

'Lab of hope' not much beyond a nice thought

From substance abuse and domestic violence, to dying downtowns and chronic unemployment, the myriad ills afflicting small towns across many of America's rural areas are grist for commentary — including a July 17 piece from New York Times columnist Timothy Egan, a Seattle-based writer who proclaims our own beloved Joseph, Oregon, to be “a laboratory of hope for small-town America.”

EDITORIAL

The voice of the Chieftain

Our immediate inclination is to welcome the endorsement wholeheartedly. After all, who wouldn't want his or her town singled out as a beacon to others? Upon closer inspection, though, it appears Egan hasn't really left us much of substance in his headlong rush to a feel-good judgment.

Egan makes his “laboratory of hope” declaration in the fourth paragraph of his 15-paragraph offering, after spending the first three paragraphs talking about “unhappy” small towns, which he describes as “claustrophobic, gossipy, dying.”

To Egan, Joseph seems different from the unhappy towns because it has worked its way beyond the discord he witnessed during a visit he made here 17 years ago, when “the people of Joseph and the surrounding area were at war with one another.”

The wrath of ranchers and others was focused on federal land managers and environmentalists, and Egan notes that a couple of local enviros were even hanged in effigy.

Fast-forward to July 2015. Egan returns to Wallowa County shortly before the annual Tamkaliks Celebration. After contemplating the import of this event, and the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo due to follow in a week, he reaches a seemingly poignant conclusion about Native Americans and the local cowboys: “The two cultures exist together in a little valley, even feed off each other.”

As further evidence, he cites a scene at the Josephy Center for Arts and Culture, where “ranchers whose great-great-grandparents may have stolen land once vital to the Nez Percé sit side by side with Indians at brisk discussions of the past.”

We think we see a few problems with this picture Egan presents, however.

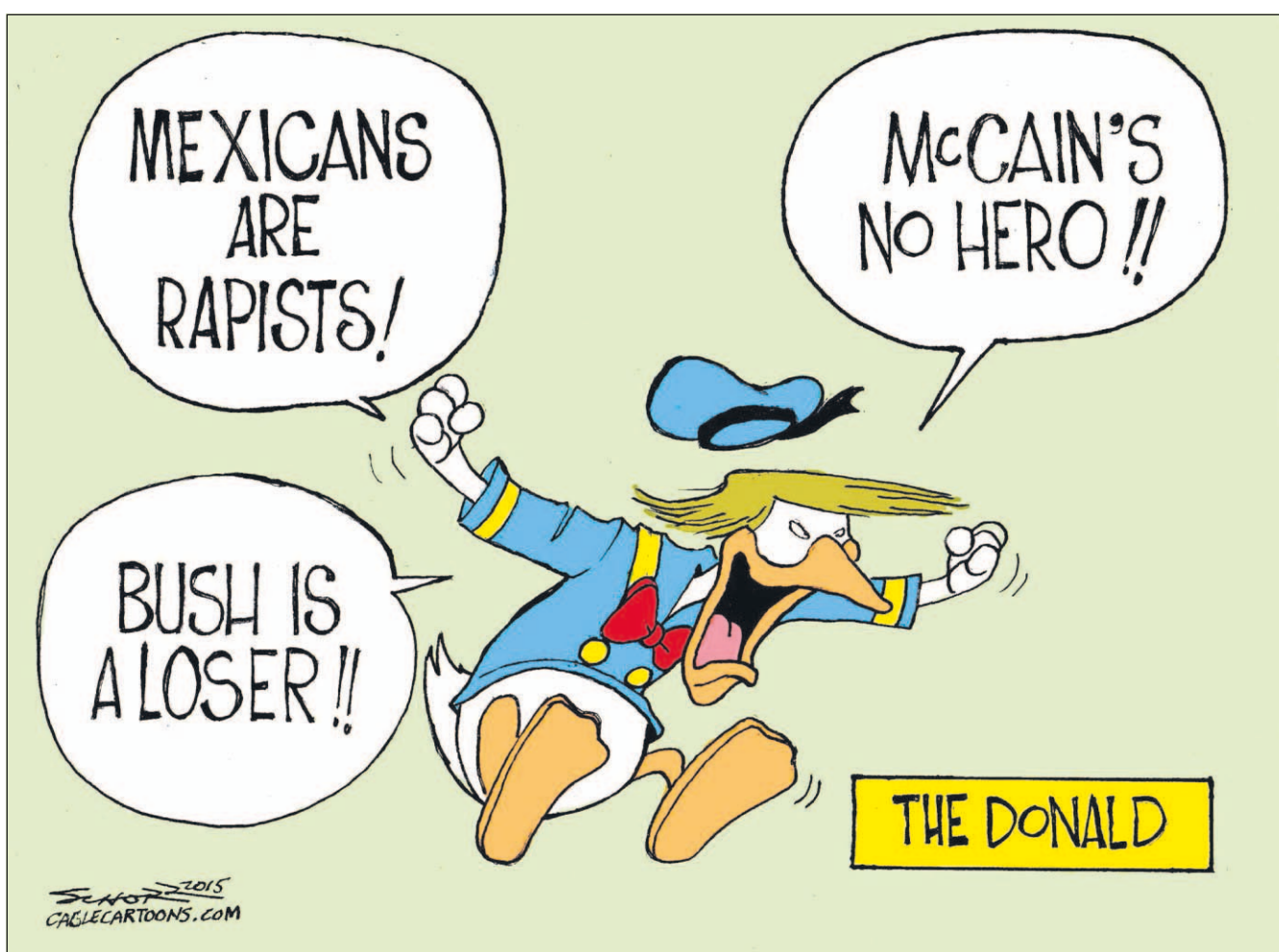
First, is it truly representative? Arriving, as he apparently does, during the brief annual period when we have Native Americans here in noticeable numbers, Egan too easily pretends that the valley really does include “two cultures.” In truth, most of the year we have hardly any Native Americans here, and that's been the case since they were driven from the area generations ago.

