

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

The River Democracy Act deserves closer look

U.S. Sen Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, will host an online town hall meeting Tuesday, Aug. 31, and if you get the chance, we urge you to listen in.

The subject of the town hall will be the River Democracy Act, a sweeping piece of new legislation pushed by Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon.

The bill is designed to greatly expand conservation protections to more than 4,000 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon, including many waterways in the eastern part of the state.

Wyden touts the legislation to expand recreation access, protect drinking water, limit wildfire and safeguard endangered fish and wildlife.

The spirit of the bill — to protect more waterways — is a good one. Our natural resources are a finite commodity and represent national treasures that enhance us as a people and a nation.

Now, more than 2,000 river miles in the state are protected under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

As much merit as the proposed legislation has, it still needs to be explained carefully to voters. That it is why it is so important for area voters to participate in the town hall.

While protecting rivers and streams is a good idea, the fact is, there already are existing protections — such as the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act — on many waterways. Other federal laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, also help add a layer of protection to streams and rivers.

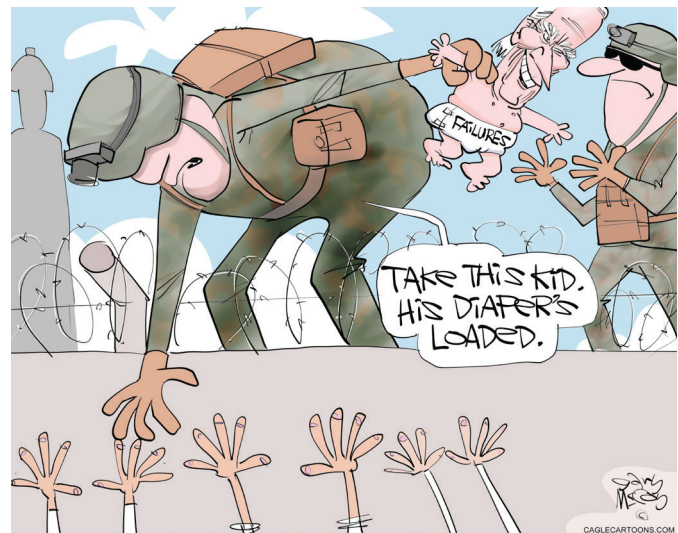
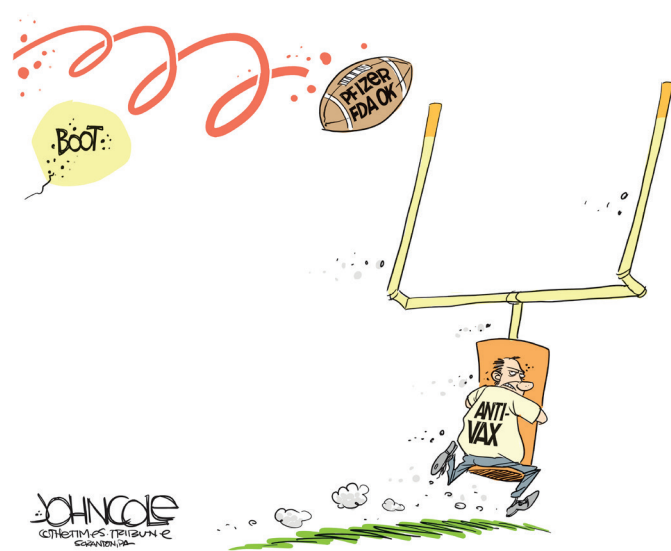
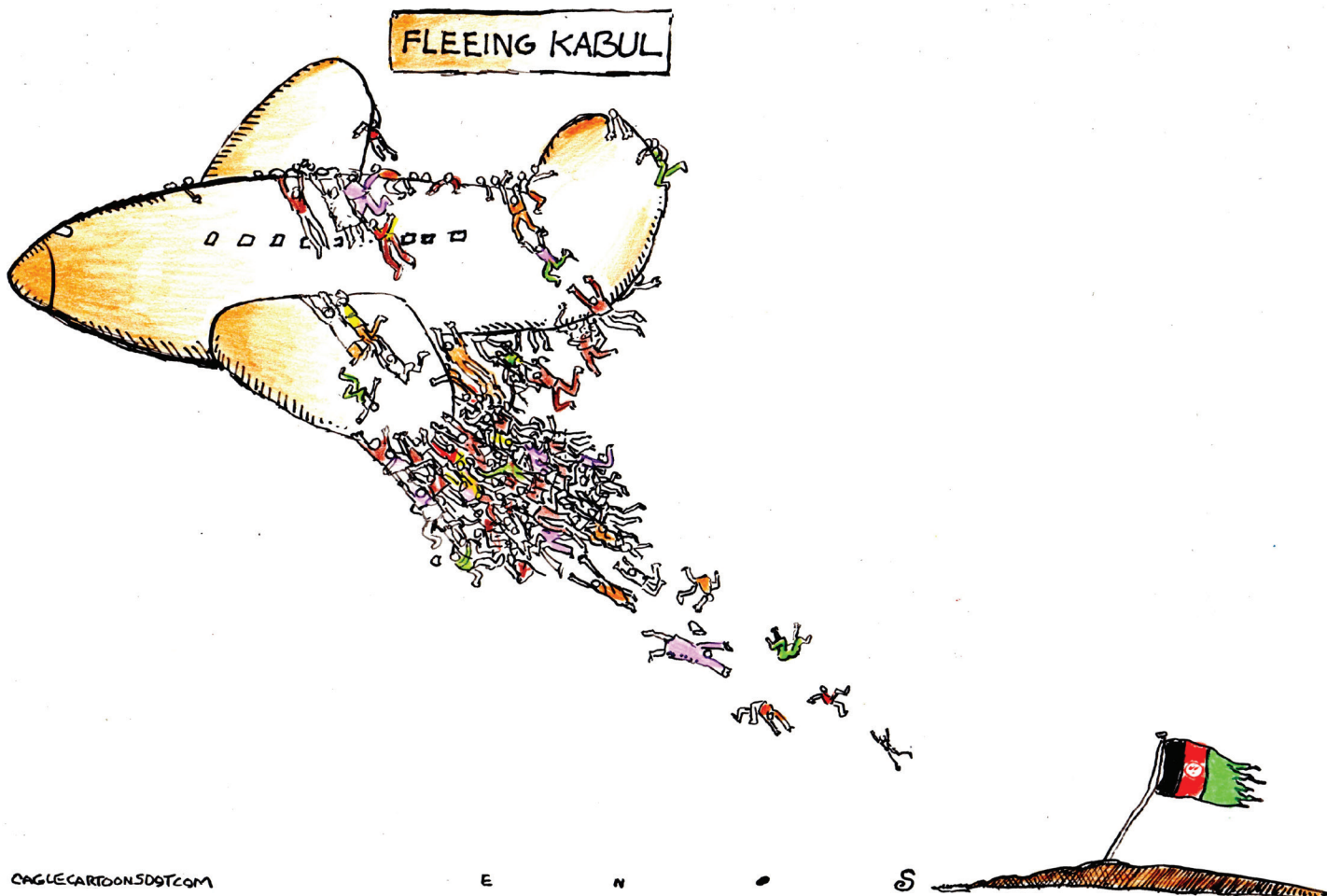
The danger in such pieces of legislation is unintended consequences. That's why Wyden must explain how, or if, private property rights will be impacted with the legislation. He also must explain how, or if, grazing rights will be affected by the legislation.

The streams and rivers of Eastern Oregon are part of our heritage and must be safeguarded, but too often the region is seen as a kind of giant, conservation amusement park for a minority of people who have little or no connection to our unique way of life.

The natural bounty of our region isn't something taken for granted for most of us who live in Eastern Oregon. We see it every day. No one wants to see our local natural resource treasures destroyed.

