

OUR VIEW

DeFazio's energy and influence will be missed

Oregon is losing an able and hardworking advocate in Congress with the impending retirement of Peter DeFazio.

The Springfield Democrat announced last week that he will not seek reelection in 2022, bringing his political career to a close after 36 years in the U.S. House of Representatives. That longevity has made him Oregon's longest-serving member of Congress — and has given him the political clout to do a lot of good things for this state and the nation.

"He is very smart, very passionate and very knowledgeable about the details," 2nd District Rep. Earl Blumenauer said of his longtime colleague during a Zoom call Friday with representatives of the East Oregonian Media Group. "This is a tremendous loss for Oregon and a tremendous loss for the country."

At 74, DeFazio has certainly earned the right to retire. He recently underwent back surgery, and his announcement stated that he was stepping down in order to focus on his health and well-being.

But Oregonians will feel the loss of his considerable influence on Capitol Hill, especially in the realm of transportation.

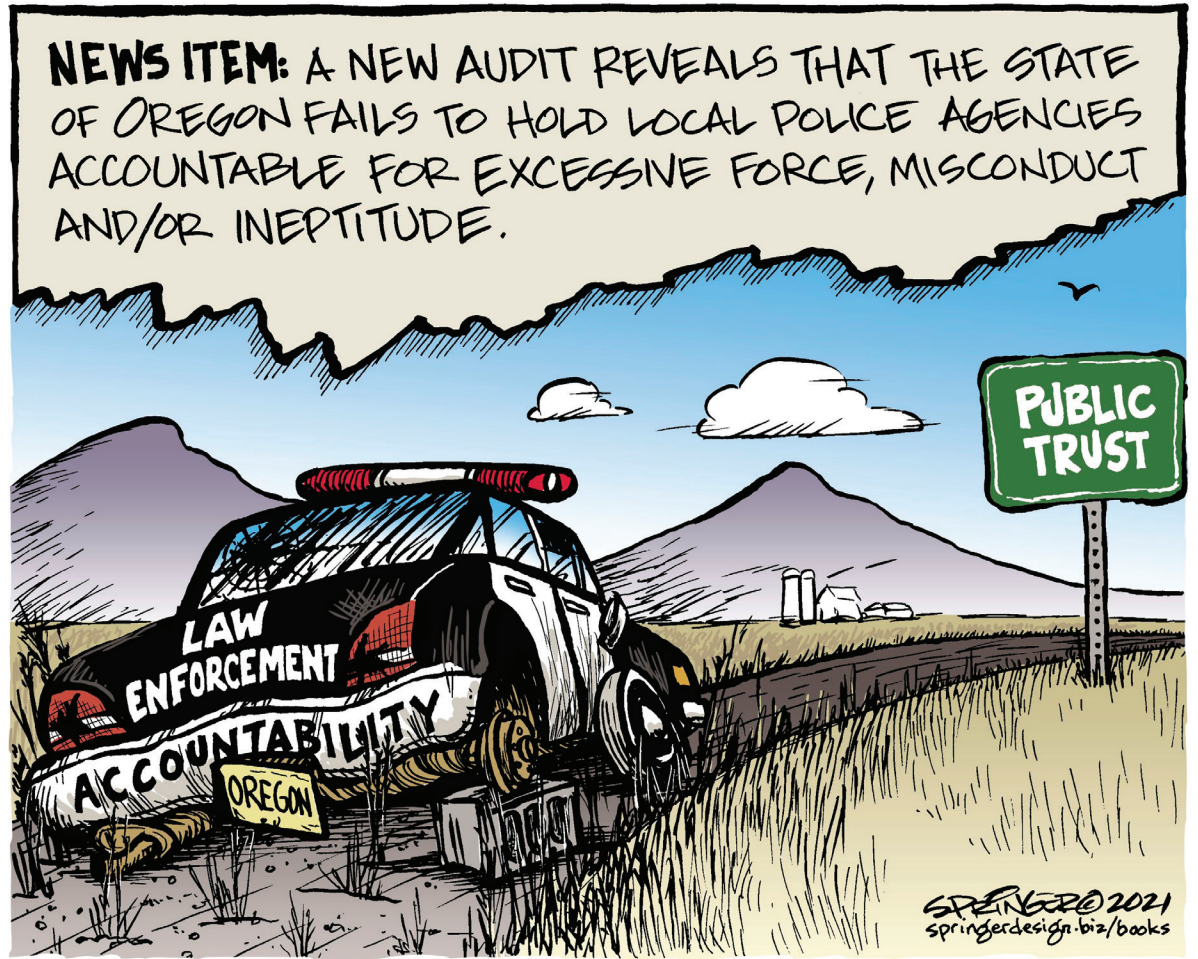
DeFazio joined the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee when he first came to Congress in 1987 and gradually rose through the ranks, becoming chair of the panel in 2019. Over the years, his position on the committee and his vast expertise on transportation issues has enabled him to steer millions of dollars in federal funding to his home state, helping to bankroll important improvements for Oregon's ports and railroads. In 2006, he was able to tweak the federal highway funding formula to free up an additional \$1.3 billion in funding for Oregon roads and bridges. His fingerprints are

