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## OUR VIEW

# Worries about the river act

Oregon's U.S. senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, cleverly included the word "Democracy" in their bill, introduced a year ago and pending in Congress, which would nearly triple the mileage of waterways in the state under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

That august word, so beloved in America, tends to burnish whatever it's applied to.

Although the senators used the democratic tactic of soliciting suggestions from the public about which streams to include in their River Democracy Act, that's not the most appropriate method when it comes to potentially imposing federal protection, and the associated potential restrictions, on an estimated 3 million acres (based on the proposed mile-wide corridor along the included streams).

Critics unanimously approved a resolution opposing the bill, pointing out some streams scarcely qualify as such because they might not carry water year round.

The 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is intended to protect rivers that have "outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values in a free-flowing condition."

"Flowing" obviously requires water.

And although another key word in the 1968 Act — "outstanding" — is decidedly subjective, the senators should use more informed criteria in crafting their bill than the preferences of a minuscule percentage of the state's population. Wyden and Merkley said they received nominations from about 2,500 Oregonians.

Protecting streams is a worthwhile goal, to be sure.

And designating streams under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act does not restrict activities on adjacent public land (private land isn't affected) nearly as stringently as another federal law, the Wilderness Act.

Yet the bill would prohibit new mining permits on public land in the corridors along designated streams (existing permits would be grandfathered in, according to Wyden's spokesperson, Hank Stern).

The bill also could thwart efforts to thin overcrowded forests. That's a problem rife in the Blue Mountains and one that increases the risk of catastrophic wildfires, which would sully any values, outstanding or otherwise, that a stream has.

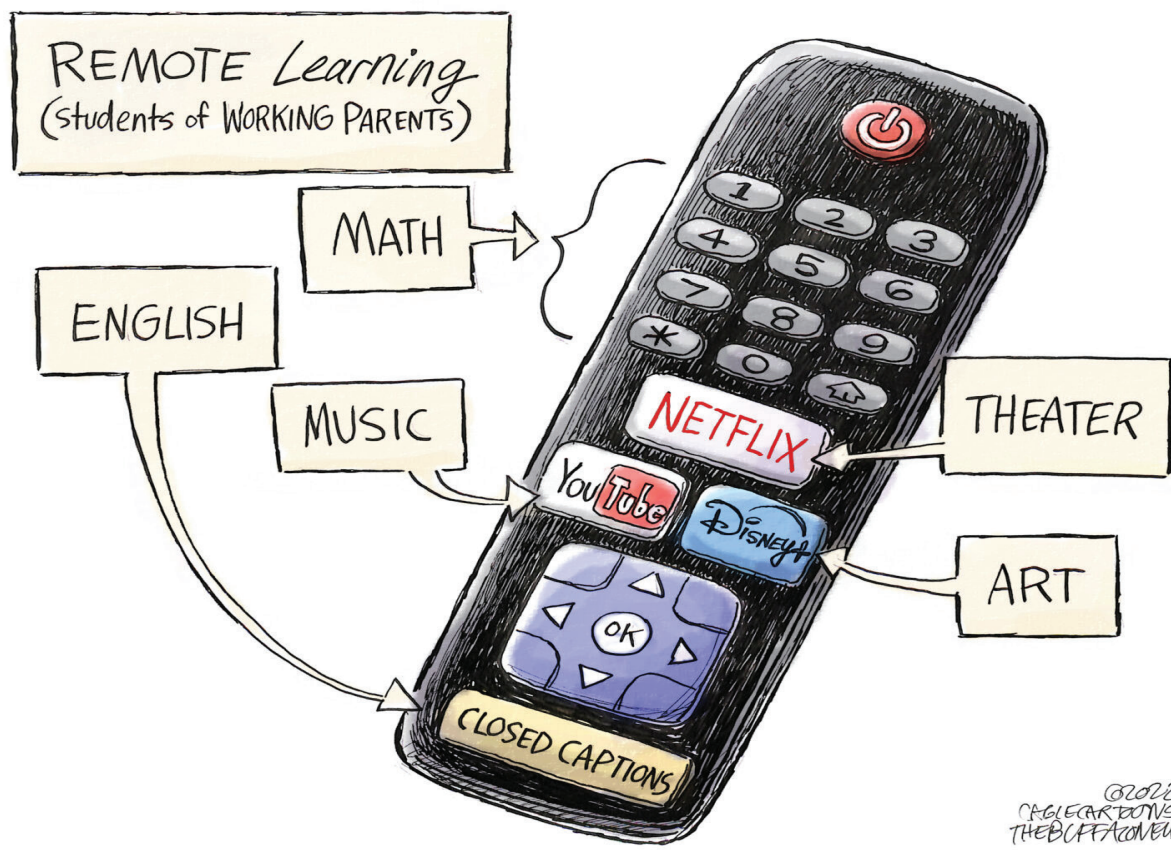
Wyden points out the River Democracy Act would not prohibit logging in stream corridors to reduce the risk of wildfires. He also notes reducing fire risk, with a focus on using prescribed fire to curb fuel loads, is among his chief goals for public lands. The bill also would require agencies that manage designated corridors — primarily the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management — to assess wildfire risks in each corridor.

