

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

ANDREW CUTLER
Publisher/Editor

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Owner

ERICK PETERSON
Hermiston Editor/Senior Reporter

TUESDAY, APRIL 5, 2022

Founded October 16, 1875

A4

OUR VIEW

Oregon mired in political swamp

It is time for Oregon voters to get serious about what exactly they want to represent them as governor.

Those of us who follow the governor's race all know who the main players are, and we all know that — for the most part — each of those candidates is firmly entrenched in the values of their party. The Democratic candidates tow the party line as do the GOP hopefuls. Some are somewhat middle of the road in their devotion to dogma and others are far to the left or far to the right. Mostly what voters hear is the same old wide sweeping proclamations triggered by events — and concepts — first rolled out onto the national political stage.

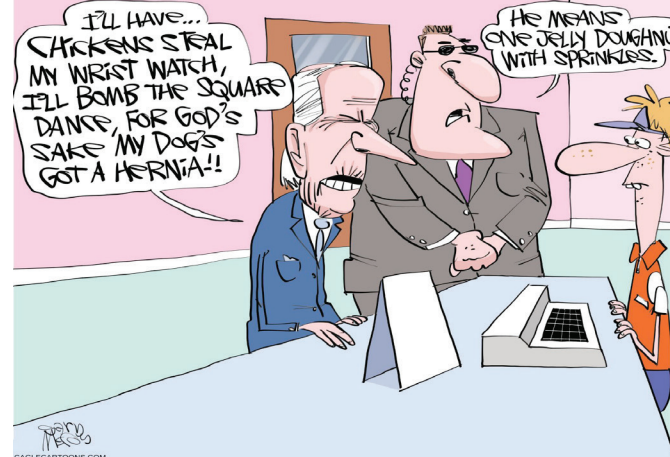
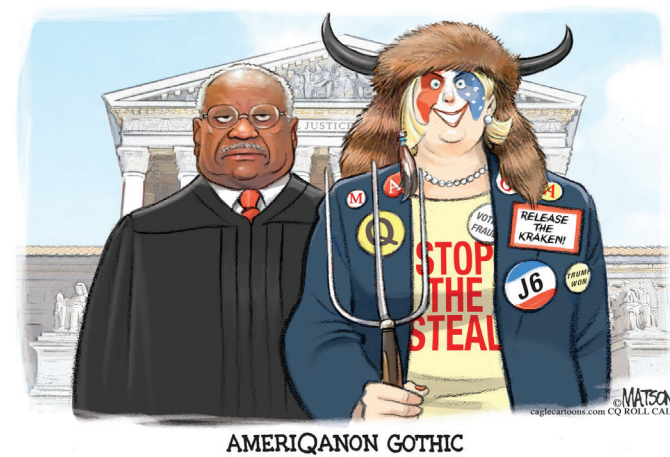
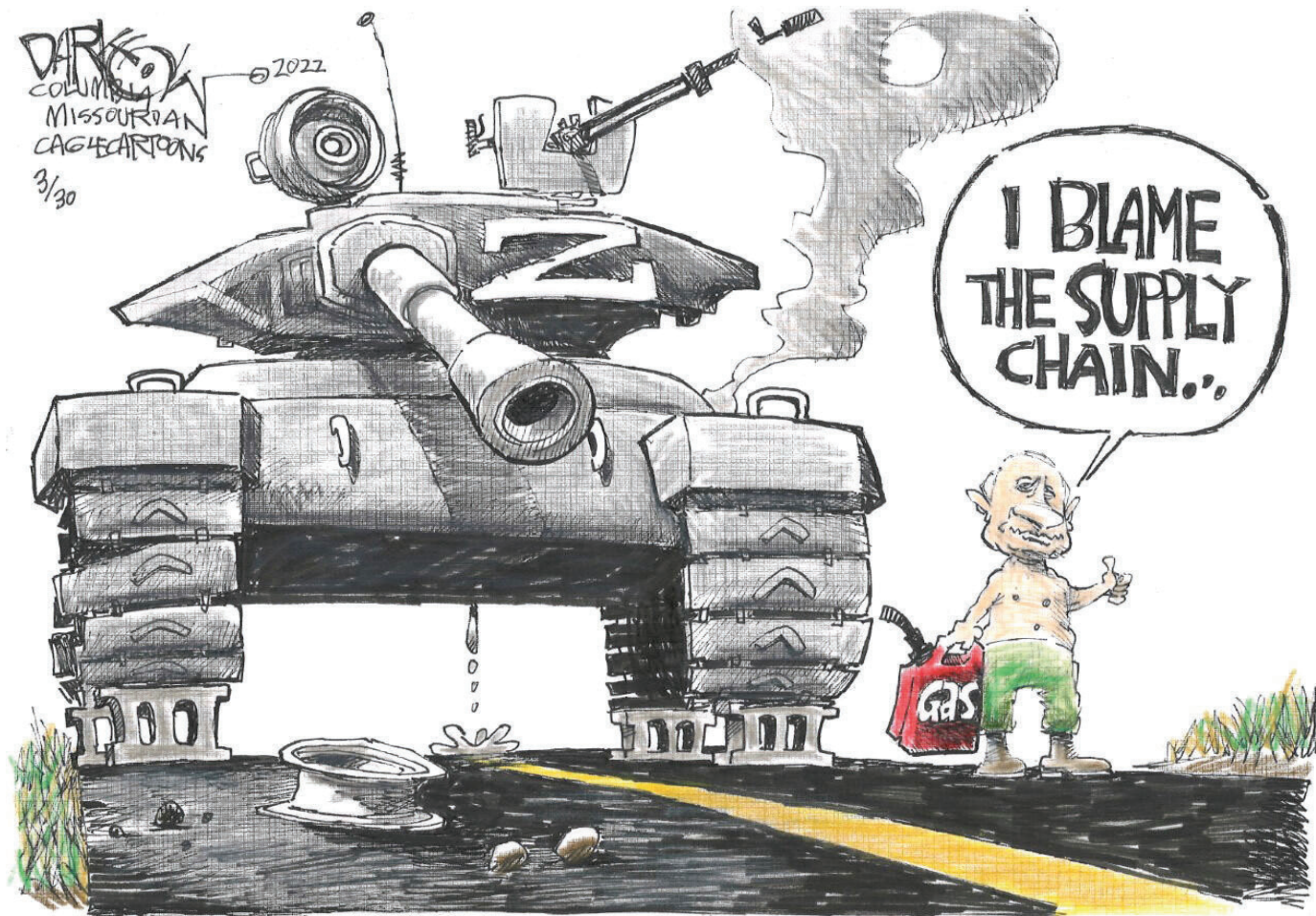
Yet there is a barely detectable undercurrent of discomfort out there among voters. A sense that the old ways of doing business are beginning to falter. A feeling that party politics are fine but only as far as they can go and now they are not going far enough.