all over the \$1.2 billion infrastructure package recently passed by Congress, which may finally pave the way for the Columbia River Crossing, a badly needed project that would ease the bottleneck where Interstate 5 links Oregon and Washington. And it was DeFazio who led the charge to hold Boeing and the FAA accountable after a malfunctioning control system caused two Boeing 737 MAX jetliners to crash, killing 346 people.

Of course, DeFazio has his share of detractors, many of whom take issue with some of his more left-leaning positions. But he's never been afraid to stand up against his own party. He crossed the aisle to support a Republican plan to create a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget, bucked Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama on free trade agreements he thought harmed American workers and harshly criticized Obama's \$787 billion stimulus package in the wake of the Great Recession, saying the money should have gone toward infrastructure improvements rather than Wall Street bailouts.

And it's worth noting that DeFazio has been able to hold his seat against all comers for 18 terms in the House. Oregon's 4th Congressional District is a politically diverse territory that encompasses not only the liberal enclaves of Eugene and Corvallis but a large swath of conservative Southwest Oregon. The district leans a bit more to the left after the recent redistricting orchestrated by the Democrat-held Legislature, but it's been competitive in the past: Last year, Republican Alek Skarlatos lost by just 6 percentage points.

Whoever the voters elect in 2022 will have a tough time matching DeFazio's long-running political tightrope act — or his ability to serve the interests of Oregonians of all party affiliations.



FARMER'S FATE

Pumpkin spice or peppermint cocoa?

We're the family who skips pumpkin spice and goes straight to peppermint cocoa. We carved pumpkins while listening to Frank Sinatra sing "Jingle Bells." We brainstormed Christmas gifts while we plunged apples down the barrel of the washing machine-turned-cider press. We whistled carols while we steamed grapes into juice. We finished up our last cutting of hay, wrapping white, round silage bales, singing "it's a marshmallow world in the winter..." As soon as the pumpkins begin turning orange, the Christmas season officially starts at our house.

Everything Christmas except the tree. The tree doesn't go up until the day after Thanksgiving — because of some crazy idea my husband has of allowing each holiday its own space. Over the years he's softened — with everything except the tree. The stockings are hung with care long before Thanksgiving, and he breaks out the Hallmark Christmas movies at the start of November. But so far, he's held fast to the tree rule.

Recently, on a picnic with my parents, we discovered some of the most beautiful pine cones — and I suddenly had a crazy idea that would satisfy his tree rule and yet circumvent it at the same time. I would make a pine cone tree. It was such a beautifully devious plan, for a moment I thought I should try my hand at politics!

It was nearly dusk before we started collecting the cones. Everyone helped, exclaiming with delight each time an especially large one was found. It was much more fun than the mushroom hunting we usually



Brianna Walker

do after a picnic with my parents — perhaps because I loathe the mushrooms, and I love pine cones.

We had filled two boxes before it became too dark to see the difference between a pine cone and a cow pie — and

not wanting to mistake one for the other, we decided it was time to call it a day.

I had memories of my mom wanting to just pick a few more mushrooms "because they were so pretty," and for the first time, I felt I understood that feeling — although never about mushrooms.

Later that week, my husband and I celebrated our 17th anniversary with our traditional gas station burritos.

My husband brought out burritos and DEF fluid for the swather. "We gotta get this hay up before it rains this weekend," he says. "But this weekend is supposed to be nasty, we could do something fun for our anniversary?" This is when my devious plan manifested itself.

"Do you wanna build a pine cone tree?" I sing-songed in "Frozen" style.