That all sounds promising.

But it's hardly farfetched to fret that a wild and scenic river designation would embolden environmental groups to legally challenge reasonable thinning projects under the guise that such work would harm the corridor's "outstanding" values.

And prescribed fire, though a valuable tool whose use should be expanded on public land, in many places must be preceded by tree-cutting, lest the "managed" fire do more harm than good.

Ultimately, the River Democracy Act is a bit premature. Rather than giving federal protection to 4,700 miles of streams in one fell swoop, and then figuring out later not only how to manage them but whether they actually met the standards of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Wyden and Merkley should call for a more thorough study of the nominated segments and present a refined list in future legislation.



# Historic institutions make America great



BRIGIT FARLEY  
PAST AND PROLOGUE

Soon the U.S. will witness congressional hearings on the events of Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob stormed and desecrated the U.S. Capitol, trying to prevent the certification of the 2020 presidential election. Having read many attempts to rationalize or excuse this event, I feel compelled to condemn it as an outrageous assault on American law and tradition, two things that have made this country the envy of the world.

Ever since the founding of this republic, except for just before the Civil War, citizens have agreed on three things: to choose leadership through free elections, to abide by the outcome in a peaceful transfer of power and to accept the verdict of the courts in case of conflict. When a president loses an election or is term-limited, he dutifully makes way for his successor. If he dies in office or resigns, his vice president automatically takes over. If a dispute arises, the courts have the last word.

Recall that in the bitterly contested 2000 election, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of George W. Bush. His opponent, Al Gore, promptly conceded and the country moved on.

This kind of respect for law and precedent has proved the exception rather than the rule elsewhere.

France experienced a violent 1789 revolution, followed by Napoleon's dictatorship, the bloody Paris Commune and Nazi invasion in 1940. Russian Communists sabotaged the country's fledgling democracy in 1917 and installed themselves as dictators.

"We have free elections," one of my teachers told me when I was a student in Leningrad in 1981. "We are free to vote

for the one candidate on the ballot," she declared — always a Communist candidate, as no opposition was permitted.

Today, Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces brazenly stuff ballot boxes in full view of TV cameras and prevent opposition parties from campaigning. Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II was forced out in 1918, after which an unsuccessful Communist uprising rocked the country. The first German democracy withstood numerous assaults from extremists before the Nazis took power and began preparations for war.

You get some sense of how rare and precious the American electoral experience is when you interact with people from abroad. A friend of my parents, newly arrived in the U.S. from Germany, was terrified when she learned of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Recalling her turbulent childhood, she prepared to batten down the hatches, anticipating political turmoil, maybe tanks in the streets.

She watched her television in astonishment as President Lyndon Johnson stepped off Air Force One to calm a shocked and grieving nation. Similarly, when my friend, Joyce Hoffman, was traveling in France the day Richard Nixon was to resign the presidency, French friends invited her to watch Nixon's speech with them.

