

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Staying safe on the roads

The warning from the Oregon Department of Transportation on Sunday, Jan. 2, was as stark as it was simple: Motorists in Umatilla County are advised to stay at home because of severe weather conditions.

Most routes throughout the county were closed or, because of blowing snow, unplowed.

The warning from the transportation department described how conditions were so extreme snowplow drivers could not see the road well enough to complete the task of clearing it.

The weather doesn't appear to be on the verge of clearing anytime soon either. Snow and high winds are forecast for a large section of the entire region.

Snowstorms are nothing new to anyone who has lived in the local area for very long. Inclement weather, interstate closures and treacherous driving conditions over Cabbage Hill are a routine part of Eastern Oregon weather.

Yet that doesn't mean the danger from severe weather is any less or should be disregarded. When the transportation department issues a warning that, in effect, tells residents to stay off the roads that means the situation is a bit more serious than expected.

What that means to the rest of us, though, is clear. Not only should we stay off the roads unless we absolutely must, but it also is a legitimate warning that we all need to take proper heed.

It is easy, after living through a couple of Eastern Oregon winters, to become complacent. We can grow dismissive of the weather, consider it just a minor nuisance that can be ignored, at the very least, downplayed.

That isn't the case. Winter storms, such as the ones we are now enduring, are serious and always carry to potential to become extremely dangerous.

The best thing, of course, is to stay off the roads if possible. If not, then extreme caution should be the watchword. Going slow on the drive to and from work is not only a good idea but may save someone's life, or at the very least, avoid a costly car repair.

When conditions deteriorate as they appeared to over the weekend and probably will again this week, motorists have an obligation to take the weather conditions seriously and not take any undue risks. Not only will you be taking care of yourself, but you will be ensuring others remain safe as well.

So be careful out there.



The next generation is ready to join the table



DANIEL
WATTENBURGER
HOMEGROWN

When East Oregonian editor Andrew Cutler asked me in January 2020 to join a monthly rotation of local columnists in this newspaper's Opinion page, I was honored. I also figured it would be easy.

There's a rich and diverse vein of news running through Eastern Oregon, which I got to mainline working in the paper's newsroom for more than a decade. There's always something new happening to consider and write about, and I hoped my perspective as a subscriber rather than a journalist could add context or at least flavor to the coverage.

Plus, after working on a daily deadline for all those years, how hard could a 30-day turnaround be for a simple 600-word column? Piece of cake.

Little did I know the months to follow would flip the world on its head and send us all into a repeating news cycle. Two years in, only my first two contributed columns are not shaded by coronavirus.

Sure, I've found some other topics to write about — patriotism, housing, elections, my kids — but every thought

I've put on paper seems linked to this pandemic. That's a challenge, because I'm running out of context and flavor.

I've shared my thoughts. Hard times can develop character, individually and communally, but that takes work. Freedom is a wonderful thing and should be used responsibly. The next generation will forever be the post-COVID-19 generation and will have a unique and powerful perspective if we'll listen to them.

It's that last point I've kept coming back to. I've watched my wife, brother and many close friends in public education pour so much of themselves into preparing students for a larger world that has become increasingly difficult to predict and understand.

The end goal is to produce a generation that will learn from past mistakes and be equipped to tackle the challenges yet to come. This requires allowing them to think differently and including their perspective into larger decisions.

That's something people haven't often done well. I grew up on the older edge of the millennials often criticized as a generation of participation trophy recipients. It's an odd allegation, especially coming from the generation that was handing out the trophies and coddling our childhoods in bubble wrap (or so the assertion goes).

In turn, I've seen my generation join

up with our elders to criticize Generation Z for its lack of work ethic and self-obsession. Somehow we do that with a straight face, not taking ownership of the bad habits we've passed along or our own negligence in instilling positive values.

It's foolish to assume the next generation is inferior or less capable than the previous, especially when it's still in development and hasn't yet had the opportunity to show what it can do. And it's especially dangerous to excuse ourselves from the responsibility of helping guide it to maturity.

The best way out of this repeating cycle is to focus on what we can do for the next generation and how we can prepare it to lead, not how we can pass the buck. It may feel like we're stuck in an endless loop, but one day we'll be free of it and on to other challenges.

As the late, great Norm MacDonald said, "When I was a child, they told me the children are our future. Then I grew up, and now they're saying it's actually these new children. I know a Ponzi scheme when I see one."

Daniel Wattenburger is the former managing editor of the East Oregonian. He lives in Hermiston with his wife and children and is an account manager for Pac/West Lobby Group. Contact him at danielwattenburger@gmail.com.

YOUR VIEWS

Distractions blur focus on city's goals

Once upon a time, Pendleton's city government had a problem. It lacked a comprehensive plan to confront and solve the issues facing city development. Issues were handled haphazardly, leaving some projects abandoned or incomplete, the most glaring being the infamous "road to nowhere."

The city set to acquire property and build larger parks with no corresponding increase in tax revenue. City infrastructure was literally falling apart. As a remedy, the mayor and city council settled on plan to focus on a specific set of goals, a tactic they felt would guarantee management success. Unfortunately, the inability to say "no" to unrelated special interest projects continues to plague city hall.

One such project approved by the city council was the formation of the North Bank of the Umatilla River Committee, stopping all development along the north riverbank, specifically the sale of a lot the city owned. The committee then received a \$10,000 grant that produced a plan for the riverbank, a utopian vision of the future. Perhaps the committee realized at

that point that without funding, not much more could be done, especially since it had accomplished the original objective — stopping the sale of the city property.

That original utopian vision has since blossomed into a project that encompasses both riverbanks the entire 5½ miles through town to explore the "riparian" restoration and flood control opportunities along the river.

The question is, what exactly does the plan entail? Current thinking among conservationists is that wetlands and flood plains are one of Mother Nature's ways of flood control and replenishing aquifers. The Umatilla River has been flooding this area long before the city existed. The current river channel does not remotely resemble the original.

Actual restoration of the original would entail removing of the levee, nonnative trees and a whole lot of buildings, making it pretty unrealistic. Further encroachment on the flood plain would require a major expansion of the levee system, be very expensive and also not very practical.

To answer that question, the committee is enlisting the assistance of the city manager, managers from Parks and Recreation, the planning depart-

ment, along with Public Works Director Bob Patterson, and of course his favorite consulting firm, Anderson Perry, the firm he's selected to solve the street maintenance issues. The key manager missing would be from finance to explain how this project fits into the budget.

The burning questions from residents are: For a program that wasn't to receive any city resources, how did so many managers get involved, what can this possibly have to do with accomplishing the goals set by the city council, and what the heck is riparian?

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

A unique bird wintering in the Echo area

I live in Echo and have a pair of black chin hummingbirds wintering over, first time ever. I'm wondering if anyone else is experiencing this locally.

I did read about a lady in Spokane, Washington, who has a pair of Anna's hummingbirds wintering over.

Colleen Williams
Echo

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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