

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

New river protections may have unintended consequences

Oregon lawmakers at the state and national level do far more work regarding unintended consequences when they craft new legislation.

That isn't an easy task, especially when a politician is trying to get reelected, salve the often-sharp political edges of his constituents or is besieged by special-interest groups.

Yet, it is a real issue that typically goes unnoticed until a piece of legislation becomes law. Then, the unintended consequences are obvious and a whole new set of problems exist.

A good case in point is a recent proposal by Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley to add more than 4,000 miles of Oregon rivers and streams to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

The bill is set to greatly expand the amount of terrain protected from a quarter-mile strip on each side of a specific river to one-half mile.

At first glance there is something in the bill for everyone. The fears of environmentalists are assuaged, hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts will see their favorite pristine piece of land near a river safeguarded and it's a giant step forward in terms of conservation.

A lingering question, though, should be, "What would be the unintended consequences to this legislation?" If you are an environmentalist, the answer would be none. However, if you are not firmly rooted in the conservation camp, what does such a bill really mean?

Wyden said in a press release regarding the bill that Oregonians made it "loud and clear: They cherish Oregon's rivers and want them protected for generations to come."

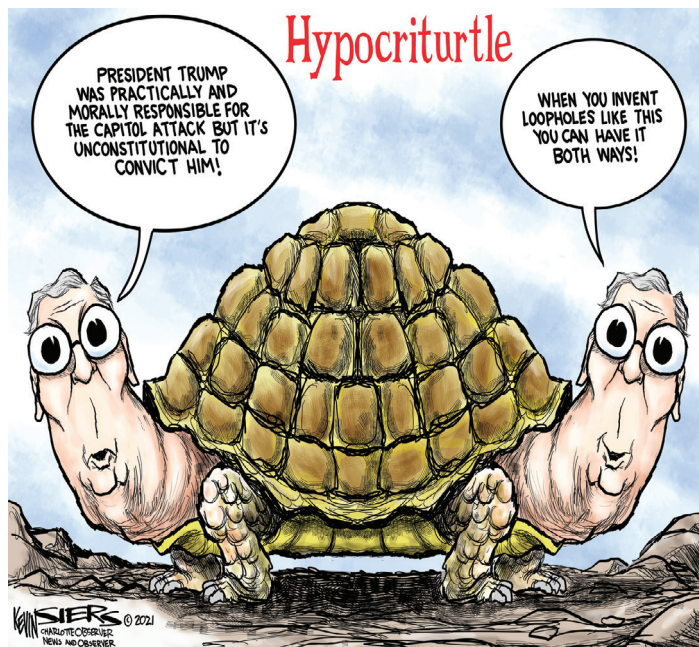
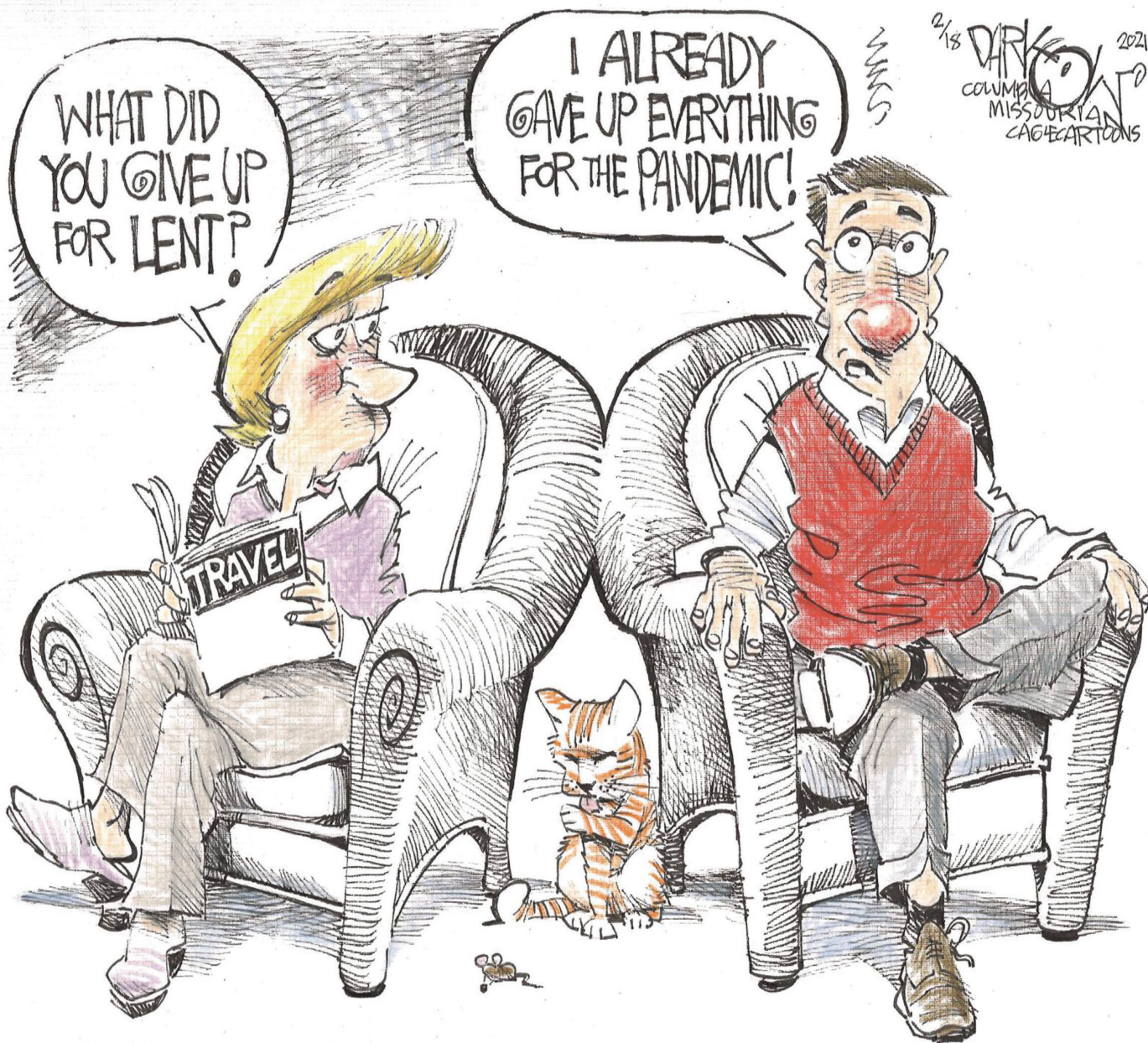
Wyden is probably correct. Generally, most people want to see our rivers and mountains protected from damage, not only now but for future generations.

Still, what Oregonians made it "loud and clear?" Umatilla County? Union County? Folks in Wallowa County? If so, how many?

We hope the lawmakers who have carefully — we hope — crafted the legislation have thought the idea all the way to the end.

Making wide-sweeping proclamations to appease conservation groups is all well and good, but the impact of the legislation to the folks on the ground should be a key question with a readily available answer.

Too often lawmakers develop a grand idea that sounds great. On paper it makes everyone happy. Then it becomes law and someone, somewhere, loses. We think Wyden's and Merkley's legislation is too important to fall into the category of unintended consequences.



LETTERS to the EDITOR

The River Democracy Act should be opposed

If this new bill passes, 4,700 river miles in Oregon will be included in the Wild and Scenic designation. It's considered a "remarkable achievement" by some, while others see a monster land grab, a back door to more lock up and lock out.

Increasing the buffer zone from a quarter to a half-mile on both sides of the rivers creates approximately 3,008,000 acres of de facto wilderness. Baker, Union, Wallowa and Grant counties will be saddled with 700 miles. Wallowa County alone (will have) 440 miles. Management plans will be developed by the U.S. Forest Service or another agency. Presently, the Forest Service is way over its head in managing the forest, so maybe the other agency that is referred to in the Feb. 13 article in the *Baker City Herald*, can take on the chore.

Unsettling, upsetting, disturbing — this is happening under the term democracy. How and when did we lose control to a room full of politicians in Washington D.C.? Have we become so complacent this is acceptable? Ignoring impacts and input at the local level has become standard

operating procedure. Lack of coordination with the counties circumvents local input (coordination is the law). Failure to recognize local concerns was the primary factor in the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision withdrawal. "Ditto," trying it again.

No one cares more for our public lands and waterways than the residents of Eastern Oregon. Federal and state agencies use many tools to protect and preserve special places. Additional restrictions, outside those presently available are unwarranted.

I'm urging the Eastern Oregon Counties Association to join in and support Baker County's opposition to The River Democracy Act.

D.M. and Wanda Ballard
Baker City

Conservatives don't need to feel threatened

Recent commentators in the *Chieftain* pages, Devin Patton and Michael Reagan, have made claims that conservatism is "under attack," and that it's somehow a "scary time" for conservatives.

This doesn't jibe with recent events. While the attack on the Capitol was iden-

tified as perpetrated by conservatives, that needs a deeper look. To (briefly) clarify, it's not conservatism to attack and harm others, to lie or obfuscate, to believe in falsehoods, to steal or cheat, to destroy others' property, to deny responsibility for one's actions then to blame others for those same actions, or to subvert the Constitution. Nor are these behaviors any part of liberalism. Rather, these actions describe criminality and those Capitol marauders chose crime over lawful behavior. To avoid holding these people accountable, and those who aided them, or to claim that doing so is falling prey to anticonservative revenge is confusing conservatism with cowardice of the truth.

Conservatives and liberals must rely on truth — that which comports with fact or reality — as the primary guiding tenet for all. This allows for clarity as well as increased understanding; and that, then, promotes respect for one another. So, conservatives don't need to feel threatened, nor should liberals. But, criminals, on the other hand, cannot count on escaping due justice or public outcry.

Lyn Westhoff
Wallowa

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