

The elephants in the room

As the Oregon Legislature prepared to start work this week, its leaders were saying all the right things about working together, respecting rural Oregon and doing what was best for the state as a whole.

But, as the saying goes, “only time will tell.”

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

In the Oregon House, the Democratic and Republican leadership have a more collegial relationship than in the past. In the Senate, it seems prickly.

Democrats gained supermajorities in the House and Senate, which enables them to pass tax increases without needing any Republican votes — if all Democrats stick together, which is never a sure thing. Some legislative issues, such as potential changes in sentencing laws, have an even higher threshold for passage. In any case, Democrats cannot conduct business unless enough Republicans are present for a quorum.

Through the leadership of Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, the Senate has acted as a moderating influence on proposals emanating from the more-liberal House. But the November elections swung the Senate to the left, and Courtney worries about how he will balance the expectations of progressive Democrats with the need to work collaboratively with Republicans.

“We cannot do this, Democrats, without Republicans. You gotta understand that,” Courtney said at the annual Associated Press Legislative Preview on Friday. “We cannot do this without Republicans. Without the elephants in the room — another way to put it — the donkeys can’t do it.”

The question is whether the 90 legislators, as well as Democratic Gov. Kate Brown, will give more than lip service to that collaboration.

The early signs are positive. They almost always are at the start of a legislative session.

Legislators went through civility training last week. Equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans will serve on the joint legislative committee charged with improving the Oregon Capitol culture and overcoming the specter of sexual harassment. Courtney appointed non-urban and urban senators — Democrats Betsy Johnson of Scappoose and Elizabeth Steiner Hayward of Beaverton — to jointly serve as the Senate’s budget leaders. He has introduced Senate Bill 2, with Republican Sens. Bill Hansell of Athena and Cliff Bentz of Ontario, which could be a breakthrough in providing greater land-use flexibility in Eastern Oregon.

It might also be a good sign that legislators are still trying to write the carbon cap-and-invest legislation, which progressives demand and conservatives dislike. Some Democratic legislators had long ago insisted that the legislation, known as Clean Oregon Jobs, was ready. Republicans have strived to make it less onerous for businesses and consumers.

Most bills passed by the Legislature are routine and have bipartisan support. Few of those will make headlines. But many contentious proposals — from taxes to firearms — likely will pit business vs. labor, rural vs. urban and minority Republicans vs. majority Democrats.

Those are the bills that will test legislators’ commitment to collaboration, to civility — and to the whole of Oregon.



What’s in a knife?



SHOOTIN' THE BREEZE

Rod Carpenter

It’s interesting what does and doesn’t turn some folks’ cranks. For instance, I can admire nice rifles all day, but for me a knife is just a tool to get the job done.

Other folks seem to want every knife they see. That doesn’t mean I don’t appreciate the qualities of a good knife, or the importance of having one when you need it. You only need to stand over one dead elk realizing you left your knife in the truck to appreciate how important it is.

We all choose our knives for different reasons. When most of us were first allowed to have one, all that mattered was that it was big. The bigger the blade, the better the knife. After carrying it around for a while and trying to clean a fish or two with a seven inch blade the light began to dawn, and we began to realize that other qualities may be important in selecting a knife.

Knives come in all shapes and sizes. From folders to fixed blades, clip points to drop points, gut hooks and nowadays we can even replace blades and never have to sharpen again. With so many options, how do you choose which knife is for you? Well, in my experience, the best knife is the one you have on you when you need it. I have had the joy of cleaning a deer with a 1.5-inch blade because that’s what was in my pocket. It wasn’t ideal.

For hunting I like a fixed, 3-inch drop point blade. Folders are more compact but are harder to clean. Three inches is plenty of blade to break down



Contributed photo/Blue Mountain Eagle

Knives come in all shapes and sizes — from folders to fixed blades, clip points to drop points, gut hooks and replaceable blades.

even the biggest animal, and the drop point is ideal for skinning. I’m not a fan of gut hooks. I can never get them to work as well as advertised, probably operator error.

I’m also not a fan of replaceable blades. Honestly, because they are too sharp. I cut myself enough as it is, and I’m always a little afraid I’m gonna leave a finger behind somewhere. Also, I think throwing away all those blades is kind of a waste.

My hunting knife today is a Buck Micro. It is light, inexpensive and meets all my needs. I have tried all kinds for butchering game. Surprisingly, I have found that a filet knife works best for me. This is the one instance where a long blade is a benefit.

It makes it so much easier to cut steaks out of big elk muscles. The flexible blade is also great for working around bones.

