

Megafires no longer if, but when

Eastern Oregon is ablaze. Eastern Washington is ablaze. The Pacific Northwest is ablaze. The American West is ablaze.

These are serious fires that have destroyed homes, taken human life, wrecked ecosystems and destroyed livelihoods. This brutally hot and dry year will have impacts well into the future, but may not be not as rare as we might first think.

“Megafires” — blazes that destroy 100,000 or more acres — are becoming almost common. This year, there were dozens across the West, including those in John Day, near Twisp, Wash. and a growing inferno in prime northeast Oregon elk country near Troy that has already destroyed multiple homes. Millions of acres have been burning for months in Alaska.

An Aug. 9 National Geographic story reports these megafires are feasting on a warming, changing climate.

The end result of these colossal blazes are permanently transformed ecosystems. One scientist quoted in the story said that if he wants to continue specializing in the same type of forest, he should move hundreds of miles north.

Maybe we should too, if want to continue living, farming, logging and recreating in the same environment.

Still, climate change is not the only huge issue at play when we discuss fires. Weather patterns are having an enormous effect this year, as is the culmination of decades of forest management practices, changes in wildlife and farming, habitat destruction and recreation.

Yes we can all give our two cents on those massive issues, and most certainly should. But we can only be assured a real impact on the decisions that affect our lives, our family and our neighbors.

At the very least, we must look at any property we own in a rural fire district — or in no fire district — and stop thinking what would happen if a wildfire rushes through. We must now act and prepare for the fire that is likely to come. We must heed the warnings we’ve heard for years about creating defensible space, about having materials and water available to defend life and property and about having escape routes ready in case of emergency.

If we can’t take that lesson to heart, as flames lap at our feet of cities across Eastern Oregon, we never will. That the latest Grant County fire is believed to have been human caused is astounding. Who wouldn’t take every precaution as they look off into the fires burning in every direction, infernos that have leveled the homes of their friends and neighbors?

We cannot look to the state for much help. A story in Friday’s East Oregonian noted how few people qualify for the state’s wildfire damage program, and how small the financial benefit is. Without a disaster designation, there is little hope for federal help too. Of course there are firefighters, doing everything possible to limit the destruction and save lives.

But rural residents are reminded again of our isolation and, yes, the dangers of living where we do. We must be prepared to do the work ourselves: both protect our property and rebuild it in the ever-increasing chances that our land is burned.


Corrections

The medal that Enterprise FCCLA members Rachel Frolander, Riley Gray and Eliza Irish received in Washington, D.C., for their Chapter Service Project was a gold, not a silver. On Aug. 12 the Chieftain published incorrect information that had been provided. The newspaper regrets the error.

Services for Susan McKean-Collett will be held at the Wallowa Buddhist Temple on Sunday, Sept. 27, at 1 p.m. Susan McKean-Collett’s sister is Claire McKean-Pett. The Chieftain regrets the errors in the obituary published Aug. 19.

WALLOWA COUNTY

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Volume 133

GUEST COMMENTARY

Nativist emotion never pretty

There was a time when farmers — a reliable Republican constituency — could count on congressional Republicans.

Not now. Farmers rely upon immigrant labor. Republicans in the House of Representatives have failed to act on immigration reform, which farmers desperately need. Even a GOP House leader like Greg Walden, whose Eastern Oregon seat is bulletproof, won’t respond to his farmers’ need.

Following the lead of Donald Trump, Republican presidential candidates in Iowa this week are doubling down on punishing immigrants, even children who were born in the U.S. Seeing a Republican base eat up the anti-immigrant talk, none of the presidential candidates will stand up to Trump and talk reality. Trump’s notion of deporting 11 million immigrants

is unthinkable, but it apparently is a guaranteed applause line in Iowa.

Nativism is never pretty. In the early 20th century, the hatred was directed at Italians and Irish, and at Catholics in general. The Ku Klux Klan that was a force in Astoria politics in the 1920s was anti-Catholic.

The cruel joke is that America has always been an immigrant nation. But many whose ancestors emigrated to the U.S. are eager to bad-mouth the latest applicants for admission.

Eventually immigrant groups become too large for politicians to trash or ignore. That’s what the Republican Party faces in the Hispanic population. The New York Times reported Wednesday that, “The population of Latinos eligible to vote by 2016 is expected to increase by 18 percent over 2012 to about 28 million people, more

than 11 percent of voters nationwide, according to projections by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, a nonpartisan organization.”

Moreover, the larger electorate does not approve of the extremist immigration solutions being promoted in Iowa this week.