Second, why Joseph, specifically? Tamkaliks, Native Americans' biggest traditional event in Wallowa County, is located on Homeland Project grounds next to Wallowa, but Egan only places the grounds “at the edge of the Wallowa River” — no town mentioned. Earlier, he mentions the breakthrough that finally occurred to discontinue use of the old Savages school team name, but he doesn't tell readers the school was in Enterprise, not Joseph.

Carefully avoiding mention of any Wallowa County city that isn't Joseph helps Egan to keep the focus exclusively on Joseph, his laboratory of hope. He seems to have endowed Joseph with the other cities' experiences.

Finally, we think it's a little inaccurate to imply, however indirectly, that our big blowups with federal land managers and environmentalists are all a thing of the past.

We can appreciate the sentiment behind Egan's column, and it does read rather pleasantly. Its content is mostly sugar, though, that burns quickly off.



New forest supervisor, no change

GUEST COLUMN

John George

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (WWNF) is fully into another year of planning, and never so self-evident as shown by the “guest comment” submitted by Tom Montoya in the Capital Press. The current planning process on the forest is to test the waters, hope the public is not paying attention, and wait for light public response at meetings throughout the region, or which is not happening.

The forest service has started its re-engagement with local communities on the forest plan revision, focusing on access, grazing and pace & scale of restoration. In total 1,094 official comments were received for the forest plan revision, with residents speaking out about the restriction of motorized access in the Blue Mountains through the designation of routes (closure of cross-country travel) and reduction of road densities (closure/obliteration of historic roads). The forests have participated in meetings and so far have brought nothing new to the public.

While the forests do not have all the meetings scheduled, I do appreciate them working on meeting with the public. Each meeting held so far has had a very strong calling for the forests to develop a forest plan that retains and protects the current level of open motorized access to the WWNF and Malheur, as well as to re-instate an open motorized access system to the Umatilla.

Most concerning is the WWNF continued development of Subpart A report of the Motorized Use Restriction Strategy. Subpart A is an internally driven decision, developed by specialist at the super-

visor's office that identifies the minimum roads needed to “administer” the forest. Mr. Montoya makes it very clear that the Subpart A report is NOT A DECISION document, however, his supervisor disagrees with him.

On June 12, 2015, Mr. Pena wrote in a response to my Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request he was denying the request per Exemption 5 “to prevent injury to the quality of the agency decisions” an exemption claimed to protect a government decision, of which Mr. Montoya claims this is not a decision.

What is sold to the public as a flexible report, actually becomes a noose around the neck of rural communities as road closures and motorized use restrictions spring forth from this internally developed, agenda-driven document. This model has been used throughout the West, and is now rearing its head in Eastern Oregon in an attempt to restrict human interaction on the landscape, per the draft forest plan revision.

The road system identified under the Subpart A report would be the minimum roads needed to meet the current forest plans objectives, but does not have in its development any official public input combining the management objectives with the rural communities' needs to access resources in the region. The recommendations from the Subpart A re-

port will serve as a “springboard” to the Subpart B plan (closure of cross-country travel) that is scheduled to take place in 2016, and assist in moving the people towards a “closed forest” system for motorized access.

Residents expect to be involved in the process of developing the report, we will not be allowed to see the report until after it's finalized, making it an ineffective tool for the region, except for those that mean to restrict motorized access. The report will serve as a baseline for future site-specific planning efforts to close/decommission roads and restrict open motorized access throughout the region.

