management strategies to ensure these public lands are resistant and resilient to a changing climate.

Fortunately, the BLM can still fix this plan and provide a balanced approach to conserving and managing our public lands in Malheur County. I urge them to do so. Future generations deserve a healthy and wild Owyhee Canyonlands.

Karl J. Findling
Bend

Learn the facts about the River Democracy Act

Misinformation is floating around regarding the River Democracy Act. The Act, S. 192, was proposed by Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, Democrats, and Oregonians assisted by nominating streams for this bill. It adds 4% of Oregon's rivers and streams to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and provides amendments to NWSR to help reduce wildfire risk and protect water for people who use rivers as their drinking water source.

In Wyden's own words to the Eastern Oregon Counties Association, the River Democracy Act "does not affect management of private property." The River Democracy Act amends the NWSR Act to say that "nothing in this act or an amendment made by this act affects private property rights."

The River Democracy Act does implement a management plan and fire risk reduction plan on federal lands, restore water quality after a fire, give Native Americans a voice in how rivers are managed on federal lands, and retain existing rights on federal land, including mining and grazing permits.

The catastrophe unfolding for Salmon in the Lower Snake River shows clean water and fish survival do not automatically remain intact even if they are good quality now. If there are provisions that opponents of this bill would like, I encourage people to contact Wyden's office to discuss them. Spreading misinformation is not helpful to the discussion.

I appreciate Wyden and Merkley for working to preserve our beautiful rivers.

Elnora Cameron
Joseph

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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