

# Time may be up for Oregon's state song

Does Oregon need a new state song?

State Rep. Jack Zika, R-Redmond, is among legislators sponsoring a bill to change it. The bill he is a sponsor of — House Bill 2329 — directs the secretary of state to develop a public process for coming up with a new one. Another bill, House Concurrent Resolution 11, just rewrites the existing lyrics to the song.

Let's start with the lyrics: "Land of the Empire Builders, Land of the Golden West; Conquered and held by free men, Fairest and the best.

Onward and upward ever, Forward and on, and on;

Hail to thee, Land of the Heroes, My Oregon.

Land of the rose and sunshine, Land of the summer's breeze;

Laden with health and vigor, Fresh from the western seas.

Blest by the blood of martyrs, Land of the setting sun;

Hail to thee, Land of Promise, My Oregon."

Zika's bill says the lyrics "are entrenched in racism, that fail to recognize the suffering of Native people who were forcibly removed from this state and that fail to recognize the pain and suffering of Black people who were subject to exclusion laws target-

ing Black people." And it says the process to select a new one "is to be inclusive to people of all backgrounds, races and ethnicities who call Oregon home."

The proposed new lyrics from HCR 11 are:

"Land of Majestic Mountains, Land of the Great Northwest; Forests and rolling rivers, Grandest and the best.

Onward and upward ever, Forward and on, and on;

Hail to thee, Land of Heroes, My Oregon.

Land of the rose and sunshine, Land of the summer's breeze;

Laden with health and vigor, Fresh from the Western seas.

Blessed by the love of freedom, Land of the setting sun;

Hail to thee, Land of Promise, My Oregon."

If Oregon is going to change its state song, we like Zika's approach better. Let's see what Oregonians can come up with. The suggestion in HCR 11 is just one idea. The Legislature should open up the process to the public, not just decide based on one suggestion that only modifies the lyrics. Tell your legislator what you think or write us a letter to the editor.

# Does Hernandez issue help women speak up?

Oregon needs an honest dialogue about sexism in the workplace. Firings and resignations of abusive men are a start.

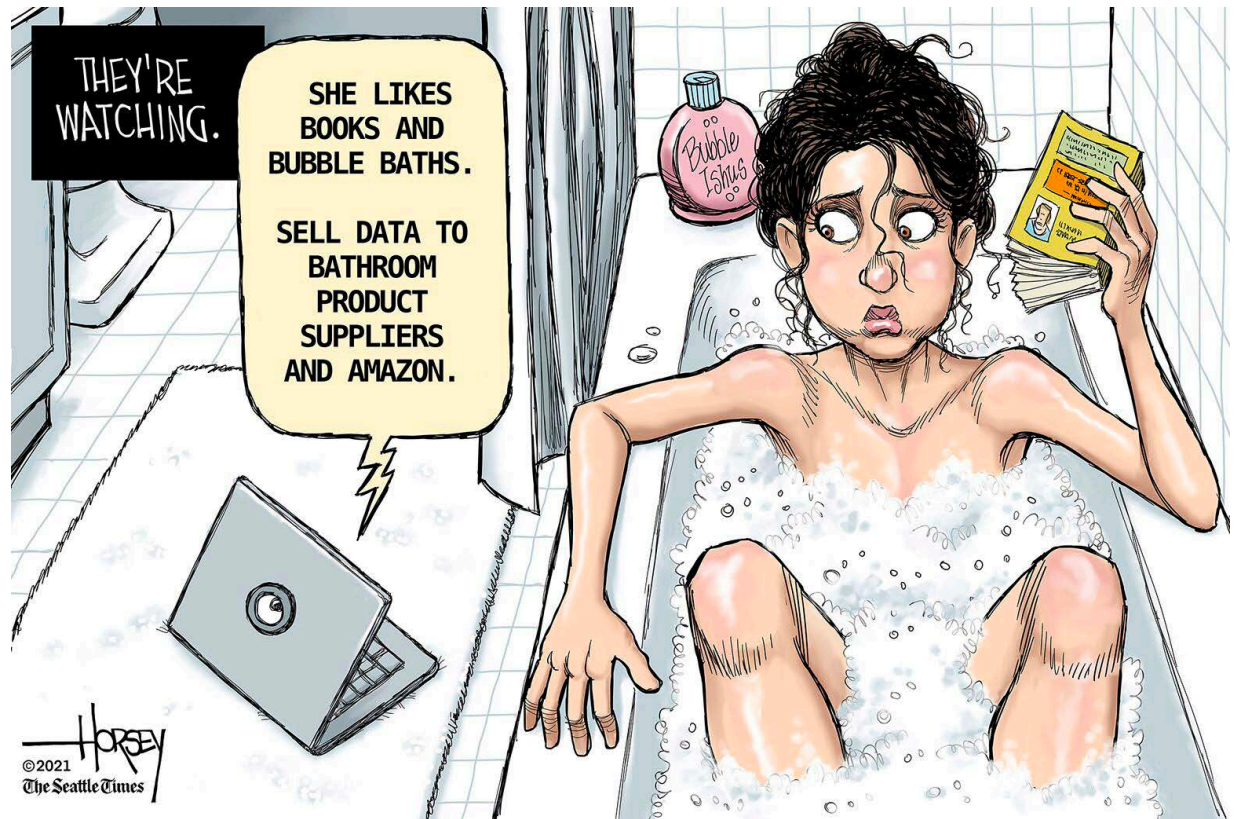
The planned resignation of state Rep. Diego Hernandez, D-Portland, over the weekend may have been just a step ahead of Hernandez becoming the first legislator expelled from the Legislature. An independent investigation released in January found he harassed and created a hostile workplace at the state Capitol for three women.

