

## OPINION

### VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

# State, port need to partner to address water issues

The list of issues voters should be interested in is a long one, and as events occur across our region the need for more oversight of local and state government by residents increases monthly.

A good example is a recent special report by the Oregon Capital Chronicle regarding how thousands of Oregonians near Boardman live near or on an aquifer that is contaminated by farming chemicals and unsafe to drink. State officials apparently knew about the contamination for decades as did one of the sources of the contamination — the Port of Morrow — yet little was done about it.

The report outlined a dismal scenario where the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality knew about nitrate pollution in groundwater potentially put the health of a largely low-income, Latino population at risk. The report also outlined how very little was done to hold the port accountable except for fines and pacts that were violated.

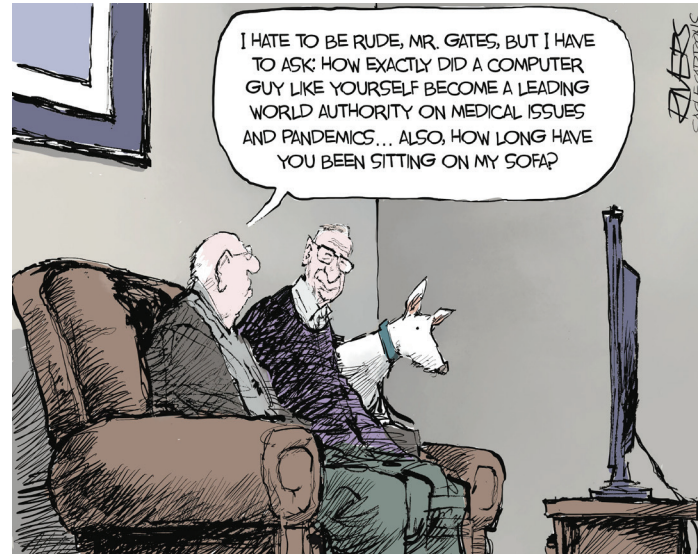
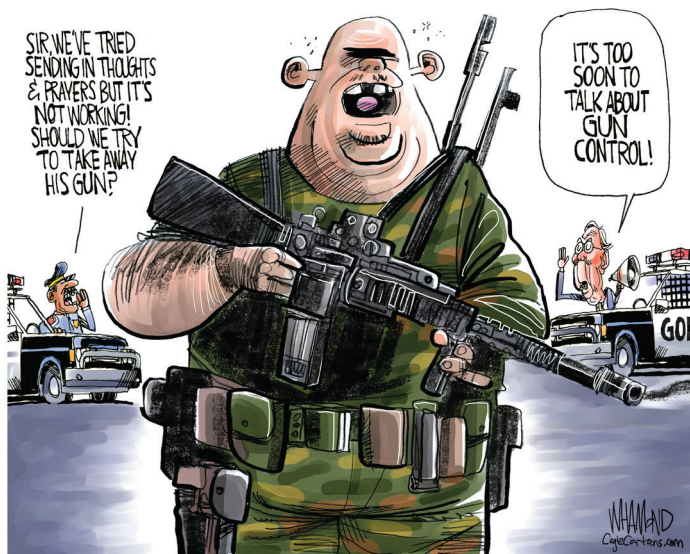
That nitrates can and do infiltrate aquifers in an area where the main industry is agriculture isn't a news flash. The groundwater in Morrow and Umatilla counties has been polluted with nitrates for a long time, and a majority of it comes from farms. Yet, for years the port illegally pumped wastewater containing nitrogen in excess of safe levels by the state from its industrial complex to area farms. The port's excess disposal is alleged to have made the water even more contaminated.

The port already has been fined by the state and certainly there appears to be a realization by officials at the state and local level there is a problem. That's a good sign, but the next big question is: Where do we go from here?

The area's agriculture industry is a multi-million-dollar mechanism that powers the local economy. Suddenly shutting down farms isn't practical, realistic or very sensible.

No, the port and state regulators who are supposed to keep a close watch on such issues, should be called to task on this issue and as soon as possible.

Moving forward, the state and port officials should be working in concert to discover how to avoid such a circumstance in the future. These discussions need to be public and the residents should have the opportunity to give input. The area's state lawmakers also should get involved and questions for them should center on what they knew about the problem, how long they knew and what they are going to do to help solve the problem.



## LETTERS to the EDITOR

### Wolf stories omit significant facts

Recent coverage on the wolf/cat-tle situation in Wallowa County omitted significant facts. It failed to mention that taxpayers compensate ranchers for confirmed and probable losses at full fall market value, and for confirmed and probable injuries. It failed to mention that taxpayers pay ranchers for extra work in protecting their stock. This year, some ranchers will be paid directly to do their own range-riding, but taxpayers also pay for hired range-riders. Last year, one rancher received \$11,713 from taxpayers for extra work and was the primary beneficiary of \$5,000 paid by a conservation group for range-riders. Oregonians also pony up for nonlethal tools and equipment, including ATVs. Oregon wolves are not a non-native species and were not introduced to Oregon. They came on their own from Idaho and are the same species as those exterminated in Oregon.

There's an ethical side to the wolf issue. Thousands of wolves were shot, trapped, poisoned, strangled and bludgeoned by livestock producers and their agents until extinct in Oregon. This savagery lasted 100 years and continues today. The landscape was denuded of an apex predator and cattle proliferated at great cost to the environment. The cattle are bred for weight and lack horns and the physical agility for defense against predators. They are wolf bait. Especially on public land, common breeds should be replaced by horned, agile cattle such as Corrientes, a successful commercial breed. Putting wolf bait out on public land and then killing wolves for eating it is a crime. Wolves are due thousands of cows (and sheep) in compensation for the thousands of slaughtered wolves. In expiation of their sin, livestock producers should themselves bear the cost of compensation. The Oregon and national cattlemen's associations should col-

lect funds from their own members for their own compensation fund. Taxpayers should not be responsible.  
Wally Sykes  
Joseph

### Congress and huge corporations are in control of fuel prices

The letters and comments of recent show a high degree of selfishness and ignorance. The president of the U.S., whether Democrat or Republican, has virtually no control over fuel prices. The U.S. is the world's largest exporter of fossil fuels; Congress and huge corporations are in control! Complaints of prices (while understood) pale in contrast to the major perils and sufferings of much of the world. How petty do you want to be?  
Boyd McAvoy  
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