

EDITORIAL

New way
to draw
districts

Was anybody really surprised that Oregon legislators couldn't agree on redistricting? We're guessing you weren't.

It's too political. There's too much at stake — control of the Legislature and the majority of Oregon's seats in Congress. Democrats have that clinched for now and perhaps for the future.

Does Oregon need a new way of redistricting? It's long been suggested that a nonpartisan commission draw the lines rather than the almost certainly partisan process of the Legislature. There's been efforts to get it on the ballot before. And on Tuesday, as *The Oregonian* reported, it was announced there would be a new effort to get the idea of an independent redistricting commission on the ballot in 2022.

"The promise of fair representation should not be a pawn in a partisan political game," said Norman Turrill, chair of the People Not Politicians campaign and former president of the League of Women Voters of Oregon.

Would an independent redistricting commission solve the problem?

Maybe. We'd like to see the idea on the ballot.

Could the districts be compact, relatively equal in population, not divide communities and protect minority representation?

Could a group of people, not politicians look past their political leanings and try to make it as fair as possible?

The new process would likely also be imperfect. It certainly feels better than asking politicians to draw their own districts.

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LETTER

Stop a killer:
Get vaccinated

There is a killer on the loose in Baker County. In the past year and a half he's killed 25 of our citizens. Yet the average Baker County citizen seems rather unconcerned.

"Why should I worry? In a county of 16,000 my chance of getting killed is practically zero."

The killer I refer to is COVID-19 and its variants, the cause of a world-wide pandemic.

The only way to defeat the virus is through vaccination. That's how measles, polio, and other killers have been practically eliminated from the Earth.

For decades children have not been allowed to attend public school without proving they've been vaccinated for the following eight diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, chickenpox, measles, mumps, and rubella.

If we adults think that's necessary for our children, why would we not apply the same standard to ourselves? Lamentably Baker County has some of the lowest adult vaccination rates in the nation.

The only way to defeat the virus is for everyone to get vaccinated.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

Congressional testimony this week by the top Pentagon officials charged with the Afghanistan pullout made clear that President Joe Biden opted against their recommendation against completely withdrawing U.S. troops. Instead, Biden insisted on a hasty pullout, leading to disastrous results. The advisers didn't seem proud about their assessment, nor did they try to sugarcoat the Pentagon's various missteps that blocked a successful end to the 20-year war.

They were bluntly — and refreshingly — honest. America needs a lot more of that.

Washington politicians on both sides of the aisle have grown so fearful of the truth, they seem willing to say or do anything to hide it from the American people. Biden is only the latest in a long succession of U.S. leaders who have lied to protect their legacies and their own fragile egos rather than choose blunt honesty so the nation can learn from its mistakes and avoid repeating them in the future.

In a Senate hearing Tuesday, questioners gave Gens. Mark Milley and Kenneth McKenzie no room for evasion when it came to the advice they gave Biden about the potential consequences of a

full withdrawal. Milley has served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under both Biden and former President Donald Trump.

Though he wouldn't give specifics about his private conversations with them, Milley stated: "I recommended that we maintain 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, and I also recommended [to Trump] early in the fall of 2020 that we maintain 4,500 at that time. Those were my personal views. I also had a view that the withdrawal of those forces would lead inevitably to the collapse of the Afghan military forces and eventually the Afghan government."

McKenzie, head of the U.S.

Central Command, agreed with Milley's assessment, though neither believed the Afghan military's collapse would come so quickly. In retrospect, though, they recognized how the forecasting by both presidents of a "date certain" withdrawal negotiated with the Taliban enemy contributed to Afghan troops' feelings that they were being abandoned.

