

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

State needs to do more in Morrow County

Morrow County is in the state of Oregon in the United States.

It isn't in the battered, remote nation of Afghanistan.

It isn't in war-torn Ukraine.

Nope. It is — arguably — located in one of the richest nations on earth.

Yet much of its water isn't clean.

That's a problem.

Recently we utilized this space on this page to laud the efforts of the state federal legislators to earmark money for the lingering water crisis in Morrow County.

Most readers are most likely aware of the recent controversy over the high number of nitrates — a common ingredient of fertilizer — in Morrow County's groundwater.

Yes, the problem isn't a new one. The high nitrate levels have been an issue for more than three decades. Yet the recent spate of testing of private wells in the Boardman area found that many residents had unsafe levels of the chemical in their drinking water.

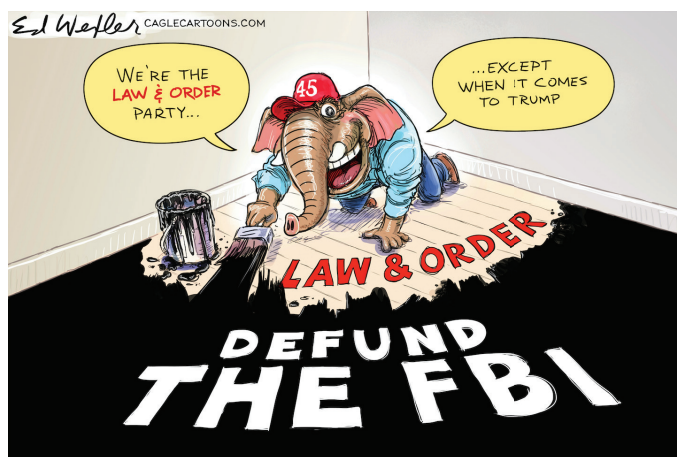
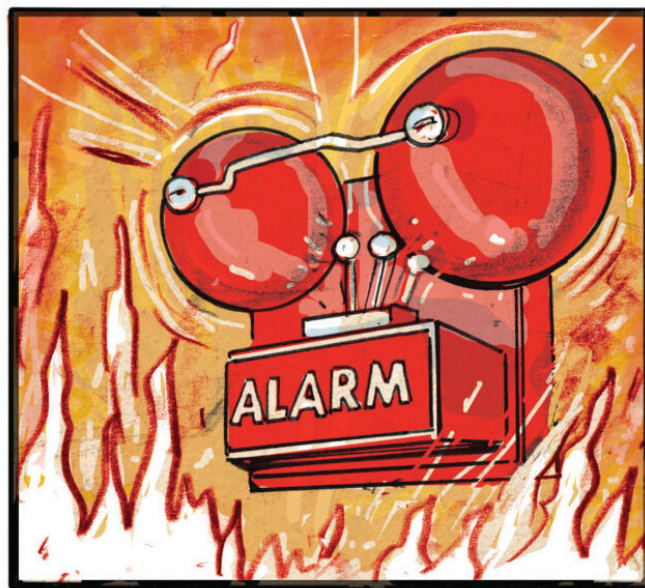
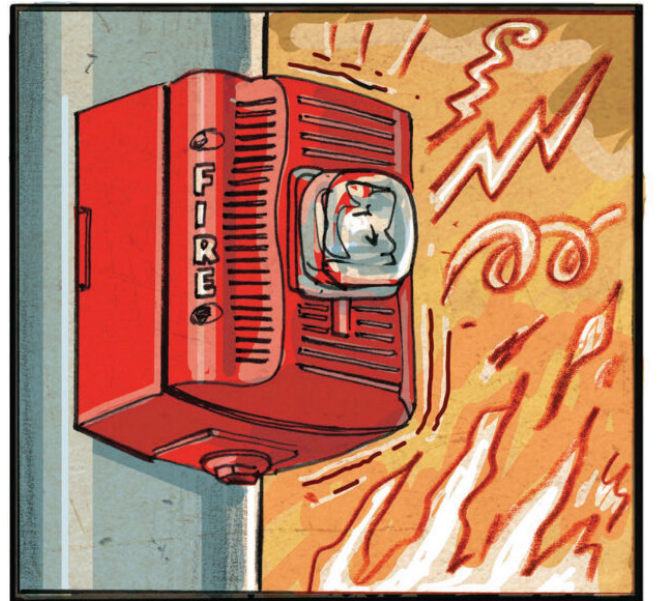
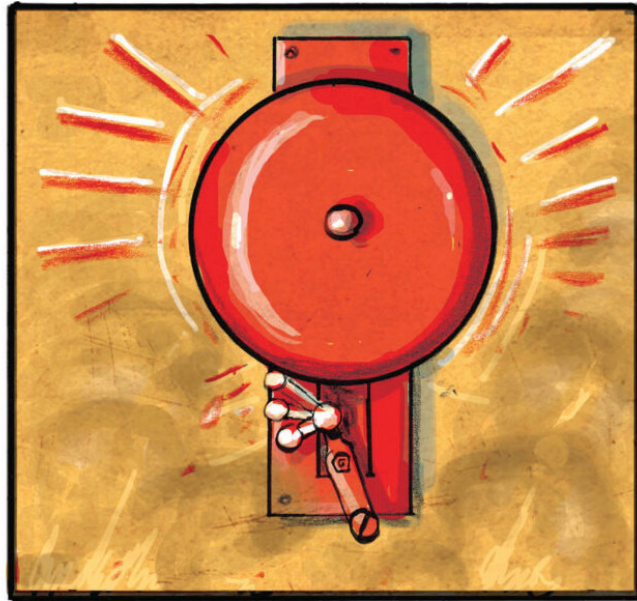
Late last month in a letter the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency urged state officials to be more proactive regarding steps to solve the problem. The letter to the Oregon Health Authority, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Oregon Department of Agriculture gave praise for some of the early effort of mitigating the nitrate problem but urged the state to hold those with control over the nitrate sources be held accountable by "requiring them to assume some of the responsibilities" for the problem and to change their practices.

