

40 years of no growth should be an alarm bell

Residents of Harney County have been described as the hostages of the armed protesters who took over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge Jan. 2. By most accounts the protesters, largely out-of-state agitators, have harassed and generally run roughshod over the local community for three weeks and have worn out their welcome.

But the government land management policies that at least partially underpin the protest have constrained the Harney County economy for 40 years.

Once upon a time, Harney County's economy was strong. Thirty-one percent of the jobs, 768 in all, were in the wood products industry. But since 1978, that number has dropped to only six jobs, according to a recent report from the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis.

And while the rest of the state increased jobs 74 percent since the late 1970s, the number of jobs in Harney County dropped by 10 percent. Since 1980, when the population was 8,314 and the job losses began, the county has lost nearly 1,200 people.

"Relative to the late 1970s — just before the state went into the severe early '80s recession and timber industry restructuring — the number of jobs today in Harney County is 10 percent below back then," Josh Lehner, the analyst who prepared the report, said. "Clearly, that is a really long time with essentially no growth."

A lot of things have changed since the 1970s. The timber industry has restructured, and there's more automation in the mills. So, not all of the wood product job losses can be attributed to federal logging policies.

But community leaders and residents say that in a county

where more than 70 percent of the land is controlled by the federal government, those policy changes, along with stricter grazing restrictions, increased regulation and the ever-present threat of environmental lawsuits that attend any dealing with government agencies have huge impacts.

"It's continued rules and regulations that do everything to make it more difficult to make a living, to pay your bills educate your kids, pay your mortgage and lead a good life," retired rancher Bill Wilber said.

County Judge Steven Grasty said the job losses in the community have led to a general feeling of despair. His friends, neighbors and their families can no longer depend on the natural resource jobs that once sustained the county.

Many of those jobs have been replaced by lower-paying service sector jobs supporting tourists and the large contingent of government workers who manage the public lands.

Government employment now accounts for 40 percent of the jobs in the county. Those jobs are welcomed, and are vital to the community. In many cases, those employees are longtime residents with deep local ties.

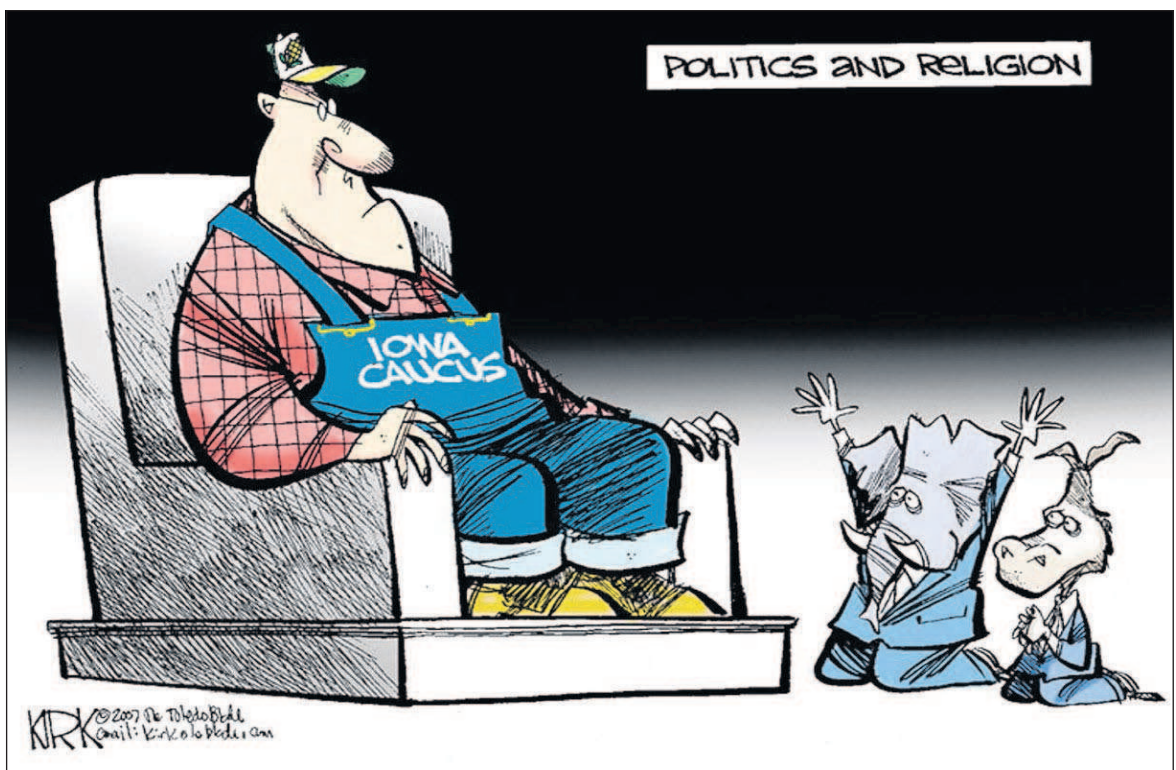
Still, there is a sense that something has been lost.

"We believe the wealth of a nation is based on its natural resources," Grasty said. "We've lost access to natural resources, in particular, timber."

The partner that once encouraged these enterprises has grown distant and unresponsive.

Sooner or later the protesters will decamp the refuge, and life in Harney County will return to normal.

But there and in a hundred places across the West, they will wait for the federal government to loosen its grip.



