

EDITORIAL

Curbing car-animal collisions

Most people who have spent much time driving Oregon's highways have felt that twinge of fear when they see a deer or elk standing on the road's fringe.

And some have felt something more tangible.

The unpleasant crunch when metal or plastic collides with flesh and bone.

These episodes are costly in multiple ways.

The animals rarely survive. Occasionally, the driver doesn't either.

And according to a recent report, the average cost, including repairs, when a car hits a mule deer is \$9,086.

These incidents aren't exactly rare, either. The Oregon Department of Transportation recorded almost 31,000 collisions between vehicles and wildlife (deer being the most frequent species) from 2017 to 2021.

Reducing that toll is the goal of a coalition that includes hunters, anglers, Tribal representatives and members of conservation groups. They are promoting a bill in the Oregon Legislature that would allocate \$7 million to build fences, underpasses and other structures that have been proven, in Oregon and elsewhere, to cut the number of collisions.

The bill introduced by Rep. Ken Helm, a Democrat from Washington County, has attracted bipartisan sponsorship, including from Reps. Mark Owens, R-Crane, and Bobby Levy, R-Echo. The Legislature should pass the bill — House Bill 4130-01 — before concluding the short 2022 session next month.

Although the \$7 million would help the state start addressing sections of highways where collisions are more common — including Interstate 84 near Meacham, which is along a popular elk migration route — the legislation might be more valuable as a leverage for federal dollars.

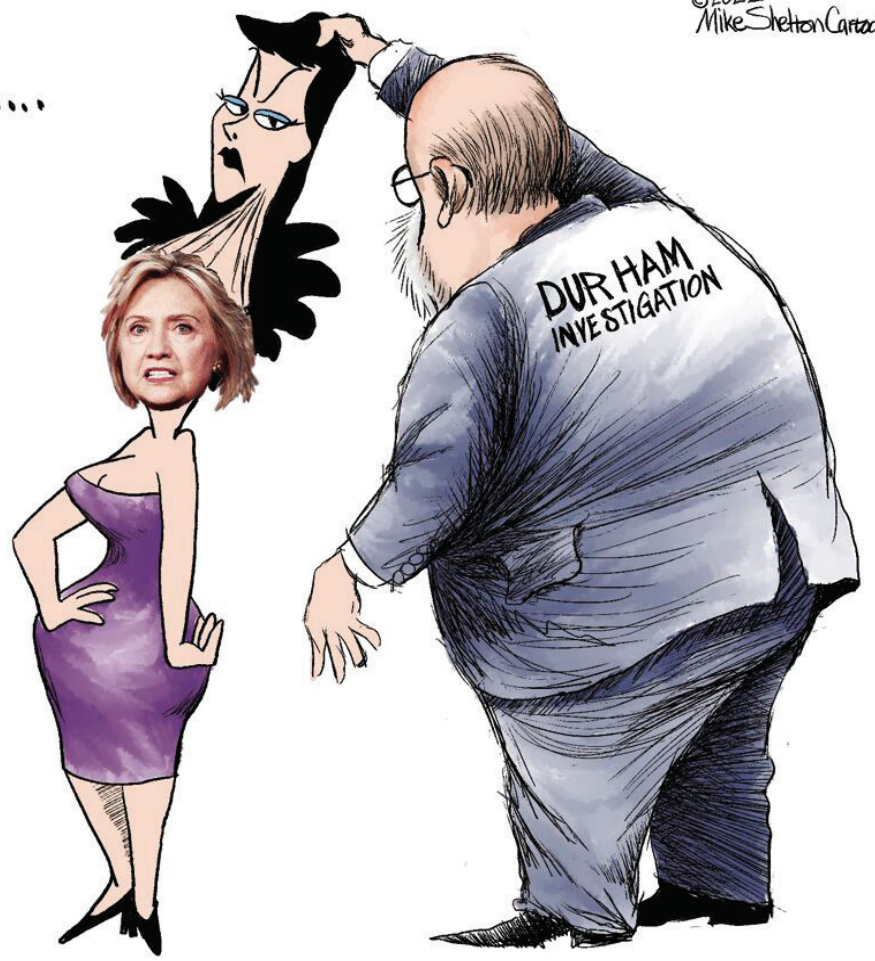
The federal infrastructure bill, passed by Congress in November, includes \$350 million in competitive grants over five years to address car-wildlife collisions.