One problem, state officials said, is some of the monitoring agencies — such as the DEQ — are limited on what they can do regarding regulation and enforcement. For example, a DEQ spokesperson said the agency has regulator authority over on a small part of the identified sources of nitrates in the area.

Up to a point, state agencies are between a rock and a hard place. But only up to a point.

The EPA could still take emergency action on the matter. While we do not believe it is the time for that kind of action, we do believe the state can do more. This shouldn't be a major challenge for a state inside one of the richest countries on the globe. It is a water contamination problem. It is unacceptable.

State, regional and local officials need to work together with industry leaders to solve this issue as soon as possible. We are way past the time of vacillation. We do not need, at least not yet, federal intervention when we are perfectly capable of solving this problem. So, let's do it.



YOUR VIEWS

Oregon has a bad habit of ignoring safety

"Poorly designed and maintained power lines are particularly susceptible to wind. When those lines slap together, even more fires can be started. Even the best-managed private property can be burned if the state and federal government and the power companies aren't doing an adequate job of maintaining their land and facilities." — East Oregonian, Aug. 18, 2022.

This, along with the findings of the commission set up by the Oregon Public Utility Commission, that Idaho Power's fire prevention plan does not meet the required standards set by the state of Oregon to prevent fires, only to then be refuted by the OPUC board are part of the problem. Why set up a commission to review the fire prevention plan submitted by Idaho Power only to ignore the findings and recommendations set forth by the "experts on fire prevention?"

When it comes to common sense issues, big business and state agencies

seem to be lacking. As Idaho Power continues to roll over the private landowners of Umatilla, Union, Baker and Morrow counties, all the state and county officials see is more dollars flowing into their coffers and the welfare of the forests and farm lands be damned. Placing the blame on the Oregon Department of Forestry is only partially right as the ODF has its hands tied many times by other state agencies as well as state and local politicians who care only about money.

Oregon has an energy corridor, which is supposed to be where new utilities are to be built, but Oregon Department of Energy Facility Siting Council along with the OPUC has decided to ignore the corridor and make exceptions to allow Idaho Power to do as they darn well desire. To make things even worse, the state has been holding hearings on making it even easier to allow big business to use condemnation of private lands even though the proposed 500 kilowatt line has to date not even been approved or permitted. As anyone that has ever watched the "hearings" knows, the

outcome is already determined prior to the "show hearings."

If the politicians are serious about reducing fire threats in our forests and agricultural lands it is time to show it by rejecting proposed projects, such as Idaho Power's for profit power line, and stop making exceptions to fire reducing laws. Oregon has a bad habit of ignoring safety all for the sake of dollars.

John Harvey Stanfield

Irrigon police department

In the 25 years that I have lived in Irrigon the Morrow County Sheriff's Office, under Sheriff Ken Matlock, has done a superior job in providing police services to the citizens of this community.

The idea of a one or even two-man force is pretty farfetched and is probably the reason that there have been no takers for the position. The city would be better off using our tax money for infrastructure.

John Carter Irrigon

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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phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

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