

OUR VIEW

Oregon Trail becoming a two-way street

The political leadership in the West needs to take note of the growing number of farm families that are picking up stakes and moving east.

In the 1840s, white settlers from east of the Mississippi River started making the arduous journey west, pushing up the Oregon Trail to the Pacific Northwest.

Others followed the trail to Fort Hall in present-day Idaho, then turned southwest on the California Trail to reach the gold fields of the Sierra Nevada and the farmland of the Central Valley.

Land was cheap and opportunity was within relatively easy grasp. The West offered fewer restrictions than were in place in the established Eastern communities.

Many longtime farm and ranch families proudly point to their pioneer heritage.

But over the last decade or so, there's been a small but growing number of farm families picking up stakes and moving east of the coastal states to escape tough business climates.

It's a reverse Oregon Trail of sorts, with modern day emigrants moving to Idaho, Montana, the Plains and the Midwest.

While it hardly can be described as a mass exodus, people are noticing an uptick in the number of farm operations moving east.

"People have talked about moving for years and years, but now people are actually doing it," said Ryan Jacobsen, manager of the Fresno County Farm Bureau in California. "Statistically, it's still probably a blip on the radar. But it's crazy that it's actually happening."

Farmers cite several reasons for moving: seeking less crowded places; political concerns; COVID-19 protocols; estate taxes, regulations and associated costs; