

EPA water rule reaches into the heartland

In what seems sort of like a good cop-bad cop routine, the Environmental Protection Agency is making headlines, locally and across the country.

Here in John Day, we've been following the work of an EPA emergency response team as it investigates nasty fumes rising from the ground into homes and buildings in the southwest part of town.

The team of EPA workers and contractors are trying to locate the source of an apparent leak or spill. They're collecting air and water samples, analyzing data, and using scientific labwork to figure out the mystery. They're collaborating with state and local agencies in a mission that seeks to solve a known problem and protect the public.

Meanwhile, back in the nation's capital, the Obama administration pushed ahead last week with a rule that seeks to protect safe drinking water, in essence by claiming federal jurisdiction over every pond, mud puddle and ditch in the nation.

The Waters of the United States rule was drafted by the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers. It expands the EPA's powers through the Clean Water Act, which originally limited federal regulation to navigable waters.

As the Wall Street Journal noted in an editorial last week, "Now it is extending federal control over just about any creek, pond, prairie pothole or muddy farm that EPA says has a 'significant nexus' to a navigable waterway."

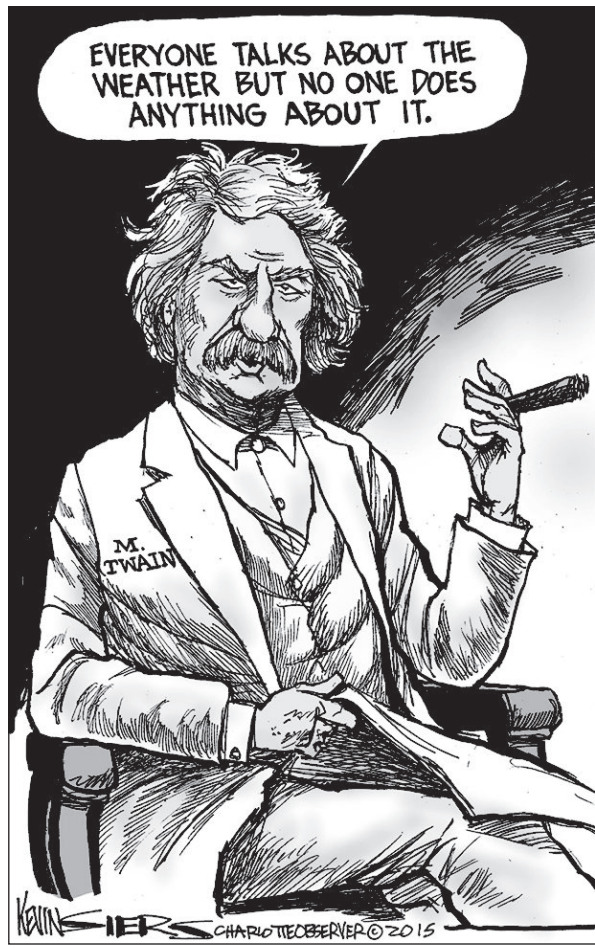
The change has sparked further concern that the EPA seems to be creating a new standard not based on specific scientific factors, but on the collected experience of the regulators. The Journal contended: "A pothole on farmer Dan's land may not affect downstream waters, but the EPA could still regulate Dan's pothole if regulators determine that prairie potholes collectively do."

Environmental groups have lauded the rule as a step to protect clean water and vulnerable sources such as vernal pools, but the expansion of power has groups like the American Farm Bureau and GOP legislators howling.

"This blatant bureaucratic overreach could drastically increase uncertainty and threaten jobs and livelihoods in rural Oregon," U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, said in a statement last week.

Walden contends the rule change came despite adverse court rulings and repeated Congressional rejection of similar legislative proposals. He urged Senate passage of a measure, already approved in the House, that would require the EPA to withdraw the rule.

Congress, if not the courts, may get the final say on whether this rule treads too harshly on private rights, but getting to that point promises only to exacerbate the urban-rural divide. On the ground here in Grant County, folks are definitely appreciating the agency's good-cop approach more than the alternative. — SC



FROM OTHER VOICES

Anthrax oops should set off alarm bells

EO Media Group

It may superficially seem like the plot of a end-of-the-world movie — for more than a year the U.S. Army accidentally shipped a deadly disease from a Utah laboratory to nine other states and South Korea.

In such a movie or a Stephen King novel, the pathogen would have jumped the fence and started rampaging through the innocent civilian population. Thankfully, real life was more forgiving. But we can't always count on such good luck.

Live anthrax like that sent around the nation by the Army is highly dangerous, but not contagious in a traditional sense, so this particular blunder between March 2014 and this April was never capable of igniting a widespread pandemic. But the U.S. military

and its international allies and foes are also stewards of numerous germs that would be able to spread from person to person.

The always-valuable Guardian newspaper provides frightening context to the anthrax mistakes. Quoting experts:

- "The incident involved exactly the same chain of errors as the CDC shipments of live anthrax bacteria in 2006 and 2014."

- "This seems to be a problem that happens pretty regularly."

- "There are approximately 1,500 US laboratories authorized to work with fully active, fully virulent, biological weapons agents. This number is too large by a factor of 10 to 20."

- "Oversight is critical in improving biosafety and ensuring that

high-containment laboratories comply with regulations. However, our work has found that aspects of the current oversight programs ... depend on entities' monitoring themselves and reporting incidents to the regulators."

The world is full of biological dangers, both man-made and spontaneously appearing in nature. Germ researchers and the agencies that fund them work to understand and develop rapid responses to these potential disasters.

Slipshod procedures and lack of adequate oversight raise the prospect of our own defensive efforts turning on us and igniting a plague. This is an ongoing deficiency in urgent need of serious intervention.