For the next 15 months, we are condemned to the rhetoric of our too-long presidential campaign. Feeding nativist anger makes some people feel good and it wins short-term gains.

At some point, Congress and a president must govern. The nation cannot afford to continually postpone immigration reform. Farmers, among others, need a solution.

The Capital Press, based in Salem, is a sister publication of the Wallowa County Chieftain.

Join party so you might run

GUEST COLUMN

Dan Meek

ocratic candidate are the same person!

The Sunlight Foundation, a liberal think tank, just graded Oregon an “F” on disclosure of lobbyist information, joining 3 other states at the bottom. The Center for Public Integrity grades Oregon an “F” in political financing and in public access to information. In response to the Kitzhaber/Hayes scandal, the Oregon Legislature did nothing of substance on these subjects, except to allow lobbyists to disclose even less.

The Independent Party of Oregon (IPO) offers a unique opportunity to thwart the “2-party system.” IPO needs candidates to run for local offices, for the Legislature, and for the four statewide offices to be voted on in 2016: Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Treasurer. But Oregon law says that no one can run for nomination in the IPO primary election who has not been a member of IPO since September 10, 2015. The Legislature has refused to change that law, and we will

challenge it in court, but it could stand and deprive IPO of all candidates who have not joined IPO at least 8 months in advance of the May 2016 primary election.

IPO wants to reduce special interest influence over our government processes; increase transparency in government, protect Oregon consumers, particularly with respect to banks, insurance companies and private utilities; provide incentives for small businesses to thrive and for larger businesses to expand in Oregon in a way that returns more benefits to the public than it costs.

If you might have any possible interest in running for office as the candidate of the Independent Party of Oregon, you should change your voter registration to “Independent Party” by September 10. It takes about 2 minutes, here: <https://secure.sos.state.or.us/orestar/vr/register.do>. Or just search “Oregon voter register.”

Do it now. You need not decide whether to run until the primary election filing deadline, March 8, 2016. But you need to reserve opportunity now to help save Oregon’s democracy.

Dan Meek is co-chair of the Independent Party of Oregon.

Nation’s leader chosen oddly

If you were asked to explain to an intelligent visitor from another galaxy, or even to an innocent, young American child, how our country chooses a president, you might be hard pressed to provide any rational justification for some of our peculiar practices.


Here are a few of the questions that an alien or an ingénue might ask. (Just for fun, you might want to imagine answering each question briefly as you read along.)

Who is eligible for this prestigious, powerful job? What skills or experience are required? Why do so few people compete when an opening for a low-paying job in a small town might get as many applicants?

How does the selection process work? Who gets to vote for president? What is a citizen? Who makes the rules? Who counts the votes, and how are they counted?

What is a political party? How many parties are there? If there are a lot of parties, why are two of them so important compared to all the others? How do the rules of each party affect the selection process for president?

What is a house party? What do you mean by fund-raising? Why does it cost a lot of money to run for president? Do people buy votes?



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

How do the voters learn about all the candidates? Who decides which candidates get on television or in the newspaper? What do you mean by “the media”? Who owns it and who runs it?

Do all the people vote on the same day? What do you mean by a primary election and a general election? What is a caucus? How does each state decide how and when it votes? Why do Iowa and New Hampshire get to go first and second, and why are those two states so important?

What is a convention? What do you mean by a “campaign”? Is that like a battle or a war? And what is the electoral college? Does the president have to attend the electoral college? Huh? So only those people really get to vote? How do they get chosen? Wow!

When you step back from this little exercise and take a look at how our presidential election is covered in “the media,” it is no less peculiar. Indeed, at a moment when one particular candidate who has never held elective office

is currently gobbling up just about all the print and television coverage, the whole process seems much more like a reality television show than a forum designed to educate voters about the merits of a field of credible candidates.

Just for the record, and perhaps if only for the reason that some of these candidates might never see their names in print in the Chieftain or perhaps in many other newspapers again, it is worth noting that there are currently seventeen declared “serious candidates” (as determined primarily by media blessing) on the Republican side, and five on the Democratic side.

The Republicans are, in the rough order of their current standings in public opinion polls, and with a mention of their highest career accomplishment: billionaire entrepreneur Donald Trump, former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, neurosurgeon Ben Carson, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, Florida Senator Marco Rubio, Ohio Governor John Kasich, Texas Senator Ted Cruz, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, former Texas Governor Rick Perry, former Pennsylvania Senator

See MCCOLGAN, Page A5