

Now is the time to work together

Not for the first time, Grant County residents are grappling with an emergency that tests their resolve and their bootstraps.

The Canyon Creek Complex fires arose last week out of an unfortunately perfect storm of conditions: widespread lightning storms, intense heat, stiff winds and thin firefighting ranks. The cost to the community to date is heart-wrenching. Some 26 homes burned beyond recognition, leaving so many families — our neighbors, relatives and friends — displaced with little or no possessions.

Amid the wreckage, we can take heart that this is a community noted for its caring and resilience. It is proving that with an immediate and growing outpouring of goodwill. Fund-raising efforts are multiplying online to help those left homeless. Local businesses are collecting donations of goods and money. The fairgrounds has set up “shop” to provide free goods for fire victims to help patch them through an unbearably tough time.

People not touched by the fire are looking at their homes and realizing they have much to share: clothing, furnishings, even school supplies for children facing a new school year amid bewildering loss. Individuals are stepping up with everything from pop bottle collections to art auctions, and the credit union has established a plan for a fund that will be locally run and locally targeted to help all

the fire victims, without the overhead that marks some large organizations’ efforts.

Animals also are sharing the love: The veterinary clinic and area ranchers have offered hay and pasture for livestock, and animal advocates here and as far as Pendleton and Baker City have offered food and supplies to help displaced pets.

As we write this, the fire continues to flare and spread in the hills outside Canyon City. Across the county, signs are popping up to give thanks to the firefighters risking their lives to battle the blaze. Some of those firefighters and contractors are our neighbors, relatives and friends; they labor even as their own homes and property may be at risk or lost.

As we acknowledge their contributions, there also have been voices of criticism, some of it quite vicious and personal, directed at the fire effort and the agencies facing this threat for us. While frustration and even anger are not surprising responses to such a disaster, we urge people to hold their powder. We can’t undo this fire, no matter how much we wish it were so.

As with any fire, there will be a time for review, but we are still in the thick of this one. And if we are to heal our community, it will not be through recrimination and blame but through our heart and our resilience. Now is the time to work together and respond with positive contributions. Let’s all try to be Grant County strong.

WHERE TO WRITE

Washington, D.C.

