

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Incoming Governor a key role in wildfire response

From 1992-2001, about 199,000 acres in Oregon burned annually in wildfires.

From 2002-11, about 314,000 acres in Oregon burned annually in wildfires.

From 2012-21, about 720,000 acres in Oregon burned annually in wildfires.

You could pick different breakpoints for the years. The story would not be much different.

Wildfire has been an increasing threat. It cost lives, homes, wildlife habitat, damage from smoke limiting outdoor activities and the costs of suppression.

The biggest recent response from the Oregon Legislature was the passage of Senate Bill 762 in 2021.

“We have done something remarkable,” state Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, said at the time, quoted by Oregon Public Broadcasting. “By we, I mean scores of people who’ve been working collaboratively for years, up to and including last night, to create a wildfire program for Oregon that rises to the scale of this crisis.”

The bill was an accomplishment. But the more cautious comment on the bill at the time from state Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, was dead on. “This is not a one-and-done project. This is absolutely the furthest thing from a one-and-done,” Findley said. “If we don’t stay intimately involved, we’re going to spend \$190 million, and we’re not going to have any results when the smoke clears, if it clears.”

(Please note he says \$190 million in that quote, but the spending in the bill is more like \$220 million.)

So has Senate Bill 762 worked?

It’s still too early. Legislators are scheduled to get an update Thursday. There will be a presentation from Doug Grafe, the wildfire program’s director in the governor’s office.

It’s really going to be up to Oregon’s next governor to follow through on the plans. That could be interesting. The part of the bill that was arguably the most contentious was wildfire mapping. But it’s one thing to rank areas in Oregon by wildfire risk. It is another thing to take that mapping and start telling people what to do on their land. And the state is considering rules for what people might be required to do on their land.

It could mean orders to clear brush and other vegetation. It could mean stricter rules for how homes can be built and what materials are used. Those may be sensible things to do. Some people will not appreciate it. One person’s excessive undergrowth can be another’s prized landscaping. Farmers also are worried what any new rules might mean for them.

There’s much more than mapping and regulations to the spending from the bill, wildfire detection cameras, working with utilities to reduce risk from power lines, suppression capacity, better smoke monitoring, grants for residential smoke filtration and the list goes on.

The good thing is baked into the bill are requirements for reports to the Legislature about the performance of the legislation and there are plans to recommend improvements.

All three candidates for Oregon governor — Democrat Tina Kotek, Republican Christine Drazan and independent candidate Betsy Johnson — voted for SB 762. We will be asking them how they will follow through on the legislation and what else Oregon might do.



Make your journey about more than just you



BRIGIT FARLEY
PAST AND PROLOGUE

June is commencement season. A few weeks ago, I was asked to give a convocation address at my school, Washington State University, Tri-Cities, for liberal arts graduates and their families. In the onslaught of dispiriting news lately, especially continuing covid-related difficulties and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I struggled to find words of compelling wisdom. So I asked for some help from my go-to sages — significant men and women in history — and they came through with some nice perspective. I offer their thoughts to the Umatilla County Class of 2022.

The world you are entering is angry and full of conflict. Here is the late John Hume, who helped do the impossible in crafting a peace between warring Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland back in 1998. “All conflict is about the same thing, no matter where it is — it is about difference,” he said upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize.

“Whether difference is your religion or your race or your nationality, the message we have to get across is that difference is an accident of birth. None of us chose to be born. And we certainly didn’t choose to be born in a particular community. There are not two people in this room who are the same. There are not two people in the whole world who are the same. Difference is the essence of humanity, and therefore respect for difference should be very, very normal and very common. It is the first and deepest principle of real peace.”

YOUR VIEWS

We need humane and effective mental health institutions

I am writing because it appears that those suffering acute mental illness are not receiving adequate treatment. This is despite the best efforts of law enforcement and mental health providers. My concern is for both the individual patient and the safety of our community. There is an urgent need for a new approach.

I served as circuit court judge for Union and Wallowa counties beginning in 1974 and continuing on either a full-time or part-time basis until 2014, a span of 40 years.

Early in my tenure, if a person was brought into court and found to be mentally ill due to danger to self or others, that person could be committed to the state mental health division for treatment at the state-run mental hospital. Then that person could be treated with medication and released if the condition stabilized. It was not uncommon for the release to occur in a matter of days, but usually on a supervised basis.

If the person failed to follow the terms of release, rehospitalization could be required for further treatment. However, the other option available at that time was to hospitalize that person for an extended period of time if the illness was serious enough to warrant that treatment.

