EDITORIALS & OPINIONS

The Bulletin
AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Heidi Wright — Publisher
Gerry O'Brien — Editor
Richard Coe — Editorial Page Editor

Stop trying to shoot down OSU-Cascades

OSU-Cascades has been a veritable higher education rocketship. When most institutions across the country were struggling even before the pandemic, enrollment and excellence at OSU-Cascades keep going up.

So we were bewildered to read an assertion from state Rep. Paul Evans, D-Monmouth. He responded in a column on Friday to an editorial we wrote earlier this month criticizing his House Bill 2888.

His bill takes a shot at the rocket. He would make OSU-Cascades less attractive to students, by stripping it of the educational strength it gets from its connection to OSU and making it a separate institution. Want to take that doctoral program in physical therapy OSU-Cascades has planned? Evans says no.

Evans made several assertions in his column. One that stood out was about the growth of OSU-Cascades. He said the growth at OSU-Cascades has happened without regard for the need of the system and despite the fact that a Higher Education Coordinating Commission study said the capacity was not needed.

We'll quote a substantial passage of his column to be more fair. You also can read the whole column and our earlier editorial if you missed them at bendbulletin.com.

Evans wrote: "...As a career college educator, I still support a campus in Bend. However, over the past six years OSU-Cascades has expanded in scale, scope and size. It has done so at the expense of existing universities; it has done so without regard for system need (the Higher Education Coordinating Commission study concluded there was no need for additional capacity)...."

That is not really what the HECC study said. It does ask a question about the future role of OSU-Cascades in the university system. Is it to be — "an extension of OSU and its mission with the attendant needs for research space as well as instructional space, or is it a regional instructional institution..."

The study then goes on to clearly state there is a need for additional capacity at OSU-Cascades — 21,478 square feet. Enrollment has even gone up since that projection was made.

To be fair to Evans, there is also a section of the plan that says future enrollment in Oregon's system could be handled with no additional buildings anywhere. But that would mean students who need or want to be able to go to college close to home in Central Oregon and elsewhere might be denied the opportunity. The school near home may not have the capacity to serve their needs.

House Bill 2888 has been assigned to the House Education Committee. It's not rocket science to figure out the bill is full of holes.

Bend begins needed look at reducing wildfire risk

Wildfires killed 9 people, destroyed more than 4,000 homes and burned more than 1 million acres in Oregon in 2020. And in Bend it should be a wake up call that one very bad ignition and one bad wind could make for a terrible tragedy.

The city has formed a Wildfire Resiliency Steering Committee to work out some things Bend might do. It had its first meeting last week. The meeting was mostly organizational.

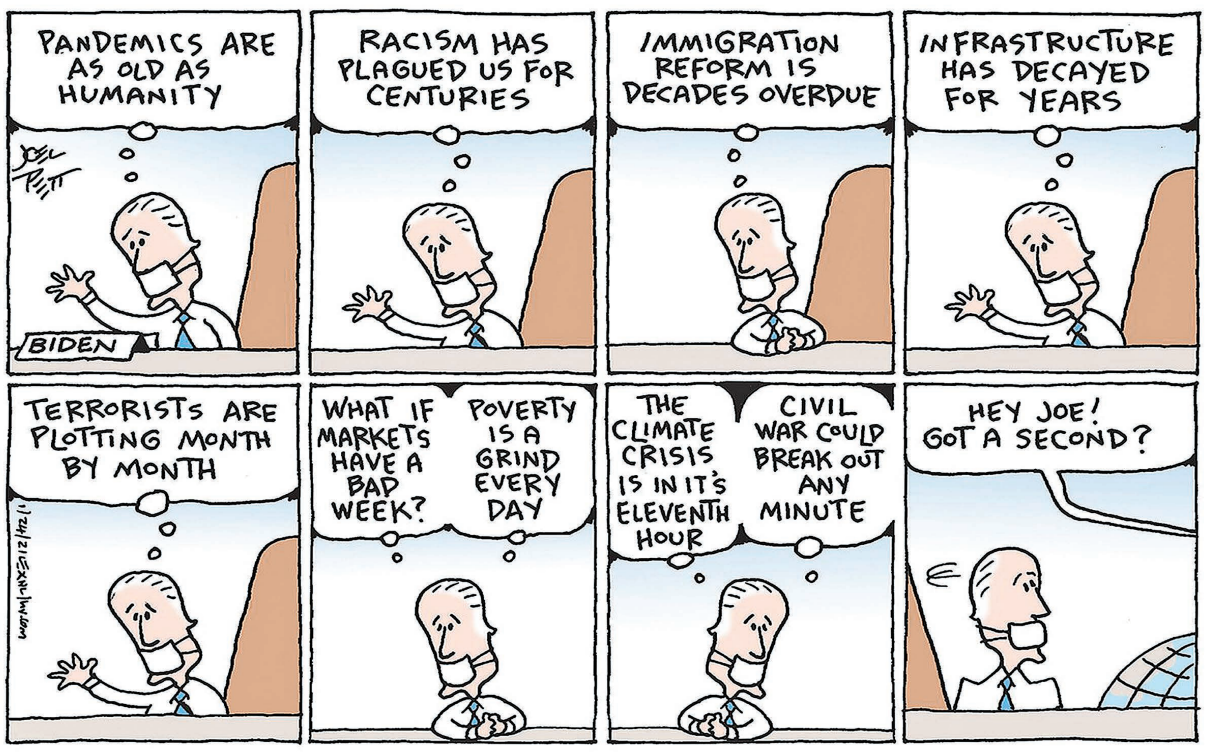
But the committee did talk about potentially making code changes to protect lives and property from wildfire risk. The committee has a wide range of representation from public safety to representatives from the business community.