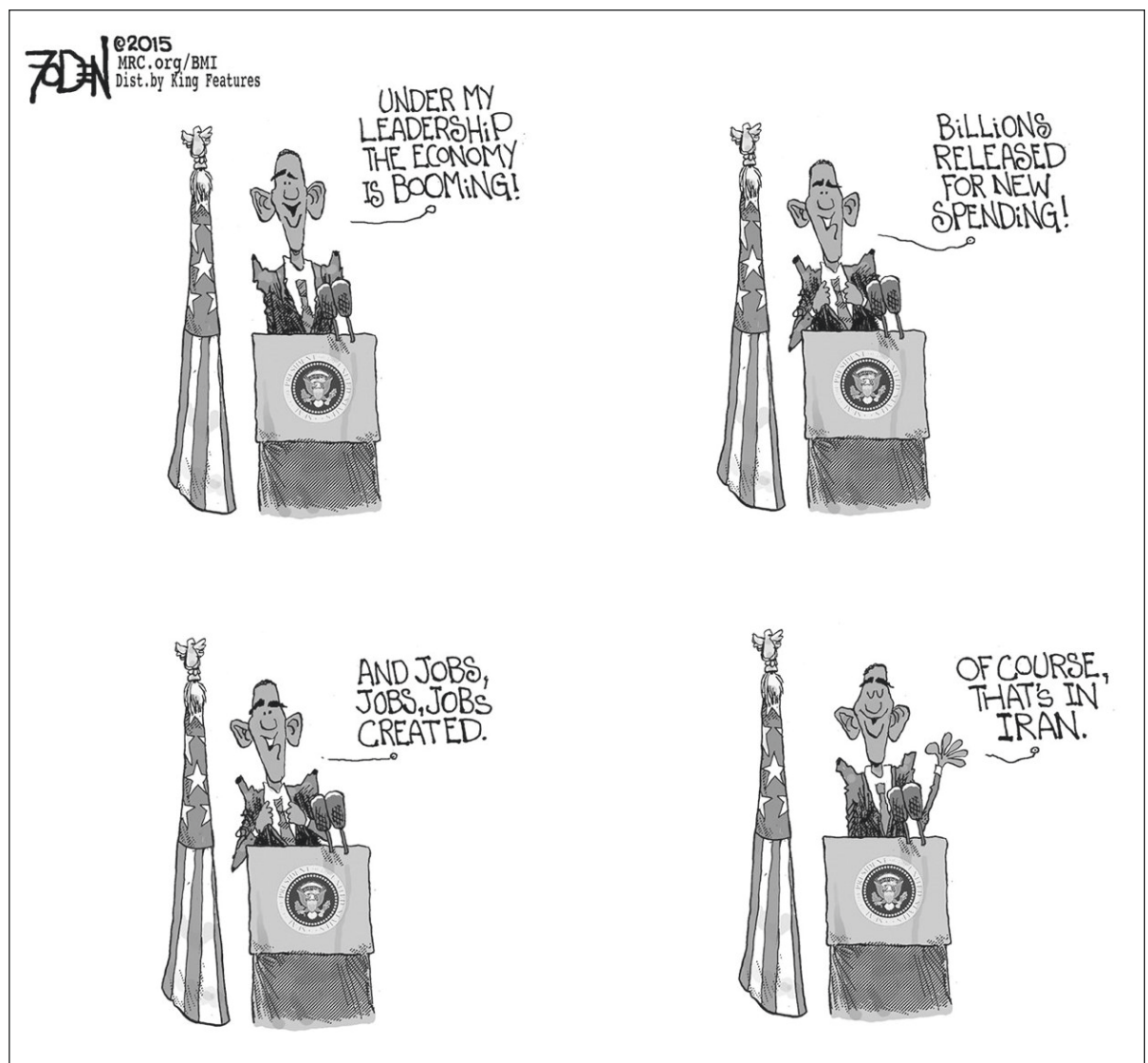
The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20500; Phone-comments: 202-456-1111; Switchboard: 202-456-1414.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D — 516 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-5244. E-mail: wayne_kinney@wyden.senate.gov Web site: http://wyden.senate.gov Fax: 202-228-2717.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D — 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. E-mail: senator@merkley.senate.gov Fax: 202-228-3997. Oregon

offices include One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St., Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; and 310 S.E. Second St., Suite 105, Pendleton, OR 97801. Phone: 503-326-3386; 541-278-1129. Fax: 503-326-2990.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, R — (Second District) 1404 Longworth Building, Washington D.C. 20515. Phone: 202-225-6730. No direct e-mail because of spam. Web site: www.walden.house.gov Fax: 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 North Central, Suite 112, Medford, OR 97501. Phone: 541-776-4646. Fax: 541-779-0204.



It's time for Senate to act on wildfire prevention bill

By Greg Walden
For the Capital Press

Around Oregon and throughout the West, another fire season is well underway. Overstocked, diseased, and bug-infested forests are at risk of the massive and catastrophic wildfires that clog our air with smoke and threaten our streams. All the while our mills are starving for a reliable supply of timber and people need jobs. It's clear the status quo isn't working for our forests, our communities, or our environment. We can do better.

The U.S. House has passed a bipartisan bill — the Resilient Federal Forests Act — that would help reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires and bring active management back to our federal forests. Through active management, we can clean up our forests, prevent these unnaturally large fires, protect our air, and put people back to work in our forested communities.

Our bill puts into place much needed reforms to federal forest policy. For example, the bill repeals the arbitrary and outdated prohibition on harvesting trees over 21 inches in diameter on national forests in eastern Oregon. “Temporarily” put in place in 1997, this rule still hasn't been removed nearly 20 years later! This flawed, one-size-fits-all rule illustrates just how broken federal forest management has become. The restriction greatly limits

forest managers' ability to address site specific needs of the forest on the ground and has only served to further tie up projects in endless appeals and litigation.



Walden

Our plan also gives the Forest Service greater flexibility to move quickly on projects to reduce the threat of fire around our rural communities, streamlining projects developed through local counties' community wildfire protection plans.

