

Agricultural trade needs long-term plan

As Eastern Oregon farmers reap their year's worth of work from its fertile soil, national and international pressures are tugging and tearing at their bottom line.

President Donald Trump said last week his administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture will use a Depression-era law to provide up to \$12 billion in aid to farmers hurt by U.S. trade policies.

Those policies — which include placing taxes on imported goods — have been reciprocated by foreign governments. That has damaged the American farmer's ability to compete on a level playing field in the worldwide market.

Thus the \$12 billion bailout. Sure, it's much cheaper than the \$700 billion Economic Stabilization Act that American taxpayers paid to bail out the banking and auto industries in 2008. But the deal for farmers is good for just one growing season, and includes few details on how exactly the money will be dispersed. If President Trump has not solved our trade war by next year, American farmers will either see depressed prices, or taxpayers will once again be on the hook for another bailout. And China, which holds much of America's debt, will hold the final call.

There's a political irony in this too, given that the political movement that catapulted Trump to the White House was partly inspired by understandable disgust in the American heartland over the 2008 federal bailouts.

This is a serious issue in Eastern Oregon, perhaps one of the most important in a generation. For us to survive on the east side of the Columbia Basin, we must make money from agriculture. It's the linchpin of our economic system, and our region depends on it.

So it's understandable to get nervous when D.C. and Brussels, Moscow and Beijing start haggling over agricultural policy — and when our traditional customers start looking elsewhere.

Reuters reported this week that three major grain milling companies in Mexico that have purchased a majority of their wheat and other grains from the U.S. are turning to Russian suppliers and other options in Latin America.

Canimolt, a Mexican trade group that represents 80 percent of Mexican milling companies, told Reuters that pre-emptively shifting import priorities away from U.S. suppliers is a way to send a "message" to President Trump over tariffs that many U.S. allies have denounced. Global U.S. wheat exports have decreased by a total of 21 percent since the beginning of the year.

It's not just foreign buyers who are disappointed with Trump's recent activity. The rather pro-Trump, pro-business Wall Street Journal wrote the administration "is trying to fix an economic problem of its own making by putting the victims on the federal dole."

This issue has everything to do with policies, not politics. Like most Western farmers, we remain convinced that the Trans-Pacific Partnership was the right way to lead on international trade and get a leg up on China.

Unfortunately, the partnership was opposed by a whole range of politicians — Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton and Trump all said they were against it during the 2016 campaign, as were a majority of Americans polled on the subject. Its demise is a missed opportunity for fair and free trade.

We understand there are emergencies where federal involvement is necessary. Some argue that was the case in 2008 as the American economy collapsed, while others disagree. Most all believe it was necessary after natural disasters, such as hurricanes in Louisiana and New Jersey.

Oregon's federal delegation has argued this week that farmers harmed by the Substation Fire need federal help, too, and should get a piece of the \$12 billion package.

