

Cottage Grove Sentinel

1498 E. Main St., STE 104  
Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

# Opinion

**The First Amendment**  
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

“I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend.” —Thomas Jefferson (1800)

## Our Actions Now = Our Grandchildren’s Future

**(Editor’s Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)**

In the 1970s when I was attending Lewis & Clark College in Portland, I can’t even recall experiencing one day of smoke so bad I couldn’t go outside.

The Tillamook Fire was a distant memory; the Biscuit Fire was 30 years in the future. But last year, there were days and days when orange sunlight filtered through brown skies and ash fell like snow.

This is not “normal” for Oregon, historically speaking. But unfortunately, it is the “new normal.” And it won’t get better unless we really get serious about doing something. Fortunately, from now until October 25, we have a unique opportunity to do something to help ensure that the beautiful Oregon we know and love is still around for our kids and grandkids to enjoy.

I’m a grandparent now, not a college kid, but I’m just as much in love with Oregon as I was back then. As life would have it, though, I was “exiled” to California for some 30 years when I married a Southern Californian who refused to move out of state.

We compromised on Northern California.

I have the dubious distinction of being a former mayor of a small city that was nearly wiped off the map by the Camp Fire in 2018: Paradise (CA) became hell on earth. In the years leading up to the Camp Fire, I had watched other fires creep up the oak and chaparral-covered hillsides toward the town, but they were always stopped in their tracks.

No one ever expected a fire to move as quickly or as powerfully as the Camp Fire did. Luckily, by the time it hit, I had moved back to Oregon, but my former house was utterly destroyed.

Recently, my daughter — who’d grown up in that house — salvaged a brick and a stone from an old patio there that she hopes to use when she builds a house of her own. But she won’t be able to show her kids the house where

she grew up, or the school where she learned to read, or the park where she used to feed the ducks. It’s all gone.

Huge wildfires like this used

### GUEST VIEWPOINT

By Lise Colgan

Oregon Chapter of Elders Climate Action Member

to be just a California problem. Now they’re an Oregon problem, too. Consider these grim facts:

During the 2017 fire season, wildfires in Oregon destroyed more than 500,000 acres for only the second time in the State’s history. In 2018, wildfires consumed 660,000 acres of forest. The 2020 burn area doubled the 2017 burn area.

Modeling from the current version of the Oregon Climate Assessment [oregonstate.app.box.com/s/7mynjzhda9vunbzqib6mn1dcpd6q5jka](http://oregonstate.app.box.com/s/7mynjzhda9vunbzqib6mn1dcpd6q5jka) projects a further doubling of the burn area to 2.5 million acres each summer by 2025-30. Annual burn areas of this magnitude will destroy 15 to 25 million acres (25% to 40% of the land area of Oregon) over the course of this decade.

In 2020, Oregon wildfires consumed 1.2 million acres, forced 500,000 Oregonians to evacuate their homes ahead of the flames, incinerated 4,000 homes — displacing 10,000 Oregonians and leaving many families homeless — and killed 11 people.

According to the Oregon Climate and Health Report, published by the Oregon Health Authority in 2020, “Fire seasons in Oregon are roughly 100 days longer than they were in the 1970s. Longer seasons mean more smoke in Oregon communities.”

The greater density of smoke and longer duration of smoke exposure in 2020 likely at least doubled the mortality caused by smoke exposure compared to 2012 — just nine years ago.

Why is this happening? The frequency and ferocity of wildfires in Oregon began to increase significantly after 2015 under the climate conditions associated with a 1.1° C to 1.2° C (about 2 degrees F.) rise above the 1850–1900 baseline.

As temperatures continue to

climb, so will the severity and frequency of wildfires. Life in Oregon is likely to be pretty miserable due to smoky conditions and/or excessively high summer temperatures for many weeks during the longer fire season.

Remember the “heat bubble” this summer? More will follow.

To try to avoid this scenario, Oregon is now in the process of composing its first ever Climate Protection Program. [[oregon.gov/deq/Regulations/rulemaking/Pages/rghgr2021.aspx](http://oregon.gov/deq/Regulations/rulemaking/Pages/rghgr2021.aspx)]

Statewide, agencies have been directed to come up with attainable programs that will generate a 45 percent reduction in heat-trapping gasses by 2035.

Even so, it will take years of significant action to help reverse the course we’re already on. It took centuries for us to get to this point. It will take more than just a few years to stabilize the situation and see any improvement. It’s kind of like dieting: you don’t get fat overnight, and you don’t lose it overnight, either.

Your voice is important in this process! Until 4 p.m. October 25, 2021, you can submit a comment to the Oregon Environmental Quality Commission to share your thoughts on how the changing climate is affecting you and what you think needs to be done.

You don’t need to be a scientist — some of the most compelling comments are those that come from the heart. What do you think it will feel like if your favorite campground in the woods is reduced to smoldering ash? Or, worse, if you join the thousands of families who lose everything in a catastrophic fire? Maybe you can share what it’s like to not even be able to go outdoors to take a swim because the smoke is so bad you can’t breathe — especially if you’re one of the millions of Oregonians who have respiratory problems or who don’t have air conditioning.

To submit a comment, go to [GHGCR2021@deq.state.or.us](mailto:GHGCR2021@deq.state.or.us). Be a part of the plan that just might help us keep Oregon the beautiful state we live in instead of just a charred memory.

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### Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

### Political/Election Letters:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must: 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn’t follow the above criteria.

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