FARMER'S FATE Calendars, storks and redneck labor

By Brianna Walker
For the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

Everyone most familiar with the Gregorian calendar knows that all months contain between 28 and 31 days. Even school children who maybe haven't been taught yet about the Roman calendar and the Julian calendar and the purpose of the leap year probably still know the little rhyme that sing songs:

*Thirty days hath September,
April, June and November.
All the rest have 31,
Except for February all alone,
It has 28 each year,
but 29 each leap year.*

Being the rational person I believe myself to be (on occasion), I have always believed this rhyme. But it is wrong. So very wrong. And I am willing to bet that I am not alone in my rationale. I think all months have between 28-31 days in them — except for the last month of pregnancy. At that point, time seems to replicate faster than Borg nanites, making that final month closer to 473 days.

And you can't help but wonder if the stork agency upgraded to GPS. In the city, that's great, but we all know how persnickety a GPS can be in rural areas. "Arriving at destination, on left," GPS devices tell guests attempting to visit our house. That "destination" is two miles from

our house in the middle of a cow pasture. Perhaps we should grab sleeping bags and sleep out there for a few nights — just in case.

And as your due date approaches and disappears (just like the tips of your shoes), family, friends and the clerk at the convenience store start gazing at the big watermelon you're swinging around, and ask "What are you going to do?"

Like it's just a big blister that I can just soak in Epsom salts and make it go away. Trust me, for each time someone has thought that baby should be arriving soon, that expectant mother has thought (and dreamt) it 10 times.

And each time it gets said, the idea of castor oil niggles ever more slightly in the back of your mind. Of course, castor oil and prune juice I think should be left to people with much stronger stomach muscles and intestines that I have. But castor oil aside, I live on a farm. There has got to be all sorts of redneck remedies for getting this baby here sooner.

My husband jumped right on this train of thought. For each day I remain pregnant is one more day he has to be the primary caretaker for my pregnant ewes. Forget forcers, he says with glee, there are calf-pullers.

And one doesn't need the vacuum extractor at the OB's office, he's got a Shop-Vac with loads more horse power.

If baby is stuck, there is PB Blaster that is sure to do the trick. Combine that with a few shots of WD-40 and baby shouldn't even make a squeak after it comes out.

Need to walk that baby out? No problems, we still have plenty of winter watering to finish up. No need to walk without an irrigation pipe in your hand. A little gentle exercise to help work those muscles? The hay trucks are coming daily, and he can always use an extra grunt on the trailer to move those bales into place.

And don't worry about running out of breath, while you're loading the trucks, he can bring along the portable air compressor and just hook me up.

It was about that moment that he started gesturing to the welder. Before he could say a word, his phone rang, interrupting the next helpful solution. It was then I had an overwhelming desire to buy a bottle of castor oil. I think it might actually make a really nice addition to my husband's dinner plate tonight — then we can both hold our stomachs tonight and commiserate on how long and uncomfortable that last month of pregnancy really is.

Brianna Walker writes about the *Farmer's Fate* occasionally for the *Blue Mountain Eagle*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sheriff should focus on primary job duties

To the Editor:

The definition of sheriff is to uphold the peace and, I believe, enforce the law. I find it quite disturbing that our county sheriff has stated his support for the Bundy group. Their actions are obviously illegal. I would think aiding and abetting criminals would be grounds for the sheriff to be ejected from office.

We need a sheriff that upholds his primary job duties above his political affiliations.

Jan Mead
John Day

Editor's note: In an interview with the Eagle Jan. 13, when asked whether he supported the armed takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer said, "I don't know."

Armed protesters should 'stay the course'

To the Editor:

In the past year, some obvious conclusions can be drawn from events across the country. In the Midwest and East, citizens gathered to "protest" what they perceived to be injustice. Rocks and Molotov cocktails were thrown, police cars torched, businesses looted and burned and no one held accountable. The lawlessness was even condoned by some as excusable "self-expression."

Here in the West, citizens have also come together to express their angst over injustice. Open meetings with law enforcement, hold-

ing public forums and otherwise conducting them in a safe and respectful manner. What makes these people different from other protesters? They have the audacity to be "armed."

The First Amendment is held sacrosanct, but exercising the Second is a horse of a different color. An armed individual is vilified and called a criminal or terrorist. One wonders why and is answered thusly. One does not kick a dog that curled its lip and shown its teeth. So it is with Americans throughout our history. There comes a time when collectively we say, "No more!"

Let us hope the situation at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is resolved with the Hammonds being released from prison. An injustice has been perpetrated, and it will not be tolerated.

For those folks south of us that have had the courage to act, "Stay the course!"

Dave Traylor
John Day

Long Creek fire department swift and professional

To the Editor:

The professional, swift efforts put in by our Long Creek volunteer fire department to put out the tragic house fire here in the early morning hours of Jan. 3 has earned them a huge "thank you" by our community.

It was nothing short of miraculous, in the shifting winds and heat from the fire, how that crew saved the adjacent residence in the process.

Our Fire Chief Don Porter also put traffic safety at the forefront,

called in additional resources where needed and worked tirelessly with the rest of the crew all day and after dark, in windy, freezing temperatures, to ensure that everything that could be done in the situation had been done.

This was another reminder of how invaluable every community's first responders are and the risks these folks take to keep us safe. I know my family feels safer knowing how competently this group can handle an emergency.

Leslie Barnett
Long Creek Lodge
Long Creek

Palmers' Christmas dinner appreciated

To the Editor:

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Roseanne and Glenn Palmer for the wonderful Christmas dinner they hold every year at the senior center.

Not only is the meal wonderful, I also get to see them and their family and friends having a good time and fellowship with each other while preparing it. I, having been a cook for a few years, know how much hard work it is, but they work in love and friendship. It is wonderful to see.

Also not only do I enjoy the meal, but also the chance to see and have fellowship with people that I don't see any other time. I hope everyone who attended and enjoyed this wonderful experience realizes how much Christian love these people are putting out there.

Thank you again for doing this for your community in honor of Jesus' birth.

Alma Joslin
John Day



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