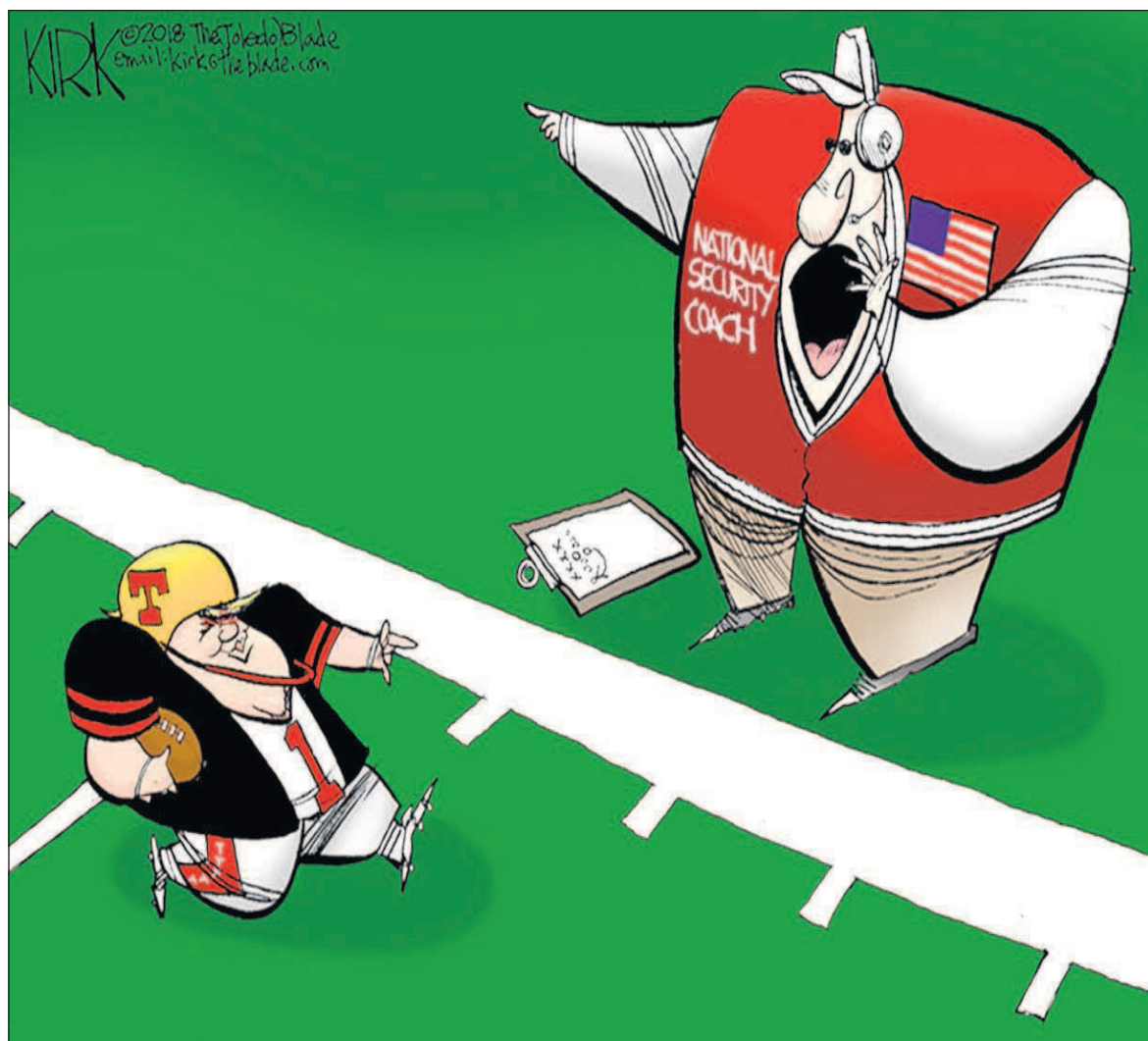
All are good arguments to have, and we imagine conservatives would argue against government involvement more often than not. And we think most people would argue against government bailouts of problems that have been government-created. Spending \$12 billion to get back to where we were prior to government action seems wasteful and inefficient.

Trump disagrees, and thinks he will pull the country out on the other side with a better trade deal.

"Negotiations are going really well, be cool," Trump tweeted last week. "The end result will be worth it!" Maybe Trump is right and the deals will get done. We will commend him if that turns out to be the case. But it's hard to "be cool" with an economic linchpin in the balance.

American farmers — just like any industry — want stable, practical international trade policies. No one wants to rely on government subsidies. No one wants to operate not knowing if those subsidies will arrive or not.

A subsidy is just another word for a bailout — government picking winners and losers and redistributing taxpayer cash. Perhaps farmers are winners now, but no industry wants D.C. to have the ability to push them onto the other side of that ledger.



FARMER'S FATE

I've got ewe, babe

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

"How do you feel about bumper lambs?"
"Um, no."
"What do you mean, no? They are so cute."
"I would love to, but unfortunately — no!"
"But they are free."
"There are worse things I could agree to. I just can't think of any at the moment."
"Your Grandpa is getting some."
"Let him get some then. But on a scale of maybe to absolutely, I say absolutely not for us! Do you know how much work sheep can be?"

My newly-wedded husband and I continued this conversation for a few more minutes before I went back to work, and he went back to look at the "cute, adorable baby lambs" with my Grandpa.