Mr. Montoya states he “strongly encourages” further public involvement, but when the public requests to participate, they are told no.

While the WWNF appears to have deferred work on Subpart B, it has not. With work continuing on Subpart A, the larger process of developing a Motorized Use Restriction Strategy is ongoing, and moving forward without public input or involvement, and the WWNF continues to breed hard feelings and mistrust in the public.

Motorized use restrictions have generated a great deal of debate in Eastern Oregon over the last 8 years, as it should. We have aging residents, and families living below the poverty level, that are heavily dependent on open access to the resources that make our communities resilient to the adversities of today's world.

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Protect kids from marijuana

COMMENTARY

From the Daily Astorian

Continuing conflicts between legal and illegal marijuana are well outlined in Willamette Week's July 22 story, “Deal With It: Oregon wants to crush black-market weed sales. But business is smoking.”

Medical marijuana dispensaries in Oregon will be allowed to begin selling Oct. 1, but until then would-be consumers are in an odd twilight zone of being legally allowed to possess, grow, use the drug at the same time nobody is legally permitted to sell it to them. As Willamette Week's story makes clear, unlicensed marijuana entrepreneurs still face potentially stiff penalties, but this isn't stopping them from going ahead and meeting demand.

Marijuana users can also supply themselves by growing it at home, obtaining a medical-marijuana card or going across the state line to Washington and buying from recreational suppliers already legally allowed to operate there — though it remains illegal to bring it back across state lines.

There is significant money still to be made selling black-market marijuana, WW found. Though the sums cited by sellers interviewed for the story may not

be correct and were taken on faith by the reporter, front-line marijuana sellers claimed to net \$600 to \$800 a week. Customers range from high school students to judges. An Oregon State University professor estimated in 2013 that nearly 320,000 Oregonians bought pot that year.

The gist of the situation: “The line between the black market and the existing legal market is often hazy.”

State Rep. Ann Lininger, D-Lake Oswego, who co-chaired the House-Senate committee on marijuana, says this ambiguity reinforces the need to keep marijuana — not to mention other intoxicating substances — out of the possession of young people. Irrespective of what adults may choose to do themselves, there is good reason to believe that marijuana has a detrimental long-term impact on still-developing brains, along with adversely affecting things like study skills and safe driving.

“I believe that we need to protect

kids,” Lininger said. “And we protect them by shrinking the black market, talking candidly to young people about why marijuana use is a bad choice for people under the age of 21, and making policies that allow young people who have made a mistake to move on with their lives.”


Crushing the marijuana black-market is a tall order. It has survived for decades despite a nationwide prohibition that was, at times, harshly enforced. Nor is it easy to keep marijuana and alcohol out of the hands of youths who choose to imbibe. Oregon's version of legalization will make this more difficult, by giving every household the right to grow marijuana and keep relatively large quantities of finished product on hand. But we have to keep trying.

Ironically, perhaps the best way to protect kids in the post-legalization era is to effectively speed things on their way, making marijuana available to adults behind a retail paywall, vigorously punishing those who sell or otherwise provide it to minors.

The Daily Astorian is a sister publication to the Wallowa County Chieftain.

Correction

Over a period of four-and-a-half years, John McColgan's Scottrade account increased by an average annual rate of 26%, not 2%. The Chieftain committed a typographical error in McColgan's Political Philosophy column that was published last week. The Chieftain regrets the error.



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Volume 133

To the Editor:

I am asking the “Creating Memories” organization and their Board of Directors to return the public's right to the only trail to Wallowa Falls.

I have been hiking to the falls for over 60 years. My father took me there when I was a child, I took my children there and I would like to continue this tradition by taking my grandchildren there.

The falls have been a major part of tourism in Wallowa County for decades. Photos of the falls were both the front and back cover of the Wallowa County brochure put out by the Joseph Commercial Club. The exact date of that brochure isn't known but it has to be from before the 1920's because the River

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

View Dairy is also featured in it.

The public's right to travel over the historic trail that was across private property to visit the Wallowa Falls should be continued. It is clear there is a long standing interest on the part of the public in the Falls. There has been a continuous public access in this location since the beginning of the 20th Century.

The action you have taken to deny the public access to the falls does your cause no service. To come in and suddenly shut people out of the only access to the major natural attraction is not in

your best overall interest.

Oregon has already said that the public has a right of access to natural resources and beauty. At the Oregon Coast, people who suddenly closed off public access to the beaches had to continue allowing such access even if it was across private property. Such closures affected the public's aesthetic or recreational rights.

The decision in the 804 Trail case said there was a Prescriptive Easement. There should be the same in this case.

Again, I call on Ken Coreson and the Board of Directors of “Creating Memories” to return the only trail to the falls to the people.

Forrest Wilson
Joseph