

'Ag gag' laws are a mistake

Eastern Oregon is well endowed with farmers, ranchers and family foresters who their neighbors know to be among the most conscientious stewards of the land. You don't take on a life of long hours and uncertain rewards raising crops, animals and trees — or stay in these endeavors — if you hate the natural world and all that lives there.

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain

What is true on the local scale — that farmers and foresters are natural conservationists worthy of steadfast support — is not universally true on the larger industrial scale.

There are irresponsible operators in every economic pursuit and this is also true of agriculture. Some large feedlots are cruel to animals. Some ranchers overgraze public lands. Some farmers over-apply chemicals or over-medicate animals destined for grocery stores.

Wonderful people but a little tone deaf when it comes to public relations, agricultural producers in some states are incensed by the efforts of a few activists to bring attention to instances of malpractice and misbehavior in the industry. This has led to efforts by ag groups and supportive legislators in places like Idaho to initiate "ag gag" laws, described in our sister publication Capital Press as prohibiting hidden-camera filming and obtaining employment under false pretenses.

A story in the Capital Press last Friday reported on just how big a blunder these laws have been in terms of confidence in farmers. A study of U.S. consumers by the University of British Columbia shows that such heavy-handed efforts to keep agricultural practices under wraps has the opposite of the desired effect.

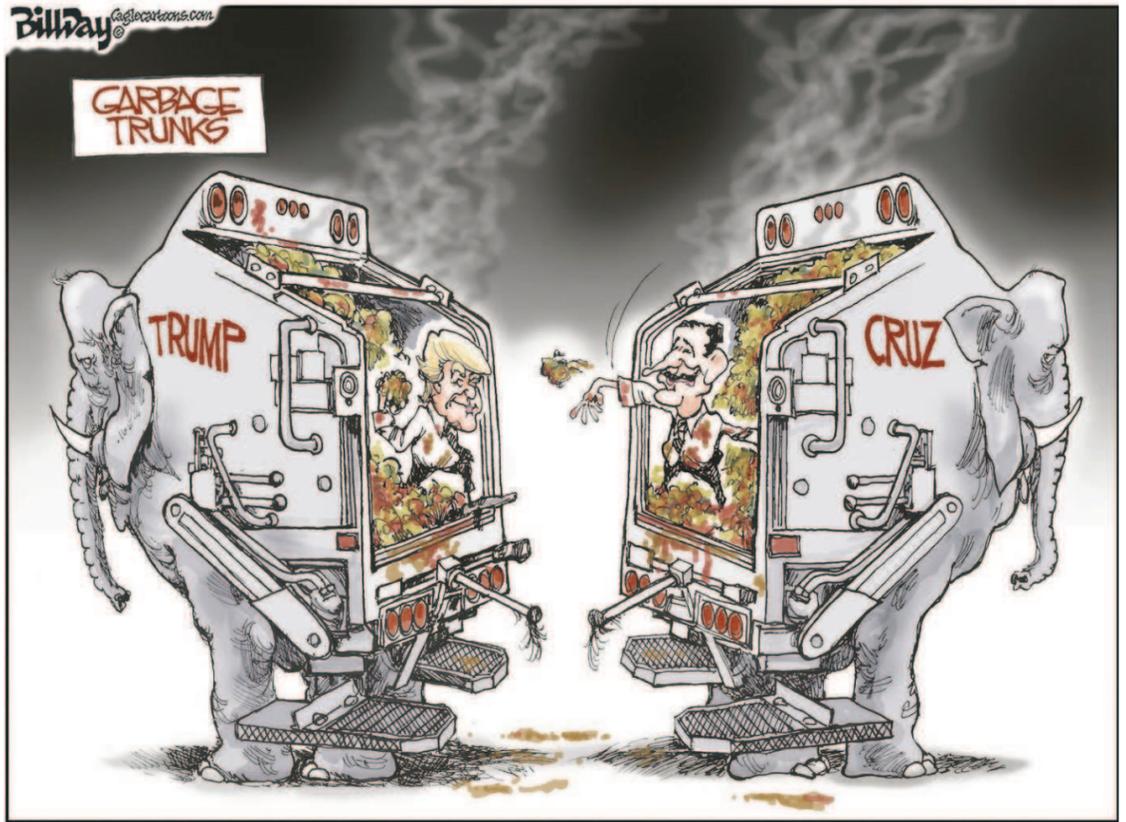
Instead of shielding squeamish consumers from agriculture's facts of life, ag gag laws evidently leave the public assuming there is something to hide. The trust rating for farmers drops 20 percent across the political spectrum among members of the public when ag gag laws are put into play, the university researchers found.