The investigation of Hernandez began in May 2020. House Speaker Tina Kotek urged him to resign that same month and to get help — before the investigation was complete. That may seem premature, though Kotek was the supervisor of one of the women

whose relationship with Hernandez was investigated.

The investigation seemed to take too long. Nine months. That seems too long for the women, Hernandez and voters. During that period, Hernandez won reelection. Why did it take so long? In part, it took two months for Hernandez to turn over documents. Hernandez ended up disputing the investigation's findings. He had just filed a lawsuit against the Legislature for \$1 million. Then he resigned.

If Hernandez got what he deserved, did the women? The state Capitol is not a big place. Will they get frozen out of some jobs or take a hit to their careers? Does this incident inspire women to come forward or keep silent about what they believe is harassment?



# My Nickel's Worth

## Abbott and the Green New Deal

I haven't had a really good laugh out loud over the past year until I heard Gov. Greg Abbott, Republican of Texas, slam the Green New Deal.

The crisis in Texas has shown that the state's existing power structure was never designed or upgraded properly to deal with the possibility of extreme cold weather.

I can't surmise if he thinks his constituents live in such a misinformation bubble that they don't realize that the Green New Deal is a climate proposal, a House resolution passed last year (H.RES. 109) and not actual legislation. It is unconscionable that an elected official would lie so blatantly to his constituents at a time when many millions are without electricity, water and running low on food.

— Barbara Craig, Bend

## We need more trails

I don't believe that permits, restricted access and fees are necessary to limit and disburse crowds on hiking trails.

I have lived in Central Oregon for 30 years and hike two to four times a week all year. During my time here, the population of Bend and Deschutes County more than quadrupled, but the U.S. Forest Service, to my knowledge, has not added any new hiking trails in the Cascades and national forest. Rimrock Trail trailhead parking has been improved, but hiking trails existed already. Some trails were actually closed off during that time and access to some was made more difficult.

Taking into consideration that in addition to population growth we also

have hordes of tourists using the hiking trails, it should not be surprising that trails are very crowded without addition of new hiking trails.

The Bureau of Land Management has done a much better job. It has added quite a few new hiking trails, so crowds are minimized. As residents, we are paying the price for population growth and tourism growth with diminished quality of life!

— Hanne Madsen, Bend

## 'The Great Gatsby' and now

I recently read F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," a novel set in the mid-1920s. Toward the end of the story, Nick Carraway, the narrator, makes the observation about some characters he's come to know.

"They were careless people. ... They smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made."

Have we experienced this over the last four years? What do you think?

— Toni Clifford, Redmond

## BLM was right to raise fees

As an environmentalist and fiscal conservative I applaud the Bureau of Land Management for raising access fees on the Deschutes and John Day rivers to cover their cost to manage the program.

They should use the same policy on cattle grazing as they do for people who want to access our Wild and Scenic Rivers. Last I checked, the BLM

received \$1.35 per cow per month to graze and despoil the habitat along these rivers. BLM's cost to administer the national grazing program was closer to \$20 per cow per month. Why are we subsidizing the degradation of one of Oregon's most precious economic and wildlife resources? Why are cows treated better than people on our wild rivers? At least charge grazing fees that approximate the cost to administer that program. In the future they should also consider a fee to pay for the restoration work necessary to preserve the wild and scenic values.