Proponents note that despite the proven benefits of fencing and underpasses — structures installed in 2012 along U.S. Highway 97 near Bend cut collisions by 86% over seven years — Oregon has only about five such structures, compared with 50 in Utah and more than 30 in Washington.

Passing Helm's bill would be a substantive start to putting Oregon on the road toward addressing this recurring problem.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

SPEAKING OF WEARING MASKS...



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YOUR VIEWS

Many reasons why we support River Democracy Act

Like many of our Northeast Oregon friends and neighbors, we support the River Democracy Act proposed by Senators Wyden and Merkley. We offer here a few of our reasons:

Meaningful action addressing life-threatening climate change is overdue. Our waterways pay a heavy price for our drive to squeeze every last penny from natural resources. Centuries of destructive practices have damaged every ecosystem on earth and threaten planetary life itself.

Our full speed ahead enterprise destroys plant and animal species at mass extinction rates, canceling them from our intricate web of life. In light of climate change and biodiversity collapse, destructive "business as usual" practices are worse than senseless. We know better. Passing the River Democracy Act is a modest, yet important, step towards protecting and restoring our natural world.

The River Democracy Act does not "lock up" our public lands. They remain as accessible as ever. Wild and Scenic designation allows restoration of these waterways and protects them from future degradation. Senator Wyden and his staff have carefully listened to stakeholders and specifically addressed their concerns in the bill.

Maps abound: A statewide map depicting all of the proposed stream reaches is found at tinyurl.com/rdamap. The River Democracy Act itself forms an atlas, its stream names and geographic details easily found on any map or GPS device. Acquiring ourselves a detailed map of Killamacue Creek, we find its reach length is indeed 4 miles, contrary to a public official's complaint it

was but 2 miles, as printed in the February 2, 2022, Baker City Herald.

We need long-range thinking to protect the natural systems on which all life depends. Two years ago local citizens, businesses, and organizations answered the call for nominations, did their homework, and made their recommendations, since reduced to protecting just 4% of Oregon's waterways. The River Democracy Act represents local knowledge and expertise in managing local resources for a sustainable future.

Thank you, Senator. Now is the time to pass the bill. Our kids, grandkids, and future generations will thank you, too.

Mike Higgins
Mike Beaty
Halfway

Radical ideas neither needed, nor wanted here

In regards to Mr. Dielman's letter on Feb. 15 in the Baker City Herald, I want to say thank you for what you have shared about the people who are calling themselves Baker Co. United. I am especially glad you shared the email you received from Jake Brown as it is pretty self-explaining of some of the radical thoughts of that member at least.

I have gone onto the Baker County United website and read and listened to speeches by members of the "Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Posse" which is the organization Baker County United group wants our county to be a part of. Here is a list of things I heard or read on their website that I find disturbing.

1. Get rid of election fraud.
2. Get rid of Wall Street "we can take it

over with guns with fixed bayonets."

3. Get rid of satanic pedophiles in the government.

4. Sheriffs can take over America one county and one state at a time.

5. Get rid of the federal government.

6. Rebel against any government mandates.

7. Abolish the IRS.

Anyone with use of a computer can go to their website and see or hear what I have listed.

I would also refer and remind people of Mark Bogart's letter to the editor on Jan. 20 which really explains the U.S. Constitution and why Baker County United's radical ideas are not needed and for the most part are not wanted in Baker County.

Cheryl Craig
Haines

Customer gratified by employee's returning of wallet

On the evening of February 16, I was in Papa Murphy's when unknowingly, I dropped my wallet. At about 8:45 p.m., our doorbell rang and it was Jesse Maldonado, an employee and senior at Baker High School, who delivered it to my house! This is especially noteworthy since I live about 12 miles from town. I've always appreciated the fact that Papa Murphy's provides employment opportunities for many high school students. In an era when it seems we hear so much negativity, it is refreshing when we encounter young people like Jesse with such a high level of integrity, strong work ethic, and professionalism. Thank you!

Gina Perkins
Baker County

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: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97550; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. bentz.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.gov; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney 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.

COLUMN

Fearing for the future of childhood vaccination

Vaccines have been much in the news the past couple years but I fear this ubiquitous publicity bodes ill for the future of vaccination, the monumental medical achievement that has spared so many children from illness and death over the past century.

COVID-19 vaccines, of course, have dominated headlines since the spring of 2020.

And since last summer the focus has widened to include not just COVID-19 vaccines, but also mandates, some imposed by government and some by private businesses, that certain people be inoculated.

But my concern is for vaccines in general.

I worry that the debate over COVID-19 vaccines and mandates, a debate driven largely by political beliefs rather than by scientific reality, will spread more widely and affect the other vital inoculations that have largely been insulated from anti-science hysteria.

Specifically, I'm troubled by the prospect that the frequently hyperbolic societal conversation during the pandemic might erode, even slightly, our well-found confidence in the effectiveness and safety of the vaccines that protect most of us from diseases which once sickened so many children and killed, or permanently harmed, some of them.

This would be an irrational reaction, to be sure.

But rationality has been a conspicuous victim during our 2-year ordeal since COVID-19 arrived.

A bill introduced in the Wisconsin legislature would prohibit schools and universities from excluding students due to their vaccination status — and it's not limited to COVID-19 vaccines.

Although the bill wouldn't repeal existing laws in that state requiring students to be vaccinated for diseases such as polio, measles and mumps, it's not clear how the bill, if it becomes law, would conflict with those existing vaccine requirements.

A bill in Georgia would ban the state from requiring proof of vaccination "as a condition of providing any service or access to any facility."

Its sponsors say the bill isn't designed to curtail vaccine requirements for students, but it seems likely that if the bill became law, some people, for whom the combination of "vaccine" and "mandate" has become symbolic of tyranny, would claim that it applies to schools.

In one sense, I'm not surprised that there is considerable opposition to COVID-19 vaccine mandates.

Many of the people subject to these mandates — in Oregon that includes health care workers and school staff — are relatively young and healthy people



Jayson Jacoby

for whom COVID-19 does not pose a grave risk.

Moreover, COVID-19 vaccines have not accomplished what we've come to expect from vaccines — which is to all but eradicate the disease for which they were created.

During both the delta variant surge last summer, and even more so with this winter's omicron wave, which is rapidly receding, the virus has infected quite a lot of vaccinated people.

But it hasn't killed nearly as many.

In Oregon, breakthrough infections have accounted for fewer than 30% of COVID-19-related deaths in every month (the highest rate, 29.6%, was in January 2022; rates for other months, dating to the onset of the delta variant in June 2021, range from 12.9% to 27.3%).

The facts are beyond dispute — people who are vaccinated are considerably less likely to die, or even require treatment in a hospital, due to COVID-19 than people who aren't vaccinated.

Unfortunately, some people cite breakthrough infection rates as proof that the vaccines don't work.

This is plain wrong.

Unless you happen to believe that living is not preferable to dying or spending a few weeks with machines breathing for you.

There are multiple reasons why COVID-19 vaccines haven't prevented infection — as distinct from severe illness and death — nearly as well as most of the other inoculations that are widely given. Most of those reasons involve complex matters of virology and immunology that neither I, nor almost everyone else who comments on the subject, understands well.

But none of those reasons can even begin to refute the indisputable, and overwhelmingly positive, effect that childhood vaccinations have had against a host of other diseases.

And all those lives have been saved in part because those inoculations, despite overly lenient exemptions for students in many states, including Oregon, are administered to the vast majority of children.

Yet despite the glaring difference between our experience thus far with COVID-19 vaccines, and the miraculous benefits that childhood vaccination has conveyed on our country, it seems to me that no small number of people are eager to conflate the two.

The legislation in Wisconsin and Georgia is an example of this misguided movement, one that would be easy to dismiss as the product of

sloppy thinking and mindless political allegiances if it weren't so potentially pernicious.

As we've seen over the past dozen or so years with regional outbreaks of measles and whooping cough, episodes largely confined to enclaves of people who eschew vaccines, the nearly complete protection afforded by childhood vaccination can be eroded when a relatively minuscule number of people subscribe to fantasy rather than reality.

This is a terrible trend regardless of its cause.

But it seems to me especially insidious if the long list of vaccines available to us, which have been largely apolitical (and appropriately, since their benefits accrue equally across the partisan spectrum) were to become collateral damage in the battle over COVID-19 vaccines.

Like all cases of guilt by association, this one is inherently unfair. Vaccines that have transformed debilitating and sometimes deadly infections such as polio, measles and diphtheria into historical artifacts rather than acute health threats ought never to be compared with COVID-19 vaccines, which like every aspect of the pandemic have been a tool of cynical propagandists.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.