

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Wildfires don't need our help

Editorial from The (Medford) Mail Tribune:

It's only the second week of July and wildfires are already popping up around the state, including one that has crossed the California border.

Eastern Oregon bore the brunt of fire activity last month with three lightning-caused blazes devouring more than 135,000 acres. This month it has been Southern Oregon's turn, starting with the Lobster Creek fire near Gold Beach and then the Klamathon fire in northern California. The difference is, those are human-caused fires.

Lightning is a fact of life and there is no way to prevent it. But human-caused fires are eminently preventable, if people use caution and a large dose of common sense.

The Lobster Creek fire, we now learn, was caused by a group of young climate activists at the Curry County-owned Lobster Creek Youth Campground. The exact cause has still not been released, but county officials say the leaders of Next Generation Climate Justice Action Camp told them they would take responsibility for starting it and had insurance to cover the costs — which now amounts to an estimated \$2 million. The fire is essentially over after burning 400 acres of private timberland; no structures were lost and no injuries reported.

The precise cause of the Klamathon fire also remained unclear Monday, but the person reporting it apparently told authorities it started from an intentional fire that got out of control. As of Monday the blaze had burned more than 35,000 acres, destroyed 81 structures and claimed the life of a Hornbrook, California, man. A firefighter was badly burned but is expected to recover.

Meanwhile, more than 1,500 people were evacuated from their homes and areas just north of the state line were under a Level 2 — get set — evacuation notice. Fire officials scheduled a community meeting at the Ashland Hills Inn Monday evening, although they said the fire posed no immediate danger to the city of Ashland.

Also Monday, a blaze along the Bear Creek Greenway in Medford sent smoke into the air and a grass fire closed the Exit 55 freeway interchange in Grants Pass. The cause of those fires is unknown, but human activity is likely to be blamed. Last week, fireworks started a 115-acre fire that destroyed a vacant house, four outbuildings and several vehicles in White City.

It's summer, folks. All it takes is a moment's carelessness to put lives and property in jeopardy.

Please, please be careful outdoors. Wildfires may still happen, but there's no point in giving them any help.

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Summer is still reading season

Now that schools have headed into summer, SMART (Start Making A Reader Today) is celebrating the end of another year of bringing a love of reading to local kids.

Twenty-one SMART volunteers in Baker County spent time each week reading one-on-one with 36 local students, providing a fun experience with books. And, students picked out 516 books to keep.

Our logic is simple: When kids think reading is fun, they want to do it and they're more likely to hone the skill. However, encouraging kids to have fun with reading isn't just limited to the school year. Students can lose up to one-fourth of their reading skills over the summer and those losses can add up over the years.

This phenomenon is called the "summer reading slide" and it has negative long-term impacts on student learning, especially when it comes to reaching the third-grade reading benchmark — a critical

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benchmark for academic success. According to state statistics, over half of Oregon's third-graders are not currently meeting state reading standards.

The good news is that the summer slide can be avoided by building in time to read with kids throughout the summer.

Here are five tips for counteracting the summer slide:

- Have books on hand during trips and errands — keep a stash in the car or in a backpack so they're always within reach. If you're going on a road trip, consider bringing along audiobooks.
- Set a bedtime routine focused on giving kids time with books they enjoy. You can even choose a new book to read aloud as a family.
- Use favorite summertime activities as opportunities to read about

new topics.

- Switch it up! Explore a range of reading materials such as kid's magazines, comic books, or even kid-friendly cookbooks.

- Let your kids see you reading. Sharing your enthusiasm for books helps get kids excited about reading, too!

The most important thing is to help kids build reading motivation and enjoy books. It's not about setting a minute or page requirement, but rather, encouraging children to read every day so that when fall rolls around, they're ready and excited for another year of reading and learning.

To learn more about SMART or to sign up to volunteer in a local SMART program this fall, go to www.getSMARToregon.org or call 971-634-1614.

Paula Seid is the Northeast program manager for SMART

GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from The Chicago Tribune:

The suspense ended Monday night: After brief remarks, President Donald Trump announced that he's nominating federal appellate Judge Brett Kavanaugh to be the 114th justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. If confirmed by the Senate, Kavanaugh will replace the justice for whom he clerked a quarter century ago, Anthony Kennedy. How should the U.S. senators who will or won't confirm him — how should all Americans — judge Judge Kavanaugh?

There was a time when court nominees were evaluated primarily on the basics: ability, experience, knowledge and temperament. Recall that Antonin Scalia, regarded now as a sharp-edged conservative, was confirmed in 1986 by a 98-0 vote of the Senate. Seven years later, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, today's liberal icon, sailed through 96-3. They were superbly qualified, and that was pretty much that.

Times have changed. Nominations such as Trump's choice of Kavanaugh have become more partisan and ideological as the court has assumed a bigger role in issues once left to the elected branches. Voters, especially on the right, pay more attention to it than they did 50 years ago. One big factor in Trump's election was the confidence of conservatives that whatever his ideological unreliability, he would pick conservatives such as Kavanaugh for the court: In 2016 exit polling, 56 percent of Trump voters said Supreme Court appointments were "the most

important factor" in their decision, compared to only 41 percent of Clinton voters.

In turn, presidents now give much weight to the judicial philosophy of candidates — in part to avoid unpleasant surprises. Abolition of the filibuster for Supreme Court nominations means a president such as Trump, whose party controls the Senate, has little need to choose appointees who can win votes across the aisle.

Nominating Kavanaugh to replace Kennedy will reaffirm approval of Trump among the president's supporters and disapproval among his detractors — as did Trump's 2017 nomination of Neil Gorsuch to fill the seat vacated by the death of Scalia.

The Tribune's policy has been to favor candidates who have demonstrated their fitness on objective grounds. In 2010, we praised Elena Kagan, nominated by Barack Obama, as "a first-rate legal mind, a respected scholar and accomplished administrator." In 2016, we admired Merrick Garland for amassing a "long and stellar record on the federal bench" that "has won nearly universal admiration." We opposed Harriet Miers in 2005 because she appeared ill-prepared for the job.

All of us should evaluate Kavanaugh not on how he is likely to vote on abortion rights, the Second Amendment or affirmative action, but on more fundamental characteristics. Predicting how a judge will rule on any particular question is a fool's errand: Ask conservatives who were shocked when Chief

Justice John Roberts provided the deciding vote to uphold Obamacare.

More important is weighing whether Kavanaugh will do the job in a careful, conscientious way, with a deep respect for the text of the Constitution, the language of statutes and the different responsibilities of the three branches of government. A justice who acts mainly to advance some political agenda will be wrong even if he or she votes in the way we would prefer.

Kavanaugh's record suggests that by these standards, he's highly qualified. In 12 years on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, which deals with especially complex regulatory cases, he's authored some 300 decisions. Taken as a body of work, they reflect a great allegiance to the words of the Constitution. By the time he faces a confirmation hearing, backers and foes of his nomination will have scrutinized his every word.

Trump's selection of Kavanaugh will displease Americans who would prefer more liberal justices. Once again, though, all of us are left with the verity that elections have consequences. Voters who object to a president's choices can turn over the White House and the Senate to the opposing party, which would make very different selections.

In picking Kavanaugh, Trump is nominating an experienced jurist of strong character and principles. Now senators will vet him and decide whether he's worthy of the highest court in the land.

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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