

OUR VIEW

Rivers act needs more input

Political hyperbole aside, U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz's concerns raised during a floor speech of the U.S. House of Representatives regarding a bill to protect more than 4,500 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon as part of the federal Wild and Scenic Act are valid and deserve more than a passing glance by voters.

Bentz lambasted the River Democracy Act, a bill sponsored by U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, Jan. 11 and labeled it as a sure way to create more, rather than fewer problems for forests in the eastern part of the state.

Bentz implied the act would leave forest dangerously exposed to become, essentially, tinderboxes.

At first glance, the legislation — now stalled in the congressional committee — appears to be a commonsense way to protect the forests and watersheds we all enjoy. Supporters of the River Democracy Act would add protections to waterways, lessen wildfire risk, enhance drinking water, and expand recreation to help rural economies.

The act also promises that only federal lands would be protected while private property and water rights would be safeguarded. A key piece of the legislation is a move to widen the area along protected waterways from one-quarter mile to half a mile.

There are a few problems with the legislation, though, not the least of which is what appears to be a lack of input from rural lawmakers at the county level. While supporters of the bill proudly proclaim voter participation through "nominations" from 2,500 Oregonians, the plan triggered resistance from several Eastern Oregon counties.

Commissioners in Union, Wallowa, Grant and Malheur counties have called the legislation into question with a variety of concerns, including lack of detailed maps and federal overreach.

One of the act's most serious problems, though, isn't visible up front. Legislation safeguarding public spaces is crucial and deserves support. Yet, there are already numerous state and federal laws on the books — including the 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act — that provide a firm foundation for conservation. Too often legislation is created without a careful study of unintended consequences.

The bill may appear to be a winner for urban voters who wish to utilize Eastern Oregon as a handy natural resource-rich theme park for tourists, but for those who live and work in this area, its possible unintended consequences are a real worry.

To move forward, the bill needs more input from local county lawmakers.

SIGNS AN OREGON COVID TEST SITE MIGHT BE FAKE...



Sir Paul McCartney's piano



ALEX HOBBS
PASTURES OF PLENTY

Growing up, I had never given the Beatles much thought. Like all good children being raised in corporate America, I had a tangential knowledge by way of advertisements. Nike and "Revolution." "Come Together" and luxury vehicles.

The songs were clipped and snipped and ready to sell stuff. It was not until I became a parent, fueled by the revulsion of technology, that I purchased a record player for my children. It seemed fitting that with their Union Jack-clad Victrola that a Beatles record should be spun first. The record was "Abbey Road." Less of a record and more of a launchpad.

It wasn't long after the needle first descended onto vinyl that my sons began to show interest in creation. A stop motion film, little fingers finding their way along keys of a piano in paths they've never before taken, stories clacked onto a black space. I started to ask myself how is a person imbued with a desire to create?

What might the world be like if we were all given equal opportunity to fully explore the depths of art, to analyze the spark of human creation? If for a moment we were all released from the expectations and standards of what we should

be producing, what might blossom in the void?

In lieu of immediate answers to these questions, I have only the Beatles. Specifically, the nine hours of footage compiled by Peter Jackson in his documentary "Get Back."

Picture this: Yoko Ono is shrieking, Paul McCartney is flailing wildly near the vicinity of a drum set, John Lennon holds his guitar aloft near an amp like a communion wafer. The noise emanating from it undulates, an unholy din. But it is an act of primordial creation — free and clear of constraint. The music that takes root around the four humans will eventually bloom into "Abbey Road" and "Let it Be." Their final songs. Absent from the music, however, is any sense of finality. Instead of, and in spite of, a looming deadline, faltering faith in members and uncertainty we see artists arguably at their best.

What is most notable about the entirety of the documentary is an underlying sense of playfulness. A joyful abandon. In fact, it reminded me of my sons. This isn't necessarily equating "Let it Be" with whatever combination of notes my son puts together, but in the distillation process, you will find the same unbothered spirit. The same willingness to take risks, be silly, and lean into vulnerability.