"There are reputational consequences. People are likely to be left with a bad taste in their mouths when they're made aware of them (ag gag laws)," a study author said.

No industry would be happy to be targeted by "secret agents" posing as visitors or employees, but agriculture occupies a central position in people's lives, providing sustenance for purchasers and their children. Heightened scrutiny is to be expected.

Oregon state lawmakers clearly should resist the siren call of ag gag laws. Agricultural producers in our states, who enjoy public support and positive reputations, can do far better by continuing to reach out to consumers with truthful information, while working to further enhance animal husbandry and environmentally friendly practices.

The vast majority of farmers are heroes with nothing to hide. They should act accordingly.



In search of a few good hearts

In this acrimonious election season, fresh off the Malheur standoff and in the middle of the long March I always think of as slush-month, it is good to find and remember a few good hearts. It's my prejudice, but I've always thought that good hearts are easier to find — maybe even more abundant — in small towns where we know and talk to our neighbors no matter what church they go to or political party they subscribe to. The good hearts in this Wallowa County have kept me here for 44 years.

I know, I know. Neighbors hear your barking dogs, see your dirty laundry and know your warts, and sometimes they let you know with a smirk or a lecture. People use drugs, abuse alcohol, kids and spouses, are guilty of adultery, anger and poking noses where not wanted. And most kids can't wait to get away from gossip and out to see the world.

Maybe it's like that graph that someone just posted on Facebook: if the world was 100 people, 15 of them would be living on less than \$2 a day, and one of them would own more than half all of the money; a handful would be starving or near starving and a bigger handful would be obese; 85 could read, 75 have cell-



MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider

phones and 15 would be homeless ... etc. In Wallowa County we can put names on the graph.

And we can for sure put names on the good hearts. Right now I am taken with the love and craftsmanship that Eric Carlson and Kirk Skovlin — and their whole construction crew — are putting into the Wallowa Nez Perce Longhouse. And I am impressed by the lower valley community that has embraced the Homeland Project, that each year readies the grounds, puts up the parachute in the dance arbor and welcomes Indians back to their traditional lands for a powwow and friendship feast. Feasters usually number 600 or 700. That's a lot of good will.

Too many names to mention, but it took two very big hearts — teacher Terry Crenshaw and Tribal member Taz Conner — to start this thing. Both have passed, but the work goes on.

There are school teachers who go the extra lesson, pastors who do more than preach, search and rescuers who practice without pay and risk their own bodies saving others, neighbors who look after, and a bevy of skiers who get more kicks out of watching kids learn at Fergi than they do skiing themselves.

And there are the Sorooptimists! On Tuesday a few of them came to the Joseph Center to talk about themselves. They weren't bragging. Well, they were. But not on themselves as individuals, but on the organization that gathers them together and lets them serve.

Serve they do. And have, for over 50 years. Old timers will remember Wilma Haller and Marjorie Martin and Alice Lessman and many others. There is a new crew now — or many new members in an evolving crew. Over the years they have gathered and sorted clothes, sold them for dimes and quarters and distributed scholarships — first \$50 and \$100, now in the thousands of dollars each year.

Families who need work pants and school pants pick out 7,000 pairs each year.

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Forest plan will consider alternatives

We are writing to share an update on the revision of the Blue Mountains Forest Plans, which will guide the management of approximately 5 million acres of the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. To begin, we want to acknowledge those who have been involved in this Forest Plan Revision process — we have been encouraged by how much you value your public lands, and we thank you for helping to shape how we manage these National Forests on behalf of the American people.