But before we go and create yet another layer of federal regulations to our region, let's make sure we are all on the same page and working for the same results.

So, tune into the town hall and exercise your right to give feedback to your elected representative.



LETTERS to the EDITOR

In agreement with 'crazy world we live in' statement

Dave Ebbert characterized our local situation in his letter to the editor last week: "What a crazy world we live in." There was certainly evidence in that same issue.

Rebecca Patton wrote that the American Institute for Economic Research produced a study that determined all manner of awful things will happen to children "forced" to mask-up to protect themselves, their family members and schoolmates from coronavirus. Nevermind that the American Institute for Economic Research is not medical research, although they like to throw around conspiracy theories about AIDS/HIV and various other medical matters.

I was particularly struck by Ms. Patton's quotation of Patrick Henry's famous "Give me liberty or give me death." When in recent weeks death is quite literally the result for a few infected children, as well as teachers, that seems a rather stark decision for adults to make on their behalf, particularly when requiring to wear a mask for awhile is hardly a question of "liberty."

Also in that same issue, Commissioner Todd Nash, apparently seeing himself as the hero in a Zane Grey or Louis L'Amour fiction novel, is quoted telling the governor that we "frontier counties" should be exempted from the recent mask mandate because of how well we're doing. Nevermind that the very same article indicated that several Eastern Oregon counties, including Wallowa County, have the highest concentration of rates of growth of the virus in the entire state, along with a few Southern Oregon counties and one in Central Oregon.

According to the Oregon Health Authority, this county has had 95 cases

of COVID-19 between Aug. 1 and Aug. 20, which is far higher than anything seen here in the previous 17 months since the first mandate on March 23, 2020. A few locals have died from coronavirus, and our health care resources are being severely stretched in recent weeks due to the spike in cases requiring hospitalization.

To quote Dave Ebbert again, "What a crazy world!"

Jan Blair Joseph

Appreciative of our local officials, school board members

In the last Chieftain, someone complained about members of the school board on the complicated issue of masks. The writer "knew" he was right. A month ago there was a story about a someone interrupting and whining at the county commissioners about the East Moraine Project. She "knew" she was right.

Empty buckets make the most noise. We are so fortunate to have the intelligent, thoughtful, experienced men and women who volunteer in our county for these important posts. The people on our school board and the county commission are as fine a bunch of folks as you will find on this planet. Long meetings. Tough choices. It is easy for those on the sidelines to make snarky, stupid, self-centered comments.

May God bless the men and women in this county who take their valuable time to serve all of us on all the boards and commissions. Thank you for serving and doing your best.

Michael Harvey Joseph

Response to Swart's 'Politics' letter

Evelyn Swart's letters to the editor always stimulate reflective thought on my part including her most recent ("Politics is a way to discuss country needs," Aug. 11, 2021).

The first political system we encounter is the family. It doesn't matter if we are part of a born-into, blended, adopted or foster family, they are all political. The Greek word "polis" refers to city or state and addresses the issue, "How are we going to live together?" Our words police, politics, policy and others derive from this base Greek word.

Religion as well as politics speaks to this same question. Is this "family" going to be open and accepting or closed and judgmental, chaotic or rigid, enmeshed or disengaged? Is there too much compliance or too much defiance? Are the parents adequate protectors (police)? Will the children be able to influence rules (policy)? Will the family accept difference or punish it?

The healthiest families, similar to the ideals and politics of the United States, exhibit cooperation, practice negotiation and accept difference so long as it isn't harmful to others. Family members take responsibility for each other while respecting each other. There can be healthy conservative, healthy liberal and healthy flexible families. These same types can be unhealthy.

Accepting variety, while controversial, in the people and families around us seems to be a good answer to the question of, "How are we going to live together?"

Don Scully Joseph

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LETTERS: The Wallowa County Chieftain welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that

infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

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