

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Foreign investors and real risks to farmland

For decades there have been concerns that foreign investors are buying up farmland in the United States.

That this is a hot-button issue for American producers and a strategic policy concern for politicians is understandable. Wealthy foreign buyers make it harder for domestic producers to compete for available farmland. Well-heeled investors of all types always push out smaller potential buyers. The thought of some foreign actor taking control of the domestic food supply is frightening.

There's no doubt that foreign investors are interested in snapping up American farmland. We are more concerned with what foreign investors are doing with the farmland they buy than we are that they are buying it in the first place.

Our reporting of USDA data shows that in the 40 years or so that records have been kept, foreign investors have bought more than 35 million acres of U.S. farmland worth \$62 billion. In all, that's an area larger than the state of New York.

According to USDA staff, outside investments are on the rise. Filings show foreign holdings of American farmland increased by 141% between 2004 and 2019.

In 1978, Congress passed the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act, which required foreign buyers to report their transactions.

Foreign buyers have purchased 1.2 million acres of Oregon farmland — roughly 7.5% of the state's farm acreage, according to the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture. The total is 1.5 million acres in Washington, and just 122,598 acres in Idaho.

The takeover of American farm production by foreigners is far from imminent. Their purchases in the last 40 years are equal to 3.9% of the farmland now in production.

Critics are convinced the reported numbers are low, and contend without proof that much more land is being bought than is being reported. They concede it would be impossible to quantify without combing through land records in 3,000 county courthouses across the country.

It is certain the USDA's numbers are misleading. Some of the land in question has been sold by one foreign buyer to another, while others have divested altogether. Tracking those transactions through USDA data is difficult. Also, not all foreign investors who have reported a purchase have a controlling interest in the land.

We agree that foreign purchases should be monitored. It would be a dangerous problem if foreign interests gain control of U.S. agriculture.

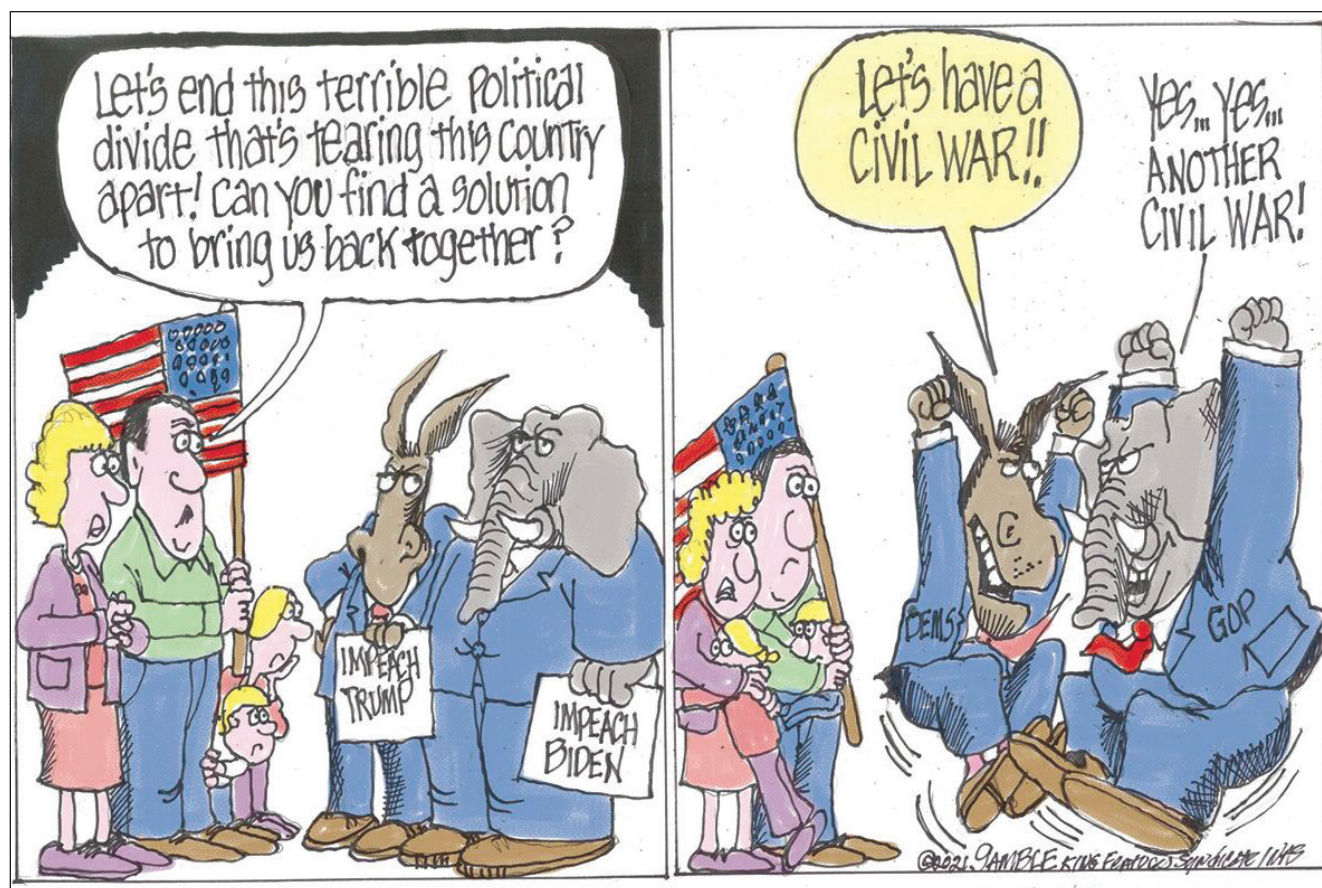
To be clear, we would prefer that U.S. farmland stay in the hands, or at least the control, of U.S. entities. But, the more pressing concern is keeping farmland productive.