— Republished from *The Daily Astorian*, an EO Media Group newspaper.

Free college: Nice idea with a cost

EO Media Group

Bills come and go in the Oregon Legislature. It is hard to become too enamored or too frightened of one, knowing it can change considerably or never even make it to the floor.

But one bill stands out as an interesting concept that if not yet ready for passage, is at least ready for deeper study.

That is Senate Bill 81, which would waive tuition at all Oregon community colleges for recently graduated in-state students who maintain a respectable GPA.

It sounds too good to be true, right? With the cost of college vastly outpacing inflation, attending one of our state's finest institutions can leave a young person saddled with debt.

College remains a good investment for nearly all of them, significantly increasing lifetime earnings as you move

from an associate degree to a bachelor's to a master's and beyond. But teens have a hard time imagining themselves as mid-career professionals, much less retirees. And when they graduate high school they have two options: earn minimum wage somewhere or, if their parents aren't rich or they're not an exceptional student, take on a boatload of scary debt.

Many young men and women make the wrong choice, taking the short-term money while later finding themselves stuck in a dead-end job with few skills to make a career change.

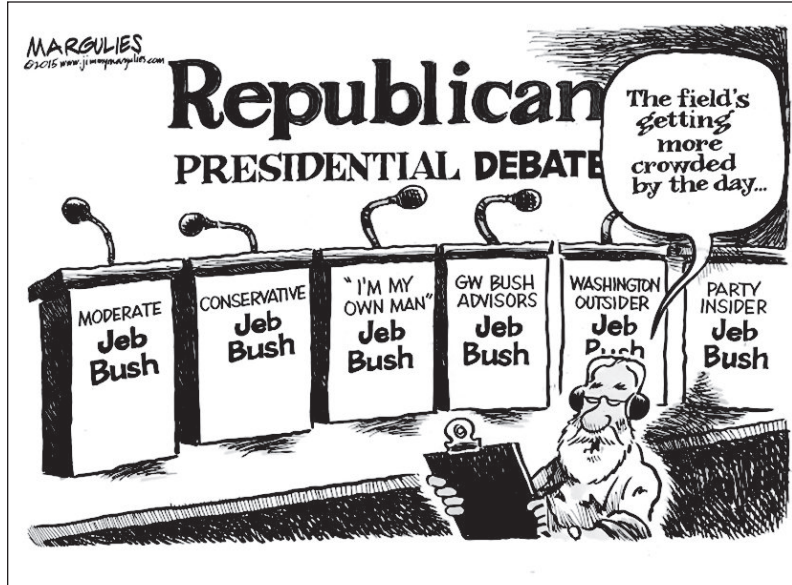
Senate Bill 81 would change the dynamic. It would allow young Oregonians to see a diploma as not the end of their studies, but the beginning. It does require some buy-in from students. They would pay \$50 per term, and also be required to maintain a GPA of 2.5 or better.

It also would be expensive for the state, costing somewhere between \$14 million and \$16 million, depending on the number of students who take advantage of the program.

The state just doesn't have that kind of money, and its current philosophy is to invest available dollars early into the education system — from preschool to third grade — in an attempt to get everyone on the same page when the real learning begins.

It's doubtful Senate Bill 81 will pass. But we have to continue thinking about ways for post-secondary education to become the norm for the majority of Oregon high school students. It's the only way our sons and daughters will be able to compete in tomorrow's economy.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It's a stall game To the Editor:

It's been described as a shell game, it's been delivered as a saving grace for the "sustainability" of our nation, and it is so important that it has taken at least five forest supervisors and eight years to complete — but one thing is for certain, they don't want you knowing what you're getting in the travel management plan, and they surely do not want you having a true voice in the discussion.

Currently the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is working on Subpart A of the plan, this part is where the Forest Service decides how many and what roads are needed (or more importantly not needed) to manage the forest. One would think the supervisor's office would hold meetings with the residents of the region to find out their specific uses and needs and work that into the equation. Unfortunately that isn't the case. I personally, have a request in from September 2014 for the draft document outlining those minimum roads numbers. As of today, I still have no document.

Why, you might ask? Well, it's pretty simple — because they don't want us to know. See, it's pretty hard to sneak something through when everyone knows what you're doing, and so the Forest Service simply keeps us in the dark until they file the report with their regional office in Portland. They'll say, we asked them to participate in the maps session and that should count for meeting their needs, but it doesn't.

Currently in Eastern Oregon exists a draft document of the Subpart A report, and the roads it intends to identify for closure. And by the end of 2015 the Wallowa-Whitman will release that plan to the regional office for acceptance.

The question is, will you allow them to do it without standing up and saying "no"?

If you have time, please send an email to tmontoya@fs.fed.us requesting the draft Subpart A report and tell him travel management planning cannot move forward until all uses are protected in the Subpart A report.

John D. George
Bates

Drama in politics To the Editor:

Noted Cartoonist Dixon Diaz quoted President Obama as saying the United States Constitution was "outdated" and "deeply flawed." You know — the one he took an oath to uphold. Gives you a warm fuzzy feeling doesn't it?

Appears the Forest Service and several political figures in our area support Obama's claim, and ignore the oath and Constitution with as great fervor as the occupant in the White House. Pardon me if I view, with jaundiced eye, the apparent changing of sides by some who have heretofore sat in the Forest Service and environmental group pockets. I definitely have a blackened view of a local hypocrite who dramatically claimed that God had a hand in furthering the Forest Service's effort to subdue the citizens and run roughshod over our public lands. If smarm was paid by the pound, he would be rich as Croesus.

Judy Kerr
Canyon City

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