We have a misconception that art and creation are predicated upon pain. There are certainly no shortages of this trope in our collective mindset. For example, I recently visited Portland where I took

my children to see Beyond Van Gogh: an installation that attempts to change the narrative surrounding the troubled painter. Blasted onto four walls were his life's work and letters transformed into animated wisps and swirls. It was immersive, visually arresting, and inspiring. But one left unable to isolate his art from his tragedy, his torture. "Look," the exhibit seemed to say, "look at what the journey led to."

Of course, art forged within the mire of suffering will always be with us. And there will always be beauty in van Gogh's pain, the moralism of Dostoyevsky, the ennui of modernism. But this is a moment to celebrate art and love, art and joy, art and glee. Paul McCartney at a piano and his daughter, Heather, at his lap singing "Let it Be." A small sliver of soul-distracting joy as the world slides further into immiseration and disarray.

Author Ursula Le Guin said, "The trouble is that we have a bad habit, encouraged by pedants and sophisticates, of considering happiness as something rather stupid. Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting. This is the treason of the artist: a refusal to admit the banality of evil and the terrible boredom of pain."

If this isn't an invitation to frolic in strawberry fields, I don't know what is.

Alex Hobbs is a former educator turned full-time homeschooling mom. She has a degree in political science from Oregon State University.

YOUR VIEWS

City officials tie future to government grants

Pendleton city officials intend to pave the road to future economic development with government grants. Grants are not normally designed to fund new projects in perpetuity, may require matching funds and are subject to political whims. The city manager's latest wishlist of grant funded projects has reached an astonishing \$34,145,608.

One particular grant request is for \$2,358,000 to purchase another bus and construction of a bus maintenance facility that includes a wash rack. They claim this new facility is required to "store" the nine vans and buses the city owns so they won't get dirty.

A little history lesson here. At one time, the city had one handicapped van operated by the taxi company. The transportation officer approached the city council informing them of the opportunity to acquire a second van. Questions were put forth by the council: Was an additional van really needed? Could the old van be traded in? Were funds available for the purchase? The answers to all three questions were "no", followed by: An additional van would be nice to have as a backup. The old van, for various legal reasons, could not be used as a trade. The new van could be paid for with a grant

if approved. So how many vehicles will we be required to purchase simply to "store" because a grant is available? How many city vehicles do we currently own that are not stored indoors? You can get a pretty good idea by visiting the Pendleton Convention Center parking lot when the city conducts their required employee safety meetings. You can get that meeting schedule from city hall.

Rather than working with Kayak or Mid Columbia Bus, both experts in the transportation field, city management elected to reinvent the wheel and compete, designating over \$100,000 for such items as "Planning Grant Consultant," "Data Services Plans," "Drug & Alcohol Oversight," and an additional \$50,000 annually for a "contingency" fund, in its latest budget that exceeds \$800,000. It's just a matter of time before they request a "transportation" fee to cover the cost of all those free rides and operation of that storage/maintenance facility.

The latest rumor coming out of city hall? The public works director is expected to replace that much touted state-of-the-art street maintenance computer program with a private consulting firm, sticking with the motto: If at first you don't succeed, spend more and hire a consultant.

Rick Rhode
Pendleton

Charge former President Trump with criminal conduct

President Joe Biden made a major speech at the first anniversary of the Donald Trump-incited riots in Washington, D.C. Biden made it very clear that his predecessor is singularly responsible for the seven deaths and hundreds of injuries that occurred during this day of infamy for our country.

Attorney General Merrick Garland also put the blame on Trump. So what needs to be done now is to charge former President Trump with criminal conduct, which would hold him accountable? There is a Department of Justice policy, not a law, which precludes a sitting president from being criminally prosecuted. The rationale here is a president is too busy to defend himself.

Trump is no longer in office so he should be charged with either voluntary manslaughter, or involuntary manslaughter, or reckless endangerment or a related felony. This would demonstrate that the long standing adage that no one is above the law has real meaning and are not just good sounding but empty words.

Bob Shippentower
Pendleton

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SEND LETTERS TO:

editor@eastoregonian.com,
or via mail to Andrew Cutler,
211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801