This process was, for the most part, disbanded as state-run hospitals were

We see clearly in Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine what happens when people do not accept difference. I hope you will internalize, and then model respect for difference everywhere you go from here. The world will be a much more peaceful and prosperous place if you do.

I hope that you make your onward journey about more than just you. Civil rights campaigner Dolores Huerta once mused, “Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.”

You don’t have to be an activist, per se — your challenge is to find a way to give back to your community, however and wherever that might be. For example, I dislike group projects and committee meetings, because I don’t play well with others. I’d just as soon work alone. But I like to write about history, so that is how I do my bit for the good of the order. Consider making a self-assessment and resolve to play to your strengths in choosing how you will contribute to the common good.

I can offer one bit of advice that is purely my own: I hope you will make travel, whether it’s in country, in hemisphere or overseas, a priority when you make some decent money. You’ll gain some good insight into your own country, and I guarantee you’ll forge some human connections that will make a difference. I vividly recall an afternoon when I was a Russian language student in Leningrad, now St. Petersburg, Russia. Desperate for ice cream, which is one really great thing about Russia, I entered a cafe and told the waitress, “I’d like 200 kilograms of ice cream” — I meant to say 200 grams. She exclaimed, “There’s not 200 kilograms of ice cream in all of Leningrad.” She looked

me over and asked where I was from. When I told her, she was shocked. “Oh, my goodness, I have a capitalist in my ice cream shop.” I laughed and said, “Well, look at you, you’ve survived the encounter. How about that?” I thought I was in for a recitation of anti-American talking points, but she surprised me by spontaneously taking my hand and telling me to give America her best. I like to think that she thought just a little differently about her “enemy” after that.

Speaking of Russia, I hope that you will adopt Tsar Peter the Great’s motto: “I am a student and I seek teachers.” Unlike Vladimir Putin, Peter didn’t have time for vanity wars. He was too busy all his life learning soldiering, sailing, shipbuilding, city planning, architecture, medicine and navigation as he built a new, seafaring capital in Russia, St. Petersburg. You don’t have to aspire to his range of proficiencies, but if you follow his example and keep learning and upgrading your skills, you’ll become a versatile and interesting individual. And you’ll never be bored — or boring.

Finally, I hope that former Georgetown University President the Rev. Timothy Healy’s wish for my graduating class of 1979 holds true for all of you.

“May your education have so changed you that you will need your brains and know how to use them for the rest of the time God has given you.”

If you internalize this charge, using your brains and education every day, you are guaranteed to lead an interesting and contributory life. Good luck and Godspeed.

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

closed and replaced with care provided on a local basis. As a result, today we may find the mentally ill living on the streets as homeless in difficult conditions and they are often self-medicated with drugs or alcohol. Or, we may find them in jails or prisons because they have committed crimes, sometimes tragic crimes such as shootings.

Or, we may find that the mentally ill person has returned home and on occasion that return has caused pain and trauma to family members. And sadly, we may find that the mentally ill person has committed suicide, which is the second leading cause of death of people ages 15 to 34.

We need mental health institutions that are safe, humane and effective. We need the legal means to compel treatment at these institutions while recognizing the civil liberties and due process rights of the mentally ill. The current method of treatment has been an experiment that has often failed the patient and the community.

Warner Wasley
La Grande

The 1942 naval victory at Midway

June 4 marks the miraculous 1942 naval victory at Midway. Chester Nimitz risked battle with over a 3-to-1 deficit in ships, and with aircraft often inferior in quality and quantity. Assembling possible resources included the improbable conversion of Army B-26 bombers into

Navy torpedo aircraft.

Early B-26s were considered “widow-makers.” To avoid fatal touchdowns, pilots maintained final approach speed at 150 mph and landed at 120-135 mph; excessive speeds compared to contemporary planes.

The Mark XIII aerial torpedo was equally unforgiving by tasking pilots to hit a 30-knot aircraft carrier with a 33-knot torpedo. They were required to fly low, straight and slow through intense fighter and anti-aircraft fire and launch at less than 1,000 yards. Most torpedoes failed when released at over 50 feet altitude and at speeds exceeding 126 mph; speeds at which B-26s often stalled and crashed.

Army Capt. James Collins led four aircraft to attack the Japanese carriers, though the pilots had never before attempted to use torpedoes. The B-26s obtained no hits, and two of the four aircraft with their seven-man crews perished. Collins with another crippled bomber returned to crash land on Midway.

This dedication was typical of about 550 airmen who lost over half their number killed when flying into concentrated anti-aircraft fire and fighter attempts to destroy four heavy carriers and defend Midway. Such courage and sacrifice by the Army, Navy and Marine flyers permanently seized the initiative in the Pacific from the Japanese.

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