

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

State, port need to partner to address water issues

The list of issues voters should be interested in is a long one, and as events occur across our region the need for more oversight of local and state government by residents increases monthly.

A good example is a recent special report by the Oregon Capital Chronicle regarding how thousands of Oregonians near Boardman live near or on an aquifer that is contaminated by farming chemicals making the water unsafe to drink.

State officials apparently knew about the contamination for decades as did one of the sources of the contamination — the Port of Morrow — yet little was done about it.

The report outlined a dismal scenario where the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality knew nitrate pollution in groundwater potentially put the health of a largely low-income, Latino population at risk. The report also outlined how very little was done to hold the port accountable except for fines and pacts that were violated.

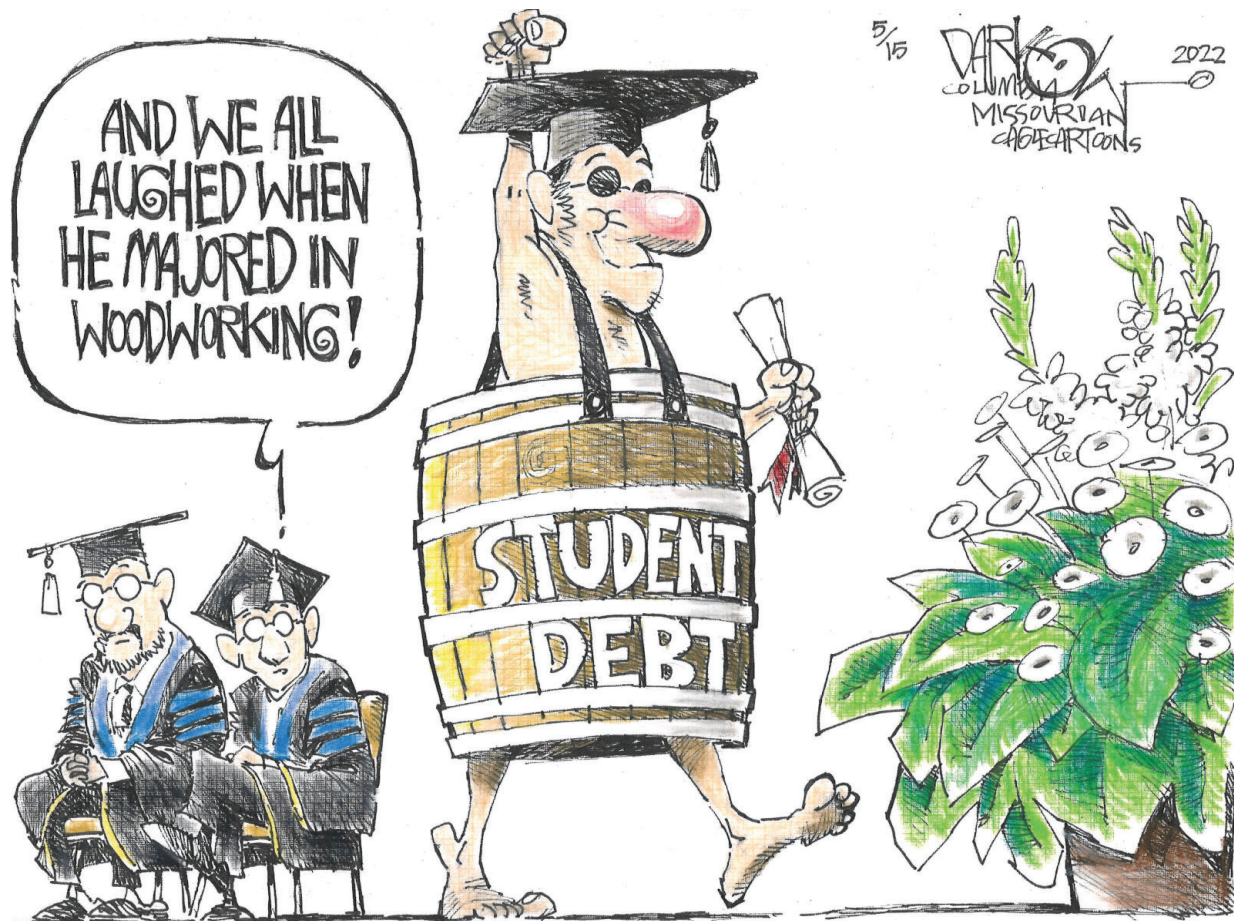
That nitrates can and do infiltrate aquifers in an area where the main industry is agriculture isn't a news flash. The groundwater in Morrow and Umatilla counties has been polluted with nitrates for a long time, and a majority of it comes from farms. Yet, for years the port illegally pumped wastewater containing nitrogen in excess of safe levels by the state from its industrial complex to area farms. The port's excess disposal is alleged to have made the water even more contaminated.

The port already has been fined by the state and certainly there appears to be a realization by officials at the state and local level there is a problem. That's a good sign, but the next big question is: Where do we go from here?

The area's agriculture industry is a multi-million-dollar mechanism that powers the local economy. Suddenly shutting down farms isn't practical, realistic or very sensible.

No, the port and state regulators who are supposed to keep a close watch on such issues should be called to task on this issue and as soon as possible.

Moving forward, the state and port officials should be working in concert to discover how to avoid such a circumstance in the future. These discussions need to be public and the residents should have the opportunity to give input. The area's state lawmakers also should get involved and questions for them should center on what they knew about the problem, how long they knew and what they are going to do to help solve the problem.



Too much all at once



ALEX
HOBBS
PASTURES OF PLENTY

This spring has been brutal. We experience the joys of 80 degrees only to have the sun whisked away, tucked behind a sheet of slate for weeks at a time. It snowed on Mother's Day. I watched the sky let loose its fluffy white contents and thought bitterly that its charm wore off a month ago.