Foreign investors are joining domestic companies that are interested in building alternative energy facilities or other real estate developments on farmland.

Turning cropland into windfarms, shopping malls and subdivisions is a greater danger to agriculture, and in turn the country, than a French company buying vineyards here to make wine.

Once farmland is built over, it's gone for good. No farmer, foreign or domestic, will ever farm it again.

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A new era at Blue Mountain CC

Blue Mountain Community College reached an important milestone on Sept. 7, when we welcomed our new president, Mark Browning, to our Eastern Oregon community.

Having had the opportunity to connect with Mark since the BMCC Board of Education approved his hiring in July, I am excited for the community to meet him and for the future of BMCC. Mark has boundless energy, vision, a passion for education, and the unique ability to create, cultivate and enhance meaningful relationships. I believe the BMCC Board has made a smart and wonderful selection in Mark to lead the college into its next chapter.

But before I hand over the reins to Mark, I wanted to take a moment to reflect upon my time as interim president at Blue Mountain for the past six months.

As many know, this is my second stint as interim president at BMCC



CONNIE GREEN

in the past three years. I have come to love the college, appreciate and value its faculty and staff, and am grateful to the students who choose to come to BMCC and to the community members who have given so much support to us over the years.

BMCC has definitely been through its share of challenges over the past few years, but I am humbled by the resiliency of the college's faculty and staff through it all. To me, their dedication to the college shows this community just how much they value BMCC and the work they do to support students. It is not always easy, to be sure, but it is certainly rewarding work when we see our students and communities succeed. Our classified employees deserve a

thank you for being the voice of care for BMCC. They take time to listen to our students and to their colleagues. Thank you to our faculty, who assist all students to learn, achieve and grow in confidence. Their passion for their content areas empowers students every day to become passionate for their own new careers. A huge amount of gratitude is extended to our exempt technical employees who asked for more inclusion, who supported all other staff during times of change, and who continued to find ways to keep their areas functioning.

Thank you to our leadership team, who assisted me and all our employees, and believe in our right size, right direction and right growth of the college. You are all superheroes in my book.

Connie Green, Ph.D., is the interim president of Blue Mountain Community College.

Saving civilization in California

By JAY AMBROSE

Why left-wingers are the way they are is a distressing puzzle: supposedly compassionate, yes, but either irrational or selfish or both to the point of outright cruelty, and, over and over again, big-time winners, taking political control of California, for instance.

It is mountainously beautiful, the most populous, richest state in the union, but also a collection of impoverished, unsheltered, often alcoholic or drug-addicted, mentally ill, barefoot, emaciated Americans with next to no care. Civilization calls for something better than vast numbers sprawled on San Francisco sidewalks next to their tents and garbage as if Hollywood movie producers were preparing a scene on the state's imminent collapse.

The decadence is broader than this skid row tragedy, and so civilization also calls for the unlikely Tuesday recall of Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom who abets bad outcomes by following progressive paths with character sadly amiss. The crucial hope is that his ejection could begin the reshaping of essentially a one-party state into more nearly a two-party state in which debate is not ideologically enclosed and there's compromise, adherence to essential principles and the possibility of honorable, reformist effectiveness.

A lieutenant governor who became governor in 2019, Newsom previously was traffic commissioner, a city supervisor and mayor in San Francisco. He is representative of some of California's worst failings, and they go beyond his

cavalier restaurant attendance in disregard of his own COVID-19 cautions. Here was a signal that this multimillionaire winery owner was above the common folks and didn't really believe in his own rhetoric. The incident sent signatures on the kick-him-out petition from 56,000 to about 500,000 in a week or so, we are informed.

But that's not the whole story because many petition signers were first-off furious because they felt he ignored the rule of law in treating undocumented immigrants as if superior to citizens in their rights. While many immigrants contribute to society, illegal entrants usually struggle to make a living, and the Democratic practice of embracing them with taxpayer billions can hurt others. Newsom didn't fix things by removing National Guard troops from the border.

Wildfire is another top issue, and Newsom promised significant forest-management that only slightly transpired, as journalists and forest fires demonstrated. Thanks to political deeds mostly excluding GOP interference, California has the highest cost of living in the country, the highest poverty rate, some of the highest taxes the rich have ever met and, according to a 2018 U.S. News study, the lowest quality of life. Homicides went up 31 percent in 2020 with district attorneys debating whether to treat criminals as criminals.

California has as many homeless people as the rest of the states combined and has spent billions upon bil-

lions to cope with the havoc as homelessness has swelled. Newsom's budget has set aside \$12 billion for new housing over two years with one dubious analyst pointing to Los Angeles having had an ambition of 10,000 units. After three years, one had been finished. Newsom also has an expensive plan for personal care for the homeless with critics saying the resources aren't there.

In the election, voters will vote "yes" or "no" on the recall, and then choose which of the 46 candidates they would prefer to replace Newsom if he loses. That would likely be Larry Elder, an attorney, author, California radio host and frequent Fox News guest. He is way ahead in the polls but is also a Black American targeted by leftist racists who believe real Black Americans are all leftists like them. They deride him despite his being superbly well-informed and on-target where it counts most, as, for instance, in favoring school choice so that disadvantaged California students learn to do math and read.

Elder could be an exceptional leader, adding appeal to the Republican Party just maybe beginning to balance things out a bit — except that 53 percent of those polled on Sept. 5 want to keep Newsom, whose billionaire friends have enabled whoopee advertising. Thousands of the less-well-to-do have been fleeing the state each year and may be packing bags.

Jay Ambrose is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service. Readers may email him at speaktojay@aol.com.

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Agriculture General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.