

EDITORIAL

Hunting, grazing in balance

You may never have visited the Zumwalt Prairie in Wallowa County, but it's a special place. Designated a National Natural Landmark, it's the largest remaining area of Pacific Northwest bunchgrass prairie in the United States. The Nature Conservancy manages a chunk of the 515-square-mile prairie, and in doing so it's demonstrated that hunting, cattle and nature can mix, all to the benefit of the prairie, even though some environmentalists might disagree.

Elk are native to the prairie, but they had all but disappeared from the land more than 100 years ago, according to an article on the Oregon Public Broadcasting website. Oregon's first game warden decided to import new elk in 1912, and by 2015 more than 4,000 of the large members of the deer family roam the area.

That's too many for the landscape, which is fragile to begin with and must be shared with cattle — which are part of a study being conducted by the conservancy to confirm that well-managed grazing can actually benefit the land. After an unsuccessful effort to persuade the elk to spend less time on the prairie and its fragile soil, ranchers approached the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to allow some hunting there, and the conservancy agreed to participate. The goal is to reduce the elk herd over time until there's a permanent herd of only about 700 animals left.

The conservancy, meanwhile, limits the number of hunters allowed on its land and has replaced some barbed wire fences with ones more friendly to young elk and other wildlife. And it continues to study the effects both of the cattle and the elk on the land. Among other things, says Chad Dotson, who oversees the conservancy's elk management efforts on the prairie, it's already clear that fewer elk moving around more are better for the native aspen than larger herds that linger too long.

Neither the conservancy nor local ranchers want to rid the Zumwalt Prairie of elk, or, for that matter, of cattle. They're working together to find a balance that benefits all, from elk to cattle to grass, flowers and trees. It's a work in progress, to be sure, but so far it appears to have demonstrated that environmentalists and cattlemen can work together successfully toward a common goal.

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OTHER VIEWS

Beef study provokes messy debate

Editorial from The Dallas Morning News:

We Texans love our beef, and we don't like it when someone suggests we shouldn't.

Oprah did so on national television and a disgruntled cattle industry hauled her into a six-week trial in Amarillo, Texas, in 1998. Now, Texas A&M University System Chancellor John Sharp has his own, pardon the pun, beef over beef, this one with Harvard University researchers, who accuse A&M researchers of conducting a biased, pro-beef study published last fall in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

We aren't going to pick sides on the merits of the research or the criticism. But we will take issue with the way this dispute has played out publicly and the disservice it does to scientific credibility.

Over the years, most of us have read headlines about beef research and probably have come to the conclusion that findings often are remarkably free ranging. Beef consumption is either good or bad for your health, depending on the parameters of the

study and, the bane of academic research, ideological predispositions and the impact of funding support on outcomes.

Scientific inquiry is supposed to lead to dispassionate conclusions based purely on evidence. This brouhaha, however, has more in common with a heavyweight boxing weigh-in than with scientific inquiry. For those of us looking for scientific guidance, that is disappointing, indeed.

The controversy began when Harvard researchers pointedly accused one of the study's 19 authors, a Texas A&M researcher, of being in the pocket of the beef industry and of downplaying the risks of beef consumption. The author, they say, hadn't disclosed that he had received funding for other research partly backed by the beef industry.

Predictably, A&M didn't take this attack lightly. Sharp wants Harvard University President Lawrence Bacow to investigate the Harvard faculty members for mischaracterizing scientific research and besmirching A&M's academic reputation. He also tosses

some shade at Harvard, suggesting that the study's critics had an ideological, anti-beef agenda and links to the True Health Initiative, a global coalition of researchers who describe their mission as "fighting fake facts and combating false doubts."

Annals Editor-in-Chief Christine Laine has said her inbox was hit with roughly 2,000 emails with messages so alike and scathing in tone that she believed them to have been generated by a bot. "We've published a lot on firearm injury prevention," Laine said in a piece published earlier this month in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. "The response from the NRA was less vitriolic than the response from the True Health Initiative."

The True Health Initiative denies a bot attack and stands by their concern that the study is misleading. But this clash is neither a shining example of classic peer review, nor does it provide useful guidance to nutritionists, doctors and consumers trying to make informed dietary choices. Scientific debate must be better than this.

Trump & Coolidge: So similar yet so different

I was watching TV coverage of President Trump's impeachment trial the other evening and I couldn't help but wonder how different things might be if Trump were more like Calvin Coolidge.

Or even a little bit like him.

The comparison, I'll concede, is farfetched in the extreme.