Despite wrathful skies, we see spring's transitory treasures emerge anyway. Balsamroot blossoms unfold from their buds, the goslings down at the river rest in their mother's wake, marmots stand sentry at their dens. Honey bees fly hastily into their hives, their legs laden with various hues of pollen.

This one carries a load of goldenrod, the other deposits scarlet granules. Which flower have you been rooting around in, little bee? Will we detect hints of lupine and Columbia lily when we jar your honey in the fall? One can only hope.

We know that eventually autumn and winter will reclaim them all. After all, what novelty would beauty hold if we beheld it daily?

In John Steinbeck's "Travels with Charley," he posits a similar sentiment: "What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter

to give it sweetness?" Every year we say goodbye to the beautiful some-things: people, bees, flowers.

We do so without resentment because we trust something else beautiful will return in their stead. Or at least, return in some variation because interwoven into the repetition of our seasons is chaos. Keeping Nature in such lovely balance.

My sons and I are studying the Middle Ages and recently set up camp in the Heian period in Japan. A culture fixated on beauty, courtiers in the Heian considered handwriting to be an extension of the soul and well-written poetry to be the pinnacle of status. Yet, amid their attempts to carefully hone their environments, the literature that emerges from this period conveys an acute understanding of the bitterness of fleeting beauty. That what blossoms will eventually wilt.

One such story is the "Tale of the Bamboo Cutter." It goes something like this: Long ago, a lonely, old bamboo cutter encountered a stalk of bamboo glowing with light. He sliced it open only to find a baby girl nestled inside. The baby grew into a woman of surpassing loveliness and bestowed her earthside parents with riches beyond imagination. They called her Princess Moonlight for her otherworldly pewter glow.

Soon, the moonlit woman attracted suitors from all over Japan. To secure her hand, she gave each an impossible task, though not out of cruelty. Some gave up, some died and none

won her hand. Their overtures were in vain as the princess knew she had to return to her celestial home on the moon. She is ushered skyward on a storm cloud, but not before refusing a potion to wipe her memory. She wished to remember her time on earth.

I often go walking in the light of the full moon, its silver glow revealing things unseen during the day. Like the catkin of a hazelnut tree, it is with us for such a brief moment and I don't want its light to go to waste. The lesson each turn of the moon — each viridescent spring — attempts to teach us is simple: to accept the transition of our own something beautifuls, and to appreciate the bittersweetness left in their absence. The relationships sent adrift, children released back out into the wider world, a sentiment left unspoken.

In turn, I imagine these moments, these relationships, like the moon at its fullest. Overflowing with light, mantled in the twinkling firmament of a clear night sky. They cast shadows where once there were none and bring attention to the moon-shaped holes in all of us. But they're ephemeral, ultimately unsustainable. Too bright, too lovely. Too much all at once. Temperatures dip back to freezing, the bees return to their hives to sit out the winter, and their honey finally runs dry.

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

YOUR VIEWS

'We have only one good name'

In the planning and formation of Blue Mountain Community College the first president, Wally McCrae, said residents of Umatilla and Morrow counties made it clear they wanted the college to offer courses that would be transferable to colleges and universities and to provide vocational programs. Over time "old blue" has kept that covenant with our constituents. Blue Mountain is often called a "gem" and "the college." Much could be written about why Blue Mountain Community College has enjoyed such strong support and has earned that reputation.

I write from the "old blue" perspective that I know best. For 30 years it was my privilege to teach animal science courses at BMCC. Our agriculture department offers courses that transfer to colleges and universities as well as vocational hands-on classes and labs. Between 1976-80 the Blue Mountain ag department established transfer agreements with Oregon State University, Washington State University and the University of Idaho. To date, the success of BMCC ag students has earned them bachelor's of science and advanced degrees from at least 12 universities. Students credit their success to the advising and academic rigor at BMCC

in all disciplines, including math, chemistry, English, biological and social sciences. There have been thousands of very successful Blue Mountain agriculture students in a variety of careers ranging from horticulture to high school agriculture instructors to veterinarians. Most now live and work in our local communities and help to build the economic base. There have been students selected for the prestigious "who's who" among university students. Some of these local agriculture instructors have gone on to become administrators in their own respective schools.

"We have only one good name" is a truth applicable to colleges and people. As the college board deliberates and makes critical decisions, I strongly encourage members to not lose sight of the directive given many decades ago to maintain core academic courses in tandem with vocational programs.

Paul Davis
Pendleton

'Significantly manipulated' photography is confusing

The category of "significantly manipulated" applied to photography in some exhibits today is confusing. I philosophically disagree with its premise. I believe photographs could be divided by things like portrait, scenery,

abstract and so on. More is not needed.

All photographs are "manipulated." A photographer chooses variables, camera body, distance, lens, shutter speed, ISO, aperture, filters, gels, strobes vs. ambient light, etc. There is no precise definition of "significantly manipulated."

Cameras in cellphones change photographs taken with them. Do people applying "effects" consider that "manipulation"?

Photography in and of itself is: The art or process of producing images by the action of radiant energy and especially the "manipulation" of light on a sensitive surface such as film or an optical sensor. A photograph is not necessarily "done" when it comes out of a camera.

I think photographs should be judged at face value. Tagging them "manipulated" is confusing. When you look at a picture you know what you like and do not like, we all do.

Throughout history "the arts" have always alluded to free expression. That which had never been imagined was created by free thinkers. There was no criteria for the "how" of the creation, simply an awe of what was presented.

The category called "significantly manipulated" results in confusion for everyone and serves no legitimate purpose.

Michael Gove
La Grande

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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