Over the past year, as part of a public re-engagement effort, we have visited with over 700 individuals in 24 public listening sessions held in communities across Eastern Oregon, Eastern Washington and Western Idaho. Although we have heard differences of opinion about how to best manage these spectacular landscapes and ecosystems of the Blue Mountains, most agree that these national forests should continue to be managed for the many uses and benefits they provide, both now and into the future.

We found the input shared during the public re-engagement process to be very

GUEST COLUMN

Steven K. Beverlin, Genevieve Masters, Thomas Montoya

helpful, and we are using this input in a variety of ways. For example, the public listening sessions have brought additional context to the 2014 formal comments and have given us a better understanding of how different alternatives may affect our diverse publics. In response, we are currently crafting two new alternatives, which we will analyze in detail in the environmental impact statement (EIS):

The first alternative will emphasize restoration and has been informed by formal public comments, re-engagement input and revised recommendations by Forest Service resource specialists.

The second alternative will build upon the first. This alternative would considerably increase the pace of forest restoration during the plan period (15 years) by moving a larger portion of the forested landscape toward the desired conditions

— i.e., thinning densely forested stands, reducing fire severity and decreasing the risks posed by insects and diseases.

We will provide public updates with new information as we develop these additional alternatives and continue with the analysis of other alternatives within the EIS. While we seek to be responsive to all of our diverse publics, any alternative we consider must be analyzed for compliance with federal laws, regulations and policies governing national forest management. Also keep in mind that the forest plan revision is still a work in progress, and the deciding officer (the Regional Forester) has not made any final decisions.

What are the next steps? The final products of this forest plan revision process will include three separate forest plans — one for each of the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. Before these forest plans can be finalized, we will consult with federal agencies on the Endangered Species Act and continue our government-to-government consultation with appropriate American Indian tribes.

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Destroying forests to save forests?

I received an unsolicited letter from Oregon Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) dated Feb. 15 that lists the very things we should question about the current Congress. The letter is too long to list in its entirety in this forum, so I am quoting one issue at a time. This week, forestry:

"For the third year in a row, the House has passed bipartisan legislation to fix broken federal forest policy to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, put people back to work in the woods and improve forest health. Yet unelected officials in Washington continue to stifle these common-sense measures with government overreach, threatening to lock up land with no regard to local input or public access. How many more acres of forest have to go up in flames, choking our communities with smoke, before something changes? These fires risk our very livelihood as well as our favorite recreation activities. I hear the frustrations from the Oregonians I meet, and I will continue to advocate for you in Congress."

"For the third year in a row, the House has passed bipartisan legislation ..." This is the definition of insanity — doing the same thing and expecting a different result. It is time to listen to the foresters and

LETTERS to the EDITOR

public, make access and fire lanes on public lands where there are none, including protected areas that require monitoring. The current bills benefit corporate logging; clear-cutting does not reduce fire danger.

For explanations of current GOP forestry bills, visit <http://tinyurl.com/zu8fbj8> and <http://tinyurl.com/znoo00a>.

As an independent who at one time had Republican leanings, I find the present GOP direction suspect. Neither of our major political parties addresses my concerns or resolves problems. The government is responsible to the people. Can we not find politicians who share such a commitment?

David Ebbert
Enterprise

Isn't this a problem?

The "Select Investigative Panel on Infant Lives" had its first hearing recently. I read the title and got really enthused. Finally, our representatives are looking into the benefits of prenatal care, preschool

education, even maybe policy advocacy, if not financial support for parenting classes.

I was wrong. This is an investigation into why the selling of baby parts, an activity attributed to Planned Parenthood, should be legislatively condemned. There are several Congressional committees investigating this same concern. The content and direction to these investigations are lead by Republicans. It doesn't seem to matter that 30 states have now looked into this matter and concluded Planned Parenthood has done nothing wrong.

There are at least two problems with this pandering to anti-abortionists:

1. Cultural warriors of religious origins are opposed to any abortion or any nuance of abortion. However, it is all too convenient to gloss over the highly prized principle of "the individual's right to choose" [anything] contrasted with those who wish to deny that choice through legislation. It comes down to: we are for an individual's freedom ... but only if you agree with us.

2. An unwanted pregnancy is an unwanted infant.

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