From our standpoint the avenue of party politics doesn't seem to answer the pressing questions of our day but, instead, create more division and more strife. Now, much of that we concede is front-loaded into the very nature of our political system, which is based on a competitive template. Also, the primaries in Oregon are set firmly within party bounds.

We recognize those factors, but it seems to be more and more evident that voters are growing weary of the same old dogma and venom spat between lawmakers. Instead of careful political compromise — a hallmark of our system — for the past decade, the norm has been for lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to die on every single political hill the encounter. There is no cooperation on the big issues but only a war to the knife.

That means voters are not served well. Lawmakers surely would disagree and point to countless successes and examples of bipartisanship. Again, there is some validity to the notion lawmakers do often work together. But "often" isn't good enough anymore. Voter — except for those on the lunatic fringe of both parties — are weary of the same old fighting with little getting done. Perhaps that feeling by many is simply a perception but in this case perception is reality.

Oregon needs a middle-of-the-road governor who isn't beholden to a party, who will get things done, who sees all sides. That, we realize is going to be a tall order. But we believe it is the only way forward for a state mired in a political swamp.



Unusual coalition unites for clean energy



MATT WITT

OTHER VIEWS

Communities in the rural West can stand up to giant outside gas companies, if they work together despite their differences. That's how the Jordan Cove gas pipeline project was finally killed in Oregon by a coalition of conservative ranchers and farmers, climate activists, Indigenous tribal leaders, anglers and coastal residents.