Indeed there might be no pair of presidents, at least among Republicans, who are less alike, temperamentally, than Trump and Coolidge.

Coolidge, who was the 30th president and served from 1923-29, was known as "Silent Cal."

Not even Trump's most simpering acolyte would dare to describe him as silent.

I wouldn't even have thought of Coolidge — who among us except presidential historians often does? — and probably not many of them — except I happened to be reading "Only Yesterday — An Informal History of the 1920s" by Frederick Lewis Allen.

I plucked it from the shelves of newly arrived nonfiction at the library under the mistaken assumption that it was a new book, one published, perhaps, to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the start of the 1920s.

In fact the book came out in 1931. (Possibly I ought to have discerned this from the "Only Yesterday" title, but there you go.)

Given that Coolidge was president for the better part of the titular decade, he is a prominent



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character in Allen's book.

As prominent as Coolidge can be, anyway, which is not especially prominent at all.

Surely no president has been more retiring, more seemingly uninterested in the trappings of the august office, than Coolidge.

He did not, of course, have Twitter.

But nothing I have read about Coolidge suggests he would have bothered to share his deepest thoughts with the wider world had the means to do so been available.

Or his shallowest thoughts, which seems to me the more apt adjective when it comes to Twitter.

Yet for all the blatant differences between the two men — Coolidge placid and distant, Trump volatile and confrontational — I was struck by the commonalities of their presidencies as I read Allen's book and, my curiosity piqued, subsequently a few others.

Coolidge, despite his reputation for not speaking unless he absolutely had to, wasn't averse, as Trump is not, to employing the latest communication technology to address his constituents.

Coolidge's speech to Congress on Dec. 6, 1923, was broadcast on

radio, a first for a presidential address.

Coolidge, like Trump, also devoted more time than most presidents to talking with reporters. This strikes me as an especially strange thing to have in common since both presidents would seem to have ample reason to avoid journalists, albeit for quite different reasons — Coolidge's general reticence as compared with Trump's visceral antipathy for mainstream media.

But to me the most intriguing comparison between Trump and Coolidge — and the one that occurred to me as I watched the impeachment trial — involves the trajectories of their presidencies.

The similarities between their policies, and of the situation in America during their tenures, seem to me striking.

Both Coolidge and Trump signed bills cutting income taxes — Coolidge did so three times, and by 1927 only the wealthiest 2% of Americans paid federal income taxes.

However, Coolidge, unlike Trump and indeed most presidents, was also able to control federal spending and actually reduce the federal debt (a quaintly tiny figure in those distant days, when "trillion" was superfluous in such matters).

Both presidents opposed what they considered excessive government regulation. One of Coolidge's biographers described federal

oversight of industry during his presidency as "thin to the point of invisibility," a phrase which certain of Trump's critics might wish to borrow.

But of course the most obvious comparison between the Trump and Coolidge administrations is the booming economy that each presided over.

The 1920s were renowned as the "Roaring '20s" — the era of bull markets and bathtub gin and Flappers doing the Charleston.

These days we can buy our gin out in the open. But stock market gains, of which there have been many the past three years, still make headlines.

Indeed, the economy during Trump's presidency, with record high Dow Jones averages and record low unemployment rates, is the stuff that many of his predecessors, from both parties, could scarcely dream of.

But rather than keep the low profile that was Coolidge's hallmark, sliding silently below the roiling waves of Washington, D.C., and only occasionally lifting his periscope to have a look around, Trump is the political equivalent of an aircraft carrier, brash and defiant and liable at any moment to light off the afterburners.

Trump's bravado endears him to his vehement supporters, of course.

And I'm not nearly naive enough to believe that had Trump only displayed a bit more modesty, then

his critics in the Democratic Party and the media would have lavished praise on his deft handling of the economy.

Still and all, the impeachment prompts the question of whether the taciturn Coolidge approach might have served Trump better during his infamous phone call July 25, 2019, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

I've read a transcript of the call multiple times.

It doesn't seem to me as nefarious as Trump's foes imply.

Yet it's no minor matter that one of the people Trump wants Zelensky to investigate is Joe Biden, someone Trump obviously knew could well be his rival in the 2020 election.

Trump is guilty of poor judgment, certainly, but that's not necessarily an impeachable offense.

In any case, Trump certainly might have saved himself a considerable amount of trouble had he decided not to broach that topic during the phone call.

One quote in particular from Coolidge — and there aren't a great many to choose from given his proclivity for muteness — seems to me applicable.

"The words of a president have an enormous weight," Coolidge wrote after he retired, "and ought not to be used discriminately."

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