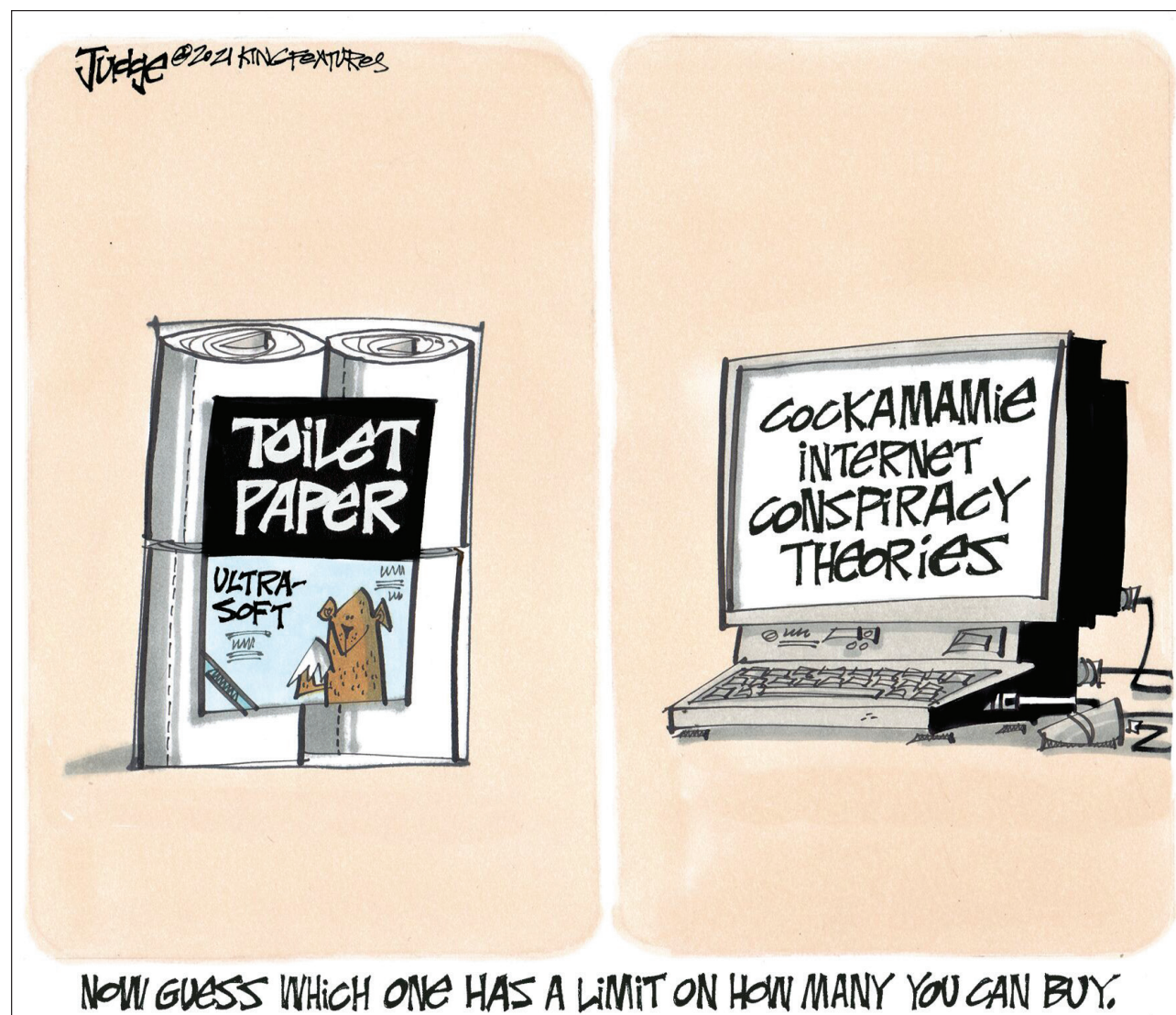
Biden not only rejected their advice, he propped up to lie about it in an Aug. 18 ABC interview when he asserted that none of his advisers had recommended against the withdrawal.

Milley also acknowledged mistakes in trying to apply

traditional U.S. military doctrine and training to a guerrilla warfare situation incompatible with the American model. In other words, U.S. commanders got it wrong and failed to pivot once they knew this.

Trump and Biden also failed to pivot, instead stubbornly insisting on specific parameters and timelines to meet their political needs. Biden's administration continues trying to portray the result as a success when it was anything but that.

