

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Winter road woes

A relatively tranquil winter turned rabid this week in Northeastern Oregon.

Heavy snow fell. Winds gusted. Vehicles spun.

Sections of Interstate 84 were closed about as often as they were open. The freeway, the main arterial through the region, was closed at times every day this week.

In some cases the freeway was closed due to vehicle crashes that blocked the lanes.

But when the route was closed most of Wednesday night into Thursday morning the cause was persistent winds, which gusted above 50 mph in places such as Ladd Canyon and at times didn't so much reduce visibility as eliminate it.

Even Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) snowplow drivers had to park their rigs on offramps, and when snowplows can't venture onto the freeway, officials have no choice but to stop all traffic.

Wind, of course, is beyond anybody's control.

But that's not necessarily the case when it comes to crashes.

It is possible to reduce the frequency of freeway closures caused by vehicles that either collide or slide out of control. The key is for drivers to put on chains — the single most effective way to improve traction.

Oregon State Police enforce chain requirements, but there are of course vastly more vehicles, in particular commercial trucks, than there are troopers.

Tom Strandberg, an ODOT spokesman in La Grande, said officials set up a mandatory chain check station at the top of Cabbage Hill on Wednesday. That's a useful tactic but it can't be employed everywhere at all times.

ODOT crews are also making good use of salt to prevent snow and ice from bonding to the pavement, making plows more effective. But salt isn't a miraculous solution. When the wind is gusting as it was Wednesday night, for instance, there's no point in spreading salt that will be whipped away.

Whiteouts will happen again, and the freeway will close occasionally. But if freeway travelers are responsible, and either stay off the road if they can, or use chains when they have to drive, even nasty weather needn't inevitably result in closures.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Europe can help U.S. deal with Iran

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:

One danger Iran presents to the world is ideological, but the greatest threat it poses is nuclear. If Iran, a regime with ties to terrorism, were to develop weapons of mass destruction, then global security would be imperiled.

The United States recognizes the risks. That's why President Donald Trump is using sanctions to compel Iran to renegotiate the 2015 nuclear agreement. He saw the deal as too weak and too narrow. So how about America's European allies who also were signatories: Where do they stand on strengthening the accord? For more than a year, we've supported U.S. calls for the United Kingdom, Germany and France to step up. They've equivocated — partly for fear of confrontation, partly to maintain business relationships.

On Tuesday, however, those three countries finally made an important move against Iran. While the trio didn't accede to Trump's wishes and join the U.S. in withdrawing from the deal, they did take action: The Europeans warned Iran that it must abide by terms of the deal or face reinstatement of United Nations sanctions. This shifts Europe closer to the U.S. position and turns up the pressure on the mullahs in Tehran.

Why is Iran so dangerous? Iran has never stopped seeking to become a regional power through disruptive force and proxy attacks. It supports Hezbollah, the terrorist army based in Lebanon, and Shiite militias in Iraq. The nuclear deal, signed by President Barack Obama, sought to put a cap in the weapons bottle, but it contained sunset clauses on development and failed to address Iran's support of terrorism and pursuit of ballistic missiles.

We reluctantly supported the 2015 deal, yet we see what Trump sees: a continual threat that must be addressed. We believe that with Europe's help, the United States has the opportunity to bring Iran to heel and then support its growth as a peaceful state.

There's plenty of reason to both mistrust Iran and seek a negotiated settlement with this menacing foe. U.S. sanctions have bitten hard. In response, Iran has been pulling away from the deal, which the Europeans still want to save — and now expand.

At the same time, Iranian aggression has been on the rise. Iran shot down a U.S. surveillance drone and is believed to be responsible for attacks on oil tankers moving through the Strait of Hormuz. After Iranian-backed militias organized violent

demonstrations at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, Trump ordered a drone attack that killed Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani. He was commander of the Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force and the master of Iranian mayhem.

Tensions between the U.S. and Iran appear to have cooled — at least temporarily. That gives the Europeans a window to start their own talks with Tehran, backed by the threat of sanctions. Technically, the Europeans initiated a dispute mechanism contained in the 2015 accord to force Iran back into compliance. But they also want to start negotiations over Iran's missiles and regional adventurism.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson took Trump's side in a television interview Tuesday, supporting a full renegotiation of the nuclear agreement. "If we're going to get rid of it, let's replace it, and let's replace it with the Trump deal," Johnson said.

U.S. sanctions are punishing, but Europe is a lot closer to Iran and has its own economic ties. The U.K., Germany and France also remain committed to the nuclear deal.

The tougher Europe gets on Iran, the more likely it is the U.S. strategy will work.

Terrible but so tiny: Confronting a kidney stone

I once examined a kidney stone, fresh from my own bladder (albeit rinsed with tap water), and I was appalled.