I carry a multi tool when I go fishing. One with relatively slender pliers for removing hooks, scissors for cutting line and a small blade for cleaning works well for me. I should probably carry one all the time, but they are heavy, and I’m old.

Whatever blade you choose to carry, keep it sharp. It really is true that it’s the dull blade that cuts you.

We welcome your thoughts and ideas at shootingthebreeze@bme@gmail.com

Rod Carpenter is a husband, father and hunting fool.

Border walls and poker faces

As I write this column, the federal shutdown is already in its fourth week, which makes it the longest one ever. I hope by the time my column is printed, the standoff will have been resolved, but I am not optimistic about that prospect.

In 1978, as I was moving into my second year in VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), I was caught up as an innocent victim of a federal shutdown. On that occasion, the issue in contention was taxpayer funding for abortion. Like many other federal employees, I missed a paycheck, but then probably because some administrative work in Washington fell between the cracks, I missed two checks and then three. By the time the snafu in my case was straightened out, I ended up getting three months pay all in the first week of 1979, which put me in a higher tax bracket for that year. The whole bungle cost me several hundred dollars in added taxes, over and above the stress and inconvenience of having to dig into my meager savings to get by.

My story is just one example of the trouble shutdowns cause in real people’s lives. Right now 800,000



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

federal workers, including TSA agents who protect our airports and Coast Guard members who patrol our seas, are without pay.

President Trump’s economic advisers are now admitting that the shutdown is taking a much bigger toll on the economy than they had previously estimated. And this self-inflicted wound comes on the heels of the worst fourth quarter drop in the stock market in ten years.

Even presidents with much better records and purer political intentions on the issue of immigration have had difficulty advancing legislation to tackle a problem that is inherently complex. But according to data from a recent New York Times article, a lot of progress has been made in the past two decades. Illegal immigration reached a peak at the end of the Clinton administration, and then with some bipartisan cooperation after 9/11, levels were cut in half during the terms of George W. Bush, and further reduced by

half again under President Obama. In 2017, illegal immigration came down even further until ticking back up in 2018 to the levels achieved during Obama’s terms.

So why the sudden crisis over the need for Trump’s promised wall? Keep in mind that President Trump had a Republican House and Senate to work with for the past two years, including even the first week when this shutdown began. Yet he could not muster enough support in his own Republican Congress to fund his wall, so he decided to try to “get a win” by precipitating a crisis and waging a political war against the new Democratic House over this issue.

This is reminiscent of the migrant caravan, that over-hyped previous crisis timed conveniently to coincide with our recent election, but which has mostly disappeared from the news since then. I wonder how National Guard troops who missed Thanksgiving with their families feel about that political stunt now, in light of a purported “invasion” that never really materialized.

If President Trump wants more than 5 billion dollars for a section of border wall, he should make

his case to Congress by introducing legislation, rather than shutting down the government and playing a very harmful and dangerous game of Chicken. And if his intention was to lay the blame on Democrats for the shutdown, then he has already failed, because surveys show that most of the public point their fingers squarely at him instead.

This entire episode has been a gigantic political gamble and miscalculation by the president. And now he has even backtracked on his often repeated campaign promises that Mexico will pay for the wall, as he tries to revise history to claim that he never really said that.

It appears instead that we are all paying for a wall that isn’t even being built. And many of those who really help keep us safe are expected to continue working for free, or to leave their good jobs and find other ways to provide for their families.

Our billionaire president does not appear to understand or care about the harm that he is causing in so many people’s lives.

We are a better country than this, Mr. Trump. We deserve better leadership!

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Abandoned animals on Alder Slope

I would like to request that people quit dumping their cats on Alder Slope and other populated rural areas. It may look wild up here, but there are residences all over the Slope. We struggle with a steady stream feral cats, mostly unneutered males, arriving to attack our gentle, neutered barn cats and steal their food and shelter.

I am told by the local Humane Society abandoning animals is illegal in Oregon. You can check with them as to what the penalty might be. I’m sorry if you have a problem, but please take your own responsibility and don’t put it on others. Veterinarians will put down unwanted animals for a fee.

Recently, my husband and I observed a pickup which stopped a few hundred feet from our house. As we watched, the driver and a passenger stepped out of the pickup. We observed someone going to the rear. We then saw a black cat running from the truck, across the field toward our barns. A black male cat has been at our house, harassing our cats and eating their food.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sharon McEwan
Enterprise

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P.O. Box 338 • Enterprise, OR 97828
Office: 209 NW First St., Enterprise, Ore.
Phone: 541-426-4567 • Fax: 541-426-3921

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General manager, Jennifer Cooney, jcooney@wallowa.com

Administrative Assistant, Amber Mock, amock@wallowa.com

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