

Could anyone have stopped the Canyon Creek Fire?

On Aug. 14, The Oregonian distributed a special 20-page report, the culmination of a year-long investigation into the Canyon Creek Fire. That fire destroyed 43 homes and nearly 100 other structures Aug. 14, 2015 near the town of Canyon City in Grant County.

EDITORIAL

From the East Oregonian

It was a journalistic endeavor that produced a fascinating product. Two reporters for the newspaper, Laura Gunderson and Ted Sickinger, spent nearly a year digging through documents, conducting interviews and questioning the U.S. Forest Service’s initial response to the small, lightning-caused fires that two days later united into a conflagration that could not be stopped.

Perhaps the most confounding part of the story is the aftermath. Burned yet valuable timber from government lands received priority in local mills, leaving private landowners high and dry. Those tree farmers, who counted on the revenue from their lumber stands, can now only watch as millions of dollars rot on the ground because mills from John Day to Pilot Rock are dealing with a glut of logs caused by last year’s disastrous fire season. Yet if the logs languished on government land, we imagine a similar uproar over waste of taxpayer dollars and resources.

The Oregonian report did nothing to change our opinion about the fire. Tim Trainor of the East Oregonian (The Chieftain’s sister paper in Pendleton) was on the ground in Canyon City while lodgepole pines were still smoking. He wrote some of the first stories documenting the Forest Service’s initial response to both the Berry Creek and Mason Spring blazes.

The Blue Mountain Eagle, our sister paper in John Day, also has documented the response and given voice to those who think it was lacking. That publication produced a lengthy look back just this week.

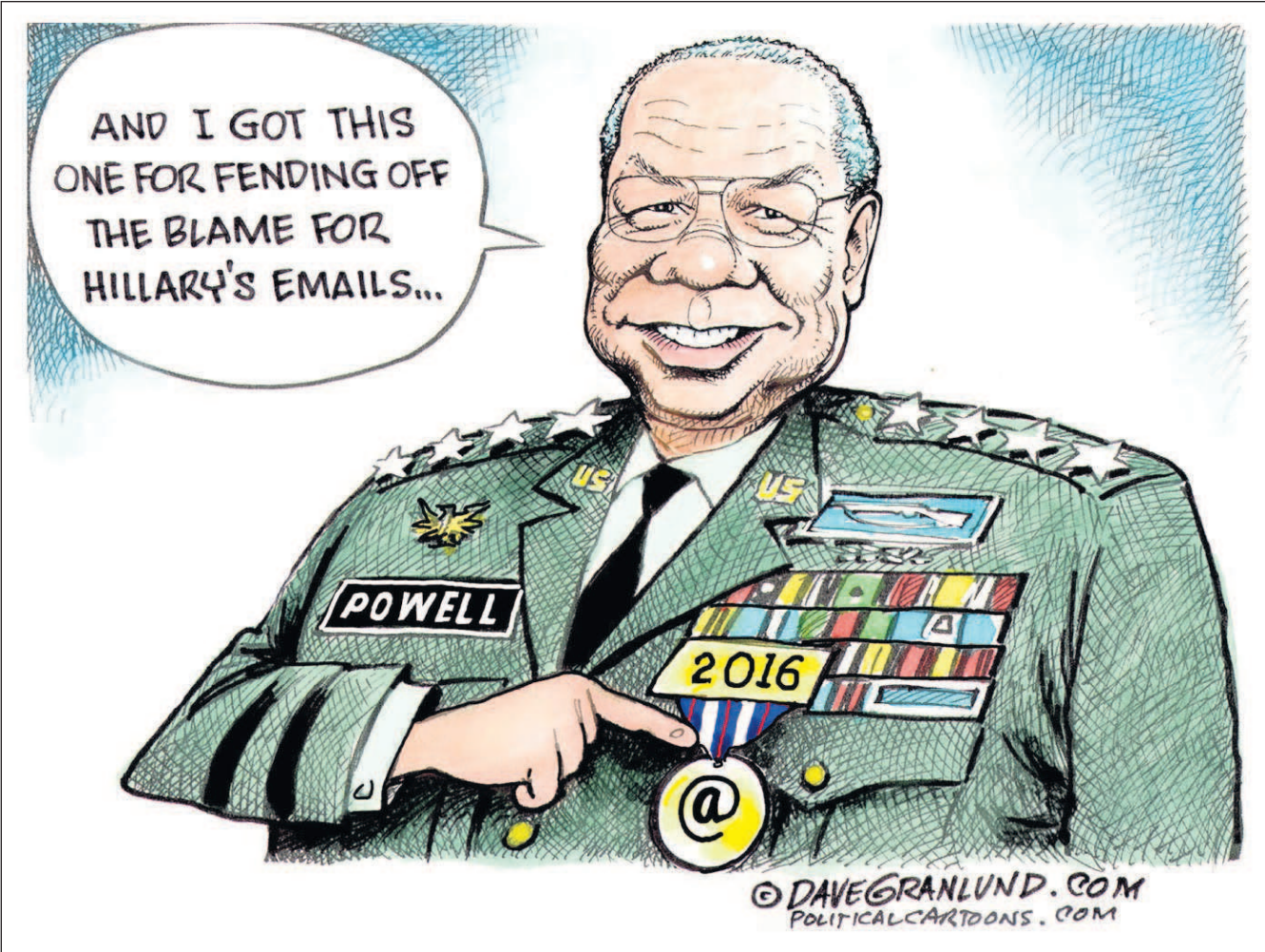
In our opinion, the devastating and tragic conflagration was caused by a region-wide lack of resources precipitated by one of the worst fire seasons in the Northwest. It became a damaging, devastating fire because of a freaky and terrifying convergence of natural events, first the lightning strikes and secondly the hot weather and then the cherry on top: high winds blowing the exact direction of Canyon Creek. That made the canyon act like a flue, which stoked the inferno beyond any ability to fight it.