One issue that may prove contentious is the balancing act between tree preservation and fire prevention. Many people in Bend are already concerned that too many of Bend trees are being cut down to make way for more buildings. What might any changes mean for trees or other things green in Bend?

The discussion never waded too deeply into any possible actions. The goal, though, is to come up with possible code changes and/or make recommendations to the Bend City Council by June or July.

Doing nothing would be playing with fire.

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.



What does qualitative community development look and feel like?

GUEST COLUMN

BY CYLVIA HAYES


Hayes

My neighborhood running trail crosses busy Reed Market Road and follows a stretch of open-flowing irrigation canal. It skirts a field and remnant forest including many huge several hundred-year-old ponderosa Pines, usually teeming with ducks, geese, hawks, and Kingfishers. Last summer, the place was home to flocks of lesser goldfinch and cedar waxwings. Once, I ran up on a large four-point buck lying in the tall grass, and he jumped up and shook his antlers. The dog and I gave him wide berth.

A few weeks ago, I went for a run and found that the field and forest were gone. The huge old trees gone. The birds gone. No deer in sight. Instead, just bulldozers and giant track hoes leveling and flattening the earth, making space for more houses. We call this development. In fact, we call all human construction development. It's a misnomer. There is a qualitative difference between development and growth. Development is about making things better not just bigger. Growth is just growth.

Central Oregon is in high demand and at a crucial crossroad. The staggering construction rate does add prosperity and opportunity for some. However, the negative trade-offs are rarely taken seriously.

There are two layers to the expansion of the human-built environment that are deeply concerning. The more obvious is the erosion of quality of life as traffic mushrooms, urban wildlife vanish, noise pollution ratchets higher and the outdoor recreation opportunities we loved are no longer available. That's all happening in Central Oregon.

The bigger, more serious issue, is the scale of human spread, and impact, on the planet as a whole. There is a staggering trend under way that few know about, though every one of us should, if we want a livable, vibrant planet. According to a landmark 2018 study by the National Academy of Sciences, by weight, humans and our livestock now make up 96% of all mammal life on the planet. Humans account for 36% of the biomass of all mammals and our domesticated livestock, mostly cows and pigs, account for the other 60%. This means that human expansion and our mass cultivation of livestock has reduced wild mammals to only 4% of all mammalian life on Earth.

Similarly, the biomass of poultry is three times higher than that of wild birds. This is a profound reshaping of the composition of living creatures on our planet.

Between cities and suburbs, livestock facilities, grazing lands, agricultural sites, fisheries, fishing vessels and off-shore oil platforms, the human-built environment has pushed wild creatures and habitats to the margins of the planet. Physical space on this planet is finite resource, and at some point, humanity must stop the displacement of non-human, wild nature. Earth is not going to be a great place for humans if there's no place on it for non-humans.

There are many places in the world where humans are living in very poor conditions and improvement in those built environments is a must. That means, in some respects, the burden to voluntarily check unbridled growth lies on the shoulders and hearts of wealthier communities. We must face the hard questions, "How much is enough?" and "What does actual qualitative community development look, sound, and feel like?"