She recalls they watched admiringly as a TV broadcaster held up a newspaper whose headline announced, "Nixon resigns," followed immediately by a second edition: "Ford takes the reins." They knew that changes in French leadership had rarely been peaceful.

Conversations with foreigners about the lawful and orderly U.S. political tradition have always made me proud to be an American. That is why it so grieved me to watch the Jan. 6 mob. The 2020 election was widely hailed as the freest and fairest in modern history. The losing side mounted more than 60 court

challenges to the results.

When those courts, including the highest in the land, examined the challenges, they found them baseless. Instead of accepting that verdict and vowing a better effort next time, the Jan. 6 mob opted for violence and intimidation to try to prevent the peaceful transfer of power. They even erected a gallows and howled for the murder of the vice president after he declined to assist them.

Unbelievably, some congressmen and women — all sworn to uphold the Constitution and the law — validated the mob's rampage when they voted against certifying the election. That any American citizen would even think of employing anti-democratic tactics like the Hitlers and Putins of the world is horrifying. It is also dangerous.

If we accept one overturned election, what's to stop opponents from attacking the next one? Why not outlaw your opposition if you get in power? Heck, how about unilaterally changing the Constitution? Russians constantly asked me, "Why do you allow people to own guns and commit crimes?" I would explain about that pesky Second Amendment, and they would respond, betraying their own regrettable political history, "Why not just tear that amendment out and take the guns away?" This is the road you travel when you wink at lawlessness.

The U.S. has always been a government of laws, not men. The Jan. 6 mob and backers decided to dispense with the law and force their preferred candidate on the country. I hope we will firmly reject this outrage and recommit to abiding by the law and Constitution.

Those institutions are what make America truly great, even exceptional.

*Brigit Farley is a Washington State University professor, student of history, adventurer and Irish heritage girl living in Pendleton.*

## YOUR VIEWS

### Oregon's urban/rural divide grows daily

I am a small-but-essential business owner in a small town in Eastern Oregon. I write this letter to address the urban/rural divide in Oregon. Dissatisfaction among the residents living in Eastern and Southern Oregon is growing daily. Currently, eight counties have voted to support Greater Idaho initiatives that explore incorporating the rural areas of Oregon into the state of Idaho. Additional counties will be voting on this initiative in 2022.

Additional evidence of support was collected by SurveyUSA during a survey of Northwestern Oregon voters. Of the voters surveyed, 81% indicated the Oregon government needs to investigate the concerns of rural Oregon communities. Furthermore, 68% of the surveyed participants indicated affirmative support for hearings on Eastern and Southern Oregon becoming a part of the state of Idaho.

Ultimately, I am surprised the political leaders acting as representatives for the state of Oregon — including those representing areas that already have voted in support of these measures — continue

to look the other way when it comes to the issues driving the disconnect between urban and rural areas of our state. Even though the Greater Idaho movement's success would benefit the needs of rural Oregon, some call into question our values. But then those leaders are actively neglecting the true values of our community.

I urge the readers of this letter to really think about the urban/rural divide in Oregon.

Sandie Gilson  
Mount Vernon

### Rethink the recall of Mark Mitchell

I have known North Gilliam County Health District President, Mark Mitchell for many years and have never seen anything in this man but excellence of character. He has served this community well for over 30 years both in law enforcement and as a community volunteer. Now he is being rewarded with a recall.

I have never been a board president, but I have been a volunteer and know the amount of time, energy, and stress

involved. I also know that not everyone will agree with every action you take or appreciate everything you do. We all have different opinions due to different perspectives and varying amounts of credible information. Decisions still need to be made by those in positions to make them. Trusting them to make the best decision with the resources available to them is important.

I believe character is paramount in any situation. If you can't trust someone, you have little else. If we are going to look at the actions and character of this board president, I suggest we use the same scrutiny in evaluating those who are demanding this recall. There are people in the Arlington community who have been fed lies. Some have worked hard to perpetuate those lies. This makes their reasoning and motives questionable.

If this recall is successful, it would not only be damaging to a longstanding community member and honest man, but it would also give power and credence to a vindictive mob mentality. This would be an atrocity.

Susie Crosby  
Heppner