

## OUR VIEW

# Time for solutions to water emergency

It shouldn't be this difficult.

It shouldn't be a great leap — as the richest nation in the world — to expect clean drinking water.

Yet, in Morrow County — as a recent investigation by Salem's Capital Chronicle news outlet showed — clean drinking water is a bridge too far.

We've remained relatively silent editorially on the matter because we expected — once the facts of this particular case were made public — a widespread federal and state response. So far as we can tell, that's been lacking.

The crux of the matter is a simple one. As the Capital Chronicle showed in its investigative series, the Port of Morrow allowed more than 600 tons of excess nitrogen from its wastewater to be applied on farmland on top of the area's already contaminated aquifer in the last decade. At the same time, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, did little to enforce penalties on the port when it violated its wastewater permit.

The state eventually laid down a \$2.1 million fine on the port.

Recently, voters quizzed U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden on the matter during a town hall session. Wyden referred to an idea where a group of local governments, businesses and residents could come together and tackle the issue. That type of plan has worked, to some extent, for Wyden before. His efforts to create a diverse group to help solve management issues of the Owyhee Canyonlands in the southeastern part of the state was a triumph of diplomacy.

However, the water issues in Morrow County are quite different than the land-use issues tied to the canyonlands.

Clean drinking water is what separates highly advanced, digital-age societies from the 19th century. To encounter a clean drinking water issue in the U.S., in Oregon, in this day and age should be nearly unthinkable. However, here we are.

Wyden and the rest of the state's federal lawmaking delegation need to step in and prompt federal authorities to take on this issue. Clearly, the problem evolved out of the realm of a state or local response almost immediately. Once federal help is on the way and visible, then the state must review the entire case and start asking some very pointed questions to several state agencies, starting with the DEQ.

Finally, those who are in charge at the Port of Morrow need to stand up and publicly respond to what was an apparent decade-long plan to ignore state rules.

A clean drinking water issue should not be occurring in the U.S. early in the 21st century.



## Governor race takes a turn with SCOTUS decisions



RANDY STAPILUS

OTHER VIEWS

The independent gubernatorial candidacy of Betsy Johnson is predicated on bringing together two dissatisfied groups — Republicans unhappy with the Trumpy side of their party, Democrats unhappy with the Portland-style liberalism in theirs — with independents to form a polyglot plurality.

She took a useful step in that direction with her call for a series of debates around the state in addition to the traditional Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association faceoff, and “if possible, it would be preferable for these debates to be televised, so that more people are able to hear directly from the candidates.”

That tactic comes with high risk for Johnson in this season, not because of any lack of skill at the podium, but because of landmine issues.

Three things have happened in the last month or so, two in the last week, that has upset that calculation.

One, purely political, came in the Republican primary election, when Christine Drahan, a former legislator who led her party's House caucus, won her party's nomination. She probably was the most broadly appealing of the many contenders, even winning endorsements from news media like The Oregonian and Bend Bulletin.

The part of Johnson's strategy based on breakaway Republican voters, who might have been more interested in an independent if the nominee were weaker, took a hit with that result.

The other two, more recent, developments were national in origin.

One was the U.S. Supreme Court gun decision overturning a long-standing New York law on public guns, swiftly following a much-noted mass shoot-

ing of school children in Uvalde, Texas. That has put the whole question of gun regulation and rights close up.

That's not a difficult issue for either Drahan, who, with her A rating from the National Rifle Association, is in line with her party, or for the Democratic nominee, Tina Kotek, who like her party favors stricter regulation. (She has called for a debate centered around gun policy.) Support and opposition for both are baked in. Johnson, too, has an A rating from the National Rifle Association, which may hurt her with Democrats.