Yet we’re happy The Oregonian invested time and resources into the investigation, even if they came to a different conclusion. It’s important for the people of Grant County, who feel like they are being attacked by the government and to some extent the media, to have an organization deeply investigate an issue important to them. No matter your takeaway from the project, Gunderson and Sickinger dug and dug, and unearthed information Grant County citizens wouldn’t have seen any other way. That’s valuable, as is the threat that future decisions by the USFS or another government agency may be vetted just as carefully.

There are lessons to be learned from the Canyon Creek Fire. The USFS has admitted it would have fought the Berry Creek and Mason Spring fires differently, knowing how it turned out. That’s the benefit of hindsight. Sometimes you play the odds and lose, and both the Forest Service and the people of Grant County lost last August.

On a larger scale, state and federal agencies must rethink their strategy and philosophy for fighting fire, as well as its management of Oregon’s valuable and vulnerable forests. It must get better. Lives and livelihoods are at stake.

This year’s fire season has been much more manageable, and therefore has been better managed. But it won’t be long until another dangerous fire is growing in intensity outside a rural Oregon town, and the stakes will be high once again.



A tough game, even in dreams

I have written several columns over the past few years about golf, and one about dreams. Believe it or not, the two subjects merge for me in golf dreams.

Maybe I am atypical as a golfer or as a dreamer, but I have golf dreams fairly often, and they tend to follow a general pattern. The rule of thumb is that in most of my golf dreams, I rarely get to hit more than one shot, and sometimes not even one.

In the standard scenario, I am teeing up a ball when something happens to cause a delay. The ball might roll off the tee. The ground might suddenly change contour. Or I might become aware that there is a wall or a tree right in my backswing. Or maybe some people have chosen just that moment to appear in the fairway in front of me. The net result is that I either don’t get the shot off at all, or I hit a bad one, and shortly after that the dream ends.

I recently had two interesting golf dreams. In each, I made only one shot. In the first dream, I was playing with my old buddy Steve. Seventeen years ago he passed away unexpectedly. He still shows up in my dreams, probably because of the untimeliness of his death. Steve hit his tee shot and then I hit mine, and mine was to the left of his. We found our balls and then Steve pretty much disappeared from the dream while I got ready to hit my next shot.



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

My ball had landed in an area that looked like a beach volleyball court, but soon it somehow wound up even further left on an actual beach that was crowded with adults on blankets and in lawn chairs and with children playing by the ocean. As I got ready to hit my next shot, I rather presumptuously asked the people to move aside briefly so that I would not hit them. A lot of them began to move to my right, but I asked them to move toward the water instead because the green was toward the right. Politely they accommodated my bizarre request, but then as I got ready to make my shot, the ground started changing levels and I decided not to hit it at all. I apologized to the crowd and picked up my ball, and they reacted more understandingly than I deserved.

I went back to the beach volleyball area and prepared to hit my second shot, but now I saw several large, open casement windows between me and the green. I noticed two women on the other side of the windows and asked them to

move for just a few moments. They explained that I should not hit through the windows because their enormous kitchen was on the other side and they had a lot of china and wine glasses that might get broken. I apologized to them as well and picked up my ball and went looking for Steve. I considered just recording my score for the hole as a par, but I figured a bogey would be more fair, since I was about to hit out of the sand and the green might not have been reachable even under better circumstances.