Girls often have the reputation for being vague and expecting their spouses to read between the lines, but when I hung up the phone that afternoon, I felt I had been overly clear with my opinion — that is, until I arrived home and discovered eight bumper lambs snuggled under a heat-lamp in the barn.

That's when I realized something all too relevant with human interactions: You may believe you



Brianna Walker

understand what you think someone has said, but what you don't realize is that what you heard is not what they meant.

My husband also learned something important. No matter how much I say no, once an animal (no matter how scraggly) is on my property, I don't have the heart to turn it out.

At first, I grumbled as I put on my boots to do middle-of-the-night feedings — but soon those scraggly animals won me over, and I forgave my husband for expecting his opinion to come out of my mouth, and my Grandpa for taking my animal-loving husband to a sheep farm.

That was 13 years — and many, many scraggly animals — ago. Those original eight lambs quickly multiplied, and soon our pasture was filled with sheep. One of those original bumpers, "Dirty Harry," gave birth the following year to a waspy set of twins. We kept the ewe lamb and named her "Junior." She could jump out of anything. We should have given her a middle name, just so she could have understood more clearly how much trouble she was in from incident to incident.

As the herd grew, so did the rest of our lives: farming, community, a family of our own — and it wasn't long before our sheep became numbers on an ear tag instead of pet names. Except for Junior. She was one of a kind. She would come nuzzle for crackers, then abruptly turn and jump over the fence. She was wild and gentle, unpredictably predictable. She was a good mix of her calm mother and her angry father, who had once jumped the fence and dented a visitor's car door.

It was with a sad heart when I found that my dear old girl had gone to greener pastures. She marked the end of an era. She was from a time before kids, a time when my husband and I were still learning about marriage and communication. Not to imply that we have graduated those courses, but we definitely understand each other better than we did that first year of marriage. Just recently I was looking at buying a couple of mini-goats. My husband saw some of the photos I'd been looking at online. He didn't say "no." I think his response was something like, "I'd rather jump in a lake of piranhas!"

I'm thinking about naming the smaller of the two goats "Junior Jr." Brianna Walker occasionally writes the *Farmer's Fate* for the *Blue Mountain Eagle*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Senseless, despicable act'

To the Editor:
On July 17, Res, our beautiful, friendly Siberian husky, was lured from our yard in Prairie City. She was found, purely by accident, on July 21, high in the hills northwest of Dixie Creek. She had been shot and thrown over the side of a remote road where she couldn't be seen from a vehicle driving by.

It is sad and frightening to know that someone in our area is capable of such a senseless, despicable act. What or who might be the next victim? Was this getting even for something or just to kill?

Bob and Dottie Miller
Prairie City

'Caught in the crossfire'

To the Editor:
Mass shootings have sparked a national debate on how to keep

firearms out of the hands of those who might go on a rampage. At the same time veteran suicides occur at the rate of about 22 per day. I've cautioned before that attempts to stop this should be well reasoned out. A knee-jerk reaction has happened just as I predicted. The July issue of the DAV (Disabled American Veterans) magazine has an article, "Caught in the Crossfire," that should cause outrage.

To quote, "In 1998, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms adopted a new procedure that defined 'mental defective' to include someone who 'lacks the mental capacity to contract or manage their own affairs due to injury or disease.'

"For veterans, this means that if the VA decides a veteran is mentally incompetent and appoints a fiduciary, a prohibiting record is created and sent to the FBI. The FBI enters the veteran's record in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, which contains names of people who are flagged and their

access to firearms restricted. "As of the start of 2017, federal agencies had contributed 171,083 records to the system's index under the new provision enacted by the ATF.

"The VA contributed 98.1 percent of those, or 167,815." It's a four-page article, much too long for a daily paper, but in a nutshell, if you are a veteran who has served in combat and suffer from PTSD you will have to decide whether to get help and see a VA mental health provider and lose your gun rights or try to beat it on your own.

I've said it before, the VA should be prohibited from adding names of those who used a firearm in defense of the country to any gun-banning list, and the ATF agents should be encouraged to get a real job with the border patrol.

Steve Culley
Baker City

Editor's note: Read the full article at dav.org/learn-more/news/2018/veterans-guns.

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