He gave me a look, like he knew what I was doing, but he merely nodded. The weather forecaster was right — it was nasty and bleak out — and the gloom had never looked more appealing. In no time we were surrounded with sawdust, plastic tubing and chicken wire. Hours later, a wire mesh tree shape had emerged.

We wrapped it in lights and then

began the pleasurable task of wiring on the pine cones — a Hallmark movie playing in the background.

As the tree took shape, my heart soared as the heart of my 5-year-old plummeted. "But Mommy," he whimpered, "I want a real tree."

"Don't you think this one is pretty?" I asked, looking into his large, sad eyes.

"Yes." "Then why do you want a real one?"

"Because," he answered soberly, "there's no room for presents under this one."

We are now calling this one our Thanksgiving tree. A Christmas tree came the fourth Friday of November — satisfying the rules, the wants, and even the capacity for presents.

So however you deck your halls — be it with pumpkin pies and overflowing cornucopias, or peppermint cocoa and Christmas lights — or whether your tree comes with the first frost or the first snow, may your holiday season be especially joyful. Filled with love, laughter and maybe a pine cone or two.

Deck the halls with loads of pine cones

fa la la la la, la la la la
Hang the stockings on the fire stoves
fa la la la la, la la la la
Don we now our Claus apparel
fa la la, la la la, la la la
Skip the spice, move on to cocoa
fa la la la la, la la la la.

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



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COMMENTARY

Masks in schools oppress our kids

In life there is no position greater than that of raising a child. The duties set forth in this position are of great gravity. Our actions will forever be remembered as the path these children should follow. In adulthood they will do so with confidence or blindly with shame.

Every day, we the community go to the stores and continue on with our business enjoying the fruits of the blood of our fathers. They fought and died for these rights. My grandfather along with many others were in WW2 fighting for the very rights I speak of today. Simple rights, rights granted to us not by the existence of authority, but instead given to us by God through the gift of life.

We as patriotic Americans see ourselves as willing to do the same; sadly, I'm afraid we will not. It's easy to buy your groceries for dinner, or talk to your friends downtown. Taking for granted our ability to not fear if you left your mask at home. This is your right and you can do so without fear of oppression. If someone questions you, you can go somewhere else without fear of actions taken against you.

These simple things are fundamental aspects of dignity granted to all people regardless of position or color. Simple respect for humankind that is expected to permeate throughout a



Lucas Andrew

free society. Today we are faced with these simple rights being stripped from our children. We as community members, fathers, mothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends go through

our daily lives, knowing these simple rights are guaranteed while our children are being stripped of them.

As we see daily, the empathy of the community condemns horrible actions against helpless beings such as pets. There is no excuse for muzzling a helpless animal, unable to fight for itself. Today our legislature banters about the dignity of livestock in our farms. Fighting for the rights of a "living being" to a fruitful existence untainted by the injustice of oppression.

While we debate the dignity of oppressed livestock and the rights of sheep, our children are watching this, heartbroken. They are unable to speak because they themselves have been muzzled... by us. They are watching haunted by the threat they may at any point be caught unmuzzled and removed from class, or denied and isolated from their sports games or scholastic activities.

How can we as their home community allow this to continue? Telling our children their rights are only given when a teacher or principal grants them? Are we so lazy as to allow the forced conformity of our youth?

I wonder how history would have changed if Harriet Tubman had succumbed to her oppressors and died a slave in servitude. Will we allow the leaders of our schools to utilize oppression as a tool to shadow the rights of our helpless children? How, as a community, can we send our young men to fight oppression abroad when we have not rid ourselves of it at home? Is there no dignity for children today? Is it OK to allow others to utilize fear to force covering the face of our beautiful children?

I am disgusted with our community for allowing this injustice perpetrated and cloaked in the color of office and law. We are teaching our children that there is no dignity or sovereignty in humanity unless granted by those who would oppress it. We tell our children they can be anything they want. Sadly, that's only true if they cover their faces in shame first.

Lucas Andrew is a resident of Mt. Vernon, he graduated from Grant Union High School, and up until recent events, he had two students enrolled in the Grant School District.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Health Department's dedication commendable

To the editor:

The Grant County Health Department has been a valuable resource in our county for years. It has helped build resilient communities and has helped our commu-

nities respond to public health threats such as COVID-19 infections.

Jessica Winegar with the Grant County Health Department has come to Seneca three times offering COVID-19 vaccinations to our residents. This commitment to the people in Grant County is commendable.

Barbara Northington
Seneca