Right now, after a fire, the Forest Service is able to reforest less than 3 percent of areas burned. This plan would accelerate the removal of timber after a fire (to help pay for replanting), and requires a large percent of the area impacted be reforested within five years. Just like we do after other natural disasters, we ought to clean up and rebuild after wildfires.

As we saw earlier this summer on the Buckskin Fire in southern Oregon, failing to clean up only leads to future fires in old burn scars full of fallen trees and snag that prove difficult and too dangerous for firefighters.

This bill also cuts costs and streamlines rules for timber production on legislation pertaining to Oregon's unique O&C Lands. The Bureau of Land Management recently unveiled new management plans for these lands that would fall short of the needs of

local communities for a reliable supply of timber to fund essential local services like schools, roads, and law enforcement. The bill tells the BLM to go back to the drawing board, and propose new plans to actually provide sustainable timber production for Oregon's rural communities as required by law.

Finally, the endless cycle of “fire borrowing” — forcing the federal government to use wildfire prevention funds to pay for fighting fire — is ended under this bill. It fixes how we pay to fight fire by allowing the Forest Service to apply for FEMA disaster funds to pay for firefighting. This treats wildfire as the natural disasters they are, similar to hurricanes or tornadoes.

The Resilient Federal Forests Act will improve the health of our forests and our rural economies. During the last session of Congress, the House twice passed bipartisan legislation I worked on to reform federal forest policy. The Senate failed to take up forestry legislation. However, with new leadership in that body I'm hopeful that the Senate will take meaningful action on forestry legislation.

We cannot let this opportunity pass us by again. Our forested communities have already waited too long. Now is the time to act.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden represents Oregon's Second Congressional District, which covers 20 counties in southern, central, and eastern Oregon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pave the path to the Rodeo Grounds

To the Editor:

Did anybody notice how bad the pathway is from the Barns and Pavilion to the Rodeo Grounds? For people pushing wheelchairs and using walkers, it is almost impossible to navigate! Instead of raising money for a P.A. system, use that money AND apply for grants to get at least the pathway paved, if not the whole gravelly area.

I am also writing to the fair board and the county commissioners to do this. Not just consider, but do it. Or try pushing a loaded wheelchair on that path, and see how hard it is!

Rosalie Averett
Austin

We need Canyon Meadows dam

To the Editor:

In light of the recent fire activity, it has come to mind a public meeting

with the forest service several years ago regarding the Canyon Meadows dam.

Public input was overwhelmingly in favor of repairing or replacing the dam to restore the reservoir. Advantages repeatedly cited were these: recreation, fish habitat, tourism, irrigation, flood control and a water source for fire suppression. Unfortunately, the dam remains in disrepair, and the reservoir is gone.

We sorely need that water source now as the helicopters fly farther afield to find enough water to fill their buckets. It's long past time to do something about this!

Robert Reed
Judith Beaudet Reed
Canyon City

Thanks to Riverside residents

To the Editor:

I want to give a big thank you to all the residents of Riverside Home Park who came together,

and so quickly, when they saw that a fire had started in a vacant lot.

With 911 called and the fire department on their way, the neighboring residents grabbed shovels, picks, hoses and went to work. The fire went in two directions toward homes, but due to their quick actions, as the fire was closing in on both units, they were able to stop the fire from burning the units even before the fire truck arrived.

This is not to say that the firefighters were slow, by any means. They also need to be thanked as they were here in no time at all, with all the other things going on. So, we say “thank you” to the officers and firefighters for their quick response also.

We are very lucky to have the people and volunteers we do living around us who are willing to come together at a moment's notice.

Again, thank you and God bless all of you for your helping hearts.

Lisa Delano
Riverside Home Park, John Day

Blue Mountain EAGLE

195 N. Canyon Blvd. • John Day, OR 97845
541-575-0710 • Fax 541-575-1244

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MEMBER OREGON NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

PUBLISHER Marissa Williams, marissa@bmeagle.com
EDITOR editor@bmeagle.com
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT Kristina Kreger, kristina@bmeagle.com
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Cheryl Hoefler, cheryl@bmeagle.com
COMMUNITY NEWS Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
SPORTS Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
MARKETING REP Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
CUSTOMER SERVICE REP Lindsay Bullock office@bmeagle.com

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