The first step in any lessons-learned exercise is admitting that there are lessons still to be learned. Milley and McKenzie get that. Too bad Biden still doesn't.

Science is clear: Catastrophic
fire requires forest management

Last year was a historically destructive wildfire season. While we haven't yet seen the end of 2021, nationally 64 large fires have burned over 3 million acres. The economic damage caused by wildfire in 2020 is estimated at \$150 billion. The loss of communities, loss of life, impacts on health, and untold environmental damage to our watersheds — not to mention the pumping of climate-changing carbon into the atmosphere — are devastating. This continuing disaster needs to be addressed like the catastrophe it is.

We are the National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR), an organization of dedicated natural resource professionals — field practitioners, firefighters, and scientists — with thousands of years of on-the-ground experience. Our membership lives in every state of the nation. We are dedicated to sustaining healthy National Forests and National Grasslands, the lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, to provide clean water, quality outdoor recreation, wildlife and fish habitat, and carbon sequestration, and to be more resilient to catastrophic wildfire as our climate changes. We are pleased that much of the American public and Congress seem supportive of action to alter our current terrible path to continuing wildfire disasters.

We are, however, dismayed at the proliferation of misinformation about what can be done about wildfires. More work is needed to address many issues within the wildland-urban interface (in which people live in proximity to forestlands) and, of course, the national and global priority of climate change. Alongside this work, reducing fuels by thinning forests followed by prescribed burning — especially in our western mixed conifer and ponderosa pine forests — is essential. Such work must be increased quickly on a landscape



STEVE ELLIS

scale if we are to even begin to save our forests and communities.

Small treatment areas, scattered "random acts of restoration" across the landscape, are not large enough to make a meaningful difference. Decades of field observations and peer reviewed research both document the effectiveness of strategic landscape fuel treatments and support the pressing need to do more. The cost of necessary treatments is a fraction of the wildfire damage such treatments can prevent. Today's wildfires in overstocked forests burn so hot and on such vast acreages that reforestation becomes difficult or next to impossible in some areas. Soil damage and erosion become extreme. Watersheds which supply vital domestic, industrial, and agricultural water are damaged or destroyed.

Restoring our forests to a more natural level of tree density does not mean clear-cutting and does not mean removing the largest trees. It does mean striving for and achieving forests which can withstand wildfire without massive damage to forests, wildlife, watersheds and communities. Research now shows that, in California before European settlement, most forest types contained around 60 trees per acre. Today it is 300 trees per acre, helping to make the incredible fire behavior and damage we now see more and more common.

This summer, America watched with great apprehension as the Caldor Fire approached South Lake Tahoe. In a community briefing, wildfire incident commander Rocky Oplinger described how active management of forestlands assisted firefighters. "When the fire spotted above

Meiers, it reached a fuels treatment that helped reduce flame lengths from 150 feet to 15 feet, enabling firefighters to mount a direct attack and protect homes," *The Los Angeles Times* quoted him.

And in a Sacramento Bee interview in which fire researcher Scott Stephens was asked how much consensus there is among fire scientists that fuels treatments do help, he answered "I'd say at least 99%. I'll be honest with you, it's that strong; it's that strong. There's at least 99% certainty that treated areas do moderate fire behavior. You will always have the ignition potential, but the fires will be much easier to manage." I don't know if it's 99% or not, but a wildfire commander with decades of experience recently told me this figure would be at least 90%. What is important here is that there is broad agreement among professionals that properly treated landscapes do moderate fire behavior.

During my career, I have personally witnessed fire dropping from tree crowns to the ground when it hit a thinned forest. So have many NAFSR members. This is an issue where scientists and practitioners agree. More strategic landscape treatments are necessary to help avoid increasingly disastrous wildfires. So, the next time you read or hear someone say that thinning and prescribed fire in the forest does not work, remember that nothing can be further from the truth.

Steve Ellis, chair of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees, is a former U.S. Forest Service Forest Supervisor, including the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Baker City, and retired Bureau of Land Management Deputy Director for Operations — the senior career position in that agency's Washington, D.C., headquarters.