In my other recent noteworthy golf dream, there were two large teacups, each of which contained a piece of fruit at the bottom and a golf ball at the top. The fruit looked like a cross between an apple and a pear, but for some unexplained reason, I thought the fruit was a pineapple. I knew I faced a challenging situation, and I made the odd club selection of driver for the shot. I hit one of the balls out of the cup, but the cup barely tipped over and the ball rolled just a few feet away. Nevertheless, I was glad to be out of the cup, and I felt confirmed in my earlier suspicion that the driver had probably been the wrong club choice.

I’m sure that sports psychologists could waste a lot of their time and my money trying to analyze my golf dreams. John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Combating mental illness, addiction

Across Oregon, I’ve talked with many families who are struggling with mental illness and drug addiction. These touch every segment of our communities, no matter where you live or what you look like. Tragically, they often carry with them a major stigma in society, and help is hard to find. Fortunately, Congress is working in a bipartisan way to help solve these problems and offer relief to those who need help.

The size of the crisis is staggering. Nearly 10 million Americans have a serious mental illness, and yet 40 percent of them aren’t receiving the treatment they need. In Oregon, more people are dying from drug overdoses than car accidents, with our state ranked consistently at the top for non-medical use of prescription pain relievers.

I’ve heard the heartbreaking personal stories from people who are most affected. At roundtables in Medford, Bend and Hermiston, I spoke with parents whose children experienced homelessness, violence and worse due to mental health issues or drug addiction. I’ve heard from law enforcement officials about how the default place for the mentally ill is often the local jail. Local physicians and caregivers told me how they severely lack the resources to effectively help patients suffering from addiction.

The good news is that recently the U.S. House passed two key pieces of leg-



GUEST COLUMN

Rep. Greg Walden

islation: the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act and the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act to tackle this crisis head on.

The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act focuses on improving drug abuse treatments, addressing the underlying causes of addiction and helping those most at risk. Our bill expands access to care and prevention services in our communities, and establishes best practices that will help prevent lawful prescription use from spiraling into abuse. It gives new tools to law enforcement and prevention advocates to combat the epidemic of painkillers and heroin.

We’re increasing first responders’ access to the potentially lifesaving anti-overdose drug naloxone. While some states, such as Oregon, already have broadened its availability, I believe the use of naloxone should be boosted around the country. With our bill, we can ensure better access to treatment, we can reduce the number of legally-proscribed pills that shouldn’t be out there and save lives.

Meanwhile, the Helping Families in

Mental Health Crisis Act would be the first significant overhaul of the nation’s mental health system since the Kennedy administration. Our bill reforms the 112 federal programs that address mental health, ensuring they effectively coordinate and streamlining the bureaucracy currently creating serious barriers to care. It allows families to better work with health care professionals to care for loved ones, and helps fix the shortage of 100,000 psychiatric hospital beds in this country. Our bill also advances tele-psychiatry (remote assistance) to help mentally ill patients in rural and underserved areas.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, those patients with severe mental illness who do receive care are 15 times less likely to commit, or be the victim of, violent acts. While the vast majority of people with mental illness are not violent, the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act works to make sure that those who are struggling do not go on to harm themselves or others.

Both of these bills addressing mental health and opioid abuse have passed the House with overwhelmingly bipartisan support. I’m proud to say that the drug addiction plan has also been passed by the Senate and signed into law by the President.

See WALDEN, Page A5

Education for refugee children vital

I am a member of the ONE Campaign and I write to you today as President Obama and other world leaders prepare for two critical summits in September that will determine the future of education for millions of refugee children.

I have two young children and I cannot imagine being forced out of my home, taking flight along with thousands of other desperate people into a life of total uncertainty. There are millions of people living in camps all across the globe, seeking asylum and hope. Children are at the greatest risk, especially from the long-term impact of not having any options for education. Their future, their families’ futures and our future are all intrinsically linked; it is not their problem, it is our problem.

If the current education plight is not ad-

LETTERS to the EDITOR

ressed, one-third of primary children will not reach basic literacy rates by 2050 and universally we will see an entire generation of illiterate adults. As a first step this year, leaders need to deliver on the promise of the London Summit and ensure quality education is provided for at least 1 million out-of-school refugee children. I am asking your readers to join ONE and ask President Obama to make sure that the United States delivers on a plan to provide one million refugee children with an education this school year.

Craig Rottman
Portland

Who needs experience?

Anyone else notice that Donald Trump’s every idea is exaggerated, usually negatively tinted?

Oh, and the disdain on his face. The causes and the effects are dire.

There is hope on the horizon, however. He as the re-incarnated Decider has remedies. Who needs experience? His brighter world vision is the vacuous “Let’s Make America Great Again” shtick with its inflated promises.

My “opinion” is only a question: given the ideas presented to date, how inclusive — of every citizen — is the direction he wishes us to go?

Patrick Dunroven
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