

OPINION

OTHER VIEWS

Oregon Trail is a two-way street

The political leadership in the West needs to take note of the growing number of farm families who are picking up stakes and moving east.

In the 1840s, white settlers from east of the Mississippi River started making the arduous journey west, pushing up the Oregon Trail to the Pacific Northwest.

Others followed the trail to Fort Hall in present-day Idaho, then turned southwest on the California Trail to reach the gold fields of the Sierra Nevada and the farmland of the Central Valley.

Land was cheap and opportunity was within relatively easy grasp. The West offered fewer restrictions than were in place in the established eastern communities.

Many longtime farm and ranch families proudly point to their pioneer heritage.

But over the past decade or so, there's been a small but growing number of farm families picking up stakes and moving east of the coastal states to escape tough business climates.

It's a reverse Oregon Trail of sorts, with modern-day emigrants moving to Idaho, Montana, the Plains and the Midwest.

While it can hardly be described as a mass exodus, people are noticing an uptick in the number of farm operations moving east.

"People have talked about moving for years and years, but now people are actually doing it," said Ryan Jacobsen, manager of the Fresno County Farm Bureau in California. "Statistically, it's still probably a blip on the radar. But it's crazy that it's actually happening."

Farmers cite several reasons for moving: seeking less-crowded places; political concerns; COVID protocols; estate taxes, regulations and associated costs; opportunities for expansion; "climate migrants" fleeing drought; and farmers seeking more-secure water supplies.

The common thread is that farmers and ranchers are moving to places where they believe their businesses — and families — can better thrive.

The tax and regulatory climate on the West Coast has made it increasingly difficult for family farming operations.

Carbon policies have made fuel more expensive. COVID regulations have reduced the availability of labor, and thus have reduced yield while increasing costs.

State legislatures have grown openly hostile to agriculture, proposing gross receipt tax schemes that would turn the already precarious economics of farming on its head.

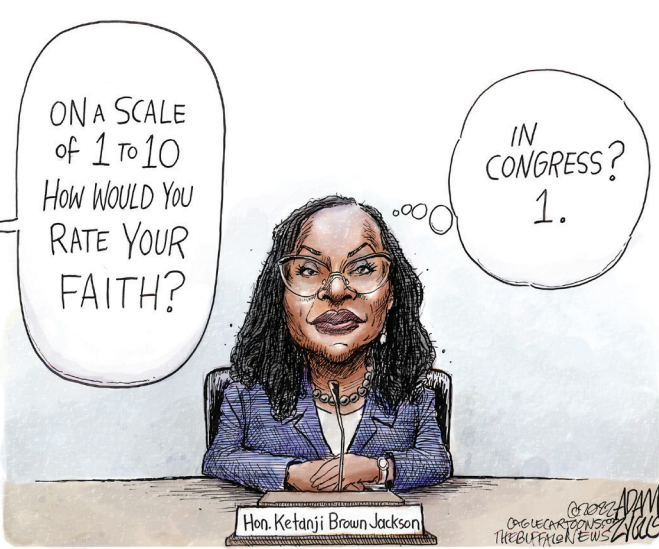
They have adopted alternative energy policies that encourage converting farmland into wind and solar energy facilities. They've proposed increasing riparian buffers. They have restricted common pesticides, herbicides and fumigants.

Most farmers can't pick up and leave. But, they can sell out to bigger operations.

Through increased regulation and legislation, state governments will hasten the consolidation of the industry, and the ruin of the rural communities that depend on a viable population to thrive.

—Capital Press

I MAKE PROMISE I DENAZIFY UKRAINE.



LETTERS to the EDITOR

Landowners could leave legacy of generosity

Legacy building is a powerful human drive. We yearn to leave something enduring to be remembered by. Opportunities for creating legacies vary. Leo Adler's generosity will be celebrated for generations by individuals and organizations in Baker City. La Grande's Cook Library and Max Square commemorate Maxine and Tom Cook. Most legacies strive to enhance quality of life by expanding access to education, recreation, human interaction and nature. Community trails have all the qualities great legacies are made of. They connect towns, friends and families to nature and healthy activities. The world needs more opportunities for communicating and exercising in nature. Uncounted hours and dollars have gone toward the creation of two public trails, one from Elgin to Joseph and another between La Grande and Island City. Finances were lined up and enthusiastic anticipation nearly unanimous. However, vehement opposition by a few property owners brought both dreams to a halt. That could well become their legacy. Landowners along other public trails have learned their fears were unfounded and that trails improve their lifestyles and land value. They are happy to have opened their hearts and land to others. Let the Wallowa Union Rail Authority, county commissioners and a few dedicated trail people schedule a conciliatory meeting. Local landowners could review their initial responses: fear of strangers and loss of privacy. They could emerge as local heroes today and remembered

for generations for generosity rather than obstructionism.

Mary McCracken
La Grande

Commissioners' bashing of west siders is a 'cheap trick'

The county commissioners are flustered (Commissioners flustered with Legislature, March 9, 2022), as ever, by legislative actions in Salem, bemoaning the passage of an agricultural overtime bill that ensures workers a decent wage earned in an ever hotter, more hostile environment. They say the law will hurt ranchers because of their special lifestyle, but provisions exempt salaried employees and provide tax credits for overtime pay, and requires the state to make recommendations for establishing grant, loan or other programs to assist employers in mitigating costs of complying with the law. All farm operations are special in their own ways, and livestock producers need to step up for their workers like everybody else. Commissioner (Todd) Nash was bitter at the failure to add \$1 million to the wolf compensation fund (in addition to \$400,000 recently added and as-yet unspent). This \$1 million was earmarked for full market compensation for cattle claimed "missing" by livestock producers, relying on assertions unsupported by verifiable evidence in a process lacking transparency. And these funds would be applied to claims going back years. "Missing" cattle compensation opens a loophole as big as 12 barn doors to the

mistaken or the unscrupulous, and it's a good thing for taxpayers and the integrity of the compensation program that this bill failed. As it is, taxpayers fully compensate ranchers for all confirmed and probable losses to wolf predation, for extra work entailed in stock management due to the presence of wolves, pay for tools and equipment and pay for state-funded range riders. Oh, the commissioners then went on to beat up the "urbanites" for not thinking we had libraries, conveniently forgetting that in 2017 our commissioners actually voted to close the Wallowa County Library. And then later on did the same with the recycling program, like we're happily marching backwards. Slamming west siders is a cheap trick, when it's their tax money and their tourist and investment dollars that provides our infrastructure and quality of life.

Wally Sykes
Joseph

What did we do to deserve this?

Ouch!
My wife and I are elderly, living on a fixed retirement income. Last week we bought another ton of wood-pellet fuel to heat our home; \$50 a ton more than Jan. 1, 2022. I know who did this to us. Big question: What did we ever do to him to deserve this? Please help us — answer please. Ouch!

Milo Schleifer
Enterprise

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