The victory occurred last December, when a Canadian energy company called Pembina announced it would halt plans to build a 230-mile pipeline through rural southwestern Oregon, crossing more than 400 streams and rivers along the way. The pipeline was to carry fracked gas from the Rockies to a huge terminal proposed for the coastal town of Coos Bay, where it would be loaded onto ships bound for Asia.

When the Jordan Cove export project was first announced some 15 years ago, the odds of stopping it appeared slim. Supporters included the state's governor and its two U.S. senators — all Democrats — plus most of the Republican political establishment.

But community organizers in Coos Bay and beyond didn't give up.

"The last thing we needed was another giant fossil-fuel project and another major fire hazard just to profit an outside corporation," recalls Allie Rosenbluth, campaigns director of Rogue Climate, a grassroots group in southern Oregon.

Rogue Climate contacted hundreds of landowners whose property would be

affected, while also working with local environmental groups like Rogue River-keeper.

They quickly found many ranchers were angry about threats from the company. If landowners didn't let the pipeline cross their land in return for a one-time payment, they were told, the power of eminent domain would be invoked to impose it on them anyway. Congress granted this power to gas pipelines in 1947.

During a seven-year period, an unlikely coalition grew in strength, turning out thousands of residents to public hearings and spurring more than 50,000 people to submit written comments to regulatory agencies. A delegation representing all parts of the coalition even held a sit-in in the governor's office.

Seven rural landowners from across the political spectrum also published a column in the state's largest newspaper, *The Oregonian*. It was blunt: "We are sick and tired of the pie-in-the-sky speculation by these for-profit corporations. We can't build, we can't plan, and we can't sell if we choose because of the threat of eminent domain."

Don Gentry, chair of the Klamath Tribes, protested that the pipeline would "strip shade from streams and pollute them with sediment, harming fish central to the Klamath's traditions and way of life."

Bill McCaffree, a lifelong Republican, and longtime president of the local electrical workers union in Coos Bay, also publicly disagreed with construction union leaders who wanted the short-term work for their members.

"Everyone who works in the building and construction trades wants to build things that benefit communities and don't

cause harm," McCaffree said. "Since I was a kid, there have been jobs here in Coos County from fishing, clamming and oyster farming. What would happen to those jobs when the bay is disturbed by construction and operation of this export terminal?"

A better strategy for creating good, stable jobs, McCaffree said, would be investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy development. That sector is "creating jobs at a rate 12 times faster than the rest of the U.S. economy."

In the wake of this broad and vocal resistance, state agencies finally announced that the pipeline and terminal failed to qualify for necessary permits. That led Pembina to tell federal regulators it was dropping the project.

The coalition didn't stop with its victory. Members convinced the Oregon Legislature last year to pass bills to transition the state to 100 percent clean energy by 2040, provide \$50 million for community-based resilience and renewable energy projects outside of Portland, and appropriate \$10 million for energy-efficient home repairs for low-income households. The Legislature also banned any new natural gas power plants in Oregon.

"Most of us who live in small towns and rural areas all want the same things," said Rogue Climate's Hannah Sohl. "Good jobs, a healthy climate, communities that work for everyone. We can accomplish a lot when we talk to each other and organize."

Matt Witt is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, writersontherange.org, a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about Western issues. He is a writer and photographer in Talent.

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

U.S. PRESIDENT

Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500
Comments: 202-456-1111

U.S. SENATORS

Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5244
La Grande office: 541-962-7691

Jeff Merkley
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3753
Pendleton office: 541-278-1129

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

Cliff Bentz
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6730
Medford office: 541-776-4646

GOVERNOR

Kate Brown
160 State Capitol
900 Court St.
Salem, OR 97301-4047
503-378-4582

REPRESENTATIVES

Bobby Levy, District 58
900 Court St. NE, H-376
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1458
Rep.BobbyLevy@state.or.us

Greg Smith, District 57
900 Court St. NE, H-482
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1457
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

SENATOR

Bill Hansell, District 29
900 Court St. NE, S-415
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1729
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

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SEND LETTERS TO:

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