The third development is abortion, something I noted two months ago, as a “political issue not top of mind for most Oregonians but (which) may get there in coming months.” It seems to have arrived.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's (expected) reversal of Roe v. Wade on June 24, the future of abortion has become the topic of the moment and probably of the weeks to come, and it may affect the upcoming November elections. Abortion battles coast to coast are boiling over already. Oregon's rules on abortion won't change — for now — but will be affected by what other states do. And national Republican political figures (notably former Vice President Mike Pence) have called for a nationwide abortion ban, which they likely would try to pass if they're able after the 2024 election.

The gubernatorial candidates split on this opposite to the way they do on guns. More or less.

Drahan was one of four endorsed governor candidates of Oregon Right to Life, which opposes abortion “from the moment of conception to natural death.” She tweeted her praise of the Roe reversal and pledged to follow up on it; we can expect to hear more about where she would try to take Oregon, and whether she'd back a nationwide ban. She may face a tug of war between a base urging her to commit to reversing the state's pro-choice policies, and a broader elec-

torate less accepting of that idea.

Independent Betsy Johnson said clearly, “I am pro-choice. This is a bedrock issue for me and, frankly, for Oregon, a fundamental right.”

That could hurt her with Republicans — but it's not all of the story. Within hours of the Supreme Court decision, Kotek released a memo pointing out that Johnson had just welcomed, as chair of Republicans for Johnson, former governor candidate Bridget Barton. She, like Drahan, was a co-endorsee of Oregon Right to Life, and said of abortion, “My efforts as governor will focus on support for all human life, including all of our most vulnerable from conception.” That could be enough to make some otherwise tempted Democrats uneasy. (Kotek also tied Drahan to several anti-abortion measures that probably would not sell well with the Oregon electorate.)

It's Kotek, the Democrat with strong pro-choice views (endorsed by Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, Pro-Choice Oregon and The Mother PAC) who has seized the abortion issue with a parade of statements since the court ruling, and for good reason: Her stance is likely close to that of a majority of Oregon voters.

In 2018 a relatively modest ballot measure that would scale back (but not eliminate) public funding for abortions, was rejected by voters 64% to 36%. Support in Oregon for retaining something like Roe v. Wade may be even more sweeping. Earlier, in 2014 (if national trends are any indication, pro-Roe views were less popular than now) a Pew Research study found 63% of Oregonians thought abortion should be “legal in all/most cases.”

Abortion and guns, so often nationally a prescription for conservative wins, could cut the other way in Oregon this November.

*Randy Stapilus has researched and written about Northwest politics and issues since 1976 for a long list of newspapers and other publications. This column*

## YOUR VIEWS

### Firework trouble in Helix

I would like to commend the Pendleton community for the nice fireworks show on July 3. It was good to see people out and enjoying the show. Even as an older adult, fireworks always seems to bring out the kid in everyone, including myself — it was very good!

Unfortunately, as a resident of Helix, I had to endure a fair amount of illegal fireworks set off in Helix starting about 7:30 p.m. and running on and off until around 11:30 p.m. As a veteran, the closeness and loud bursts tended to really bother me, and my dog was going nuts. We even have a deputy sheriff that

lives in town, but nothing was done to restrain the enthusiastic violators. The total lack of consideration for the other people who live in the Helix community by a few selfish and narcissistic self-indulgent people ruined the evening for me, and apparently several other people in town whom I spoke with this morning.

If the state has enacted these regulations for the sake of safety, they should be enforced. But what has actually happened is that we have taken the right to let children play with fireworks that might injure them and turned it over to their drunk parents who don't seem to care about anyone else as long as they can do what they want to do without

consideration of others. A sad commentary on today's society.

Robert Park  
Helix

### Quit your whining

Rick Rohde is a great complainer. Fact: The of Pendleton city does own the larger transit vans, but Elite Taxi owns the cars. Fact: If Rick Rohde does not like the current agreement between the city and Elite Taxi he can certainly get off his posterior and submit a bid himself. He could be a part of a solution and not such a whiner.

Randy Holman  
Pendleton

### EDITORIALS

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