— Craig Lacy, Bend

## Homeowners need space

I am writing to strongly object to some of the housing solutions proposed by Karon Johnson, land use chair for the Old Farm District neighborhood association, in her letter published by The Bulletin on Friday Feb. 12. Her No. 1 solution "Eliminate single family detached houses," is a great idea only if you want to cover every inch of buildable ground with apartments. There are lots of examples of what this looks like.

Ms. Johnson states "The 6-foot separation between single family detached houses is a waste of space." I disagree. We are not lab rats being jammed into cages or convicts living in cells. Even Johnson admits people need green trees and space. Personally, I don't want to hear my neighbors making love on the other side of my bedroom wall in the middle of the night.

— Dave Stalker, Bend

## 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.

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# What 500K COVID-19 deaths mean a year after their projection

BY DAVID VON DREHLE

The Washington Post

The data spread like Soviet-era samizdat, the secret anti-propaganda writings used to pass from hand-to-hand in the USSR among brave souls hungry for the truth. Participants in a webinar organized by the American Hospital Association had downloaded a shocking presentation by U.S. epidemiologists. They applied their knowledge to the novel coronavirus spreading from provincial China. The material spread through a rapidly expanding circle of dismay — a virus warning gone viral.

This was a year ago, February 2020. The number of U.S. deaths attributed to the virus was zero. (Later, investigators would discover that at least two American victims had been killed by the middle of that month.)

Of all the data in the presentation, one slide stood out, driving the appalled circulation. James Lawler, an epidemiologist at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha

— one of the centers of U.S. Ebola response — had run the numbers and projected that the novel coronavirus could kill some 480,000 or more Americans in the coming year.

Half a million people dead. It boggled the mind: Could it be true? What if it were?

That would be more Americans dead than the military members who were killed in World War II. It would approach the equivalent of everyone living in Wyoming. A thousand deaths a day would not come close to half a million. I have no way of proving this, apart from my own memory of the mood of a year ago — when crowds thronged another Mardi Gras and plans were ripening for another lusty spring break — but I don't think 1 American in 10 imagined that such a grim reaping lay ahead.

Now a year has passed, and more than 494,000 Americans have died of complications from COVID-19. The novel coronavirus is likely already multiplying inside the unlucky person fated to be the 500,000th to

die. Lawler's projection a year ago, launched like a rocket in that fateful webinar, has come to ground precisely on target — a chronicle of half a million deaths foretold.

This terrible number is full of meanings. Unpacking them all — examining them, learning from them, arguing over them — will take some time. Certainly, the number says something profound about arithmetic. If the virus kept spreading as it was observed to spread and killing as it was known to kill, then math would do the rest, grinding away at human lives until the full number was reached. Lawler was no visionary; he was a man willing to face the arithmetic without flinching.

To change a mathematical outcome, one needs to only change an input. Clearly, we failed in the effort to do so. All the pleading and arguments of pandemic politics did not alter the variables of Lawler's computation; too little was done to slow the spread or lessen the lethality. As a result, the forecast came fatally true.

So from the rock of arithmetic comes another meaning. The number 500,000 represents a choice — though people might disagree over exactly what was chosen. Some chose not to believe in the number. The belief that COVID-19 deaths are exaggerated is sufficiently widespread to be the Lie of the Year for the publication PolitiFact. As disturbing as that is, it might not be worse than the other choice: a decision by society that all those deaths were acceptable.

We were warned. Lawler and others provided projections that came true again and again, bringing us to the half-million mark like clockwork. Despite these warnings, some number of employers did not make their workplaces safe; some number of families refused to defer their reunions; some number of revelers chose not to keep a safe distance or wear masks. On some level, some number of Americans looked at the forecast of a half-million fatalities in a year's time and embraced it, rather

than change their routines to alter the arithmetic.

The same is true of many other countries, should that be a consolation to you.

Finally, the number contains oceans of grief. For the loved ones of the dead, ignoring or denying the number is not an option. The COVID-19 toll is not some huge and faceless mass; it is the accumulation of 500,000 specific individuals, each with a name, a way of laughing, a favorite song, a life story. Many of them were elderly, but the elderly are grieved. Many of them were in poor health, but the infirm can be missed. The pain has a peculiar quality, sharpened by the very facts of the pandemic: funerals that could not be held; wakes that could not be convened; hugs that could not be shared.

An average of 1,370 per day. An average of 57 per hour. Approximately one per minute, every minute of a miserable year.

David Von Drehle writes a twice-weekly column for The Washington Post.