The thing didn't deserve to be called a stone.

It required a fair amount of exaggeration even to deem it a pebble.

If I hadn't been looking keenly for anything out of the ordinary as I conducted that most prosaic of bodily functions I surely wouldn't have noticed the object, and down the drain it would have gone.

Based on the level of discomfort this crumb had caused me over the previous day or so I was expecting something more like the business end of a medieval mace, the club with a spike-studded sphere intended to put a serious dent in a knight's armor (and, ideally, his skull).

Frankly I felt that I deserved to eject an object which exuded menace — the sort of thing that would give you a nasty fright if you came across it in a dusty corner of your room while probing with the crevice tool on your vacuum.

Something I could have stored in a specimen bottle filled with alcohol, or maybe formaldehyde.

Something I would brandish on occasion, much as an athlete displays a prized trophy, just to show people what I had accomplished.

But this "stone" of mine provoked embarrassment rather than pride.



JAYSON JACOBY

Most people, I suspect, upon seeing it would snicker — presuming, of course, that they actually could see it without having it pointed out, like one of those hidden pictures that give me a migraine.

I can imagine the ensuing conversation.

"That's what all the fuss was about? I've dug bigger chunks of debris from my knee with a paring knife and didn't even need a bandage afterward. You must have the pain tolerance of a Victorian baroness."

I kept the kidney stone for a few months anyway, trivial though it was. I put it in a plastic cup smaller than a shot glass, and even in that diminutive vessel the stone wasn't obvious. I set the cup on a bookshelf and one day I knocked it over while pulling out a book. I didn't bother searching for the stone — I'd as well try to distinguish between dust motes in the carpet.

I had occasion recently to ponder kidney stones during the latest of my bouts with these tiny but tenacious products of a pair of organs which normally do their important work without drawing attention to

themselves.

Which, of course, is what we want from all our vital parts.

My experience with kidney stones dates back about a quarter of a century. During that span I've been afflicted perhaps eight or 10 times.

The episodes haven't kept to any sort of regular schedule — at least not that I can recall, although I concede I've never felt compelled to maintain a journal or diary on the topic.

As best as I can remember, though, several years separated two of these painful intervals. This was a long enough span that I once believed whatever physiological quirk infested my kidneys with these nasty little barnacles had sorted itself out.

But then the familiar dull ache would rise in the small of my back.

I would wait, as you do when any part of your body gives a twinge, and hope that the pain was ephemeral.

But eventually the ache would intensify until it felt — or so it always has seemed to me — as though an abscessed tooth had been implanted in my flank.

I have employed a variety of pharmaceutical remedies to combat kidney stone pain, both over-the-counter and prescription, but the only tactic that ever erased the agony was the one time I was

given a morphine IV drip in a Salem medical clinic. The relief was blissful.

The stones haven't quite returned often enough to prompt me to pursue more than modest medical intervention.

Back in 2011, after an especially unpleasant interlude, I underwent a CT scan which yielded disturbing images of my kidneys. They disturbed me, anyway. The doctor used the tip of his ballpoint pen to point out the white blips that denoted stones. There were several in each organ, as I recall. This would have been an interesting clinical experience, rather like watching a documentary, except that the kidneys on display were mine, and each bright dot represented potential pain.

The doctor referred me to a nephrologist, who ordered a regimen of unpleasant and in some cases frankly embarrassing tasks, among them bottling my own urine.

It looked for a while as though I would undergo a procedure called lithotripsy. This struck me as a curious mixture of modern technology and the sort of blunt force approach an exasperated shadetree mechanic might resort to when trying to dislodge a rusted bolt. The basic idea was to bombard my kidneys with sound waves that would smash the stones into what the doctor described as "gravel." These bits would then make their

way from the kidneys through the ureter to the bladder and finally to the outside world with rather less trouble than if the stones were left intact.

But I ended up missing an appointment for some reason I can't recall, and nothing came of it. Probably I tired of the urine storage task.

The stones remained quiescent for a few years, and I returned to my regular status of complacency with only the slightest trepidation whenever a stomach cramp seemed to linger a trifle longer than usual.

And yet, having seen irrefutable photographic evidence of their presence, I knew those stones probably still lurked in their fleshy caves and that eventually one or more would, for reasons beyond the ken of science, begin its torturous journey.

In deference to lithotripsy, I sometimes dial up some AC/DC on my mp3 player — either Bon or Brian; I don't believe it matters — crank the volume and snug the headphones against the small of my back.

This is much closer to alchemy than medicine, of course. But I figure it can't hurt. And I hope the cretinous stones, despite the name similarity, hate rock 'n roll.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.