Are we better off when our neighborhoods become less walkable and bikeable due to never-ending streams of cars and trucks? Are we better when urban habitat is totally razed to maximize room for more large houses?

If we want Central Oregon to remain a great place, leaders and residents must get serious, right now, about protecting remaining urban trees and habitat, mandating smaller footprint homes, protecting trail connectivity and significantly reducing the consumption of nature. We must get to enough.

Cylvia Hayes is the CEO of 3EStrategies and the former first lady of Oregon.

Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

Guest columns

Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com

Write: My Nickel's Worth/Guest Column
P.O. Box 6020
Bend, OR 97708

Fax: 541-385-5804

The COVID-19 pandemic improved how the world does science

BY TYLER COWEN
Bloomberg

The current pandemic will eventually end, leaving us more free to ponder what to keep from all the changes it has wrought. One obvious candidate is open-access scientific journals.

Most relevant scientific advances on the covid-19 front have been put online in open-access form and then debated online. Even if they later came out in refereed journals, their real impact came during their early open-access days.

Open-access publishing has obvious advantages. The articles are free, the whole world can read them, and the interplay of ideas they generate is easier to track. As scientific contributions come from a greater number of different countries, including many poorer countries, these factors will be increasingly important. I work at a major U.S. research university, but even so I am frequently unable to gain access to desired academic publications.

To make a new open-access system work would require a number of pieces to fall into place. There is such a path.

The Indian government has a proposal, called the "One Nation, One Subscription" plan, to buy bulk subscriptions of the world's most important scientific journals and provide them free to everyone in India. Given the porousness of the internet, and the widespread availability of VPN services, general worldwide access is likely to result.

Sci-Hub, based in Russia, already offers open access to many scientific publications.

But why stop there? Rather than just reproducing published articles, the publication process could be opened up altogether. If this Indian initiative happens, or if pirated copies become more common, academic journal publishing could become less profitable. Perhaps the gated publication sources will prove unable to sustain themselves financially, especially as the budgets of universities libraries continue to tighten.

The biggest problem for an open-access regime is how to ensure good refereeing, which if done correctly raises the quality of academic papers. Under the current system, editors decide which papers get refereed, and they choose the identities of the referees. Those same referees are underpaid and underincentivized, and often do a poor or indifferent job.

Many of the original papers on mRNA vaccines, for example, were rejected numerous times by academic journals, hardly a ringing endorsement of the status quo. More generally, since publication is currently a yes/no decision, the refereeing system creates incentives to avoid criticism and play it safe, rather than to strike out with bold new ideas and risk rejection.

Under my alternative vision, research scientists would be told to publish one-third less and devote the extra time to volunteer refereeing of what they consider to be the most important online postings. That refereeing, which would not be anonymous, would be considered as a significant part of their research contribution for tenure and promotion. Professional associations, foundations and universities could set up prizes for the top referees, who might be able to get tenure just by being great at adding value to other people's work. If the lack of anonymity bothers you, keep in mind that book reviews are already a key determinant for tenure in many fields, such as the humanities, and they are not typically anonymous.

Secondary institutions would spotlight the most interesting papers and reviews, and they would aggregate that information into more digestible form — just as Google Scholar helps to track citations. With open-access publishing, it also would be easier to revise papers to incorporate new data or an author's change in opinion.

Overall, more collective effort would be put into improving, revising and interpreting the most important results.

Under the current system in my own profession — economics — a large percentage of the top 50 schools will not consider candidates for tenure unless they have some publications in the top three or four journals. Is that such a good system for encouraging innovation and nonconformism?

Critics might argue that under this system more false results would circulate. But keep in mind that this new arrangement would devote much more effort and attention to high-quality, open-access refereeing. Furthermore, the status quo is not ideal. It is very hard to find reliable information about how good any given article is, even in a top journal. In reality, many of these results are false, nonreplicable or simply irrelevant for real-world problems. People outside the academic process do not have much faith in what is being certified.

The changes the pandemic has forced in academic publishing aren't all bad. At the very least, they have revealed that there are almost certainly better ways to evaluate and publish scientific research.

Tyler Cowen is a Bloomberg columnist. He is a professor of economics at George Mason University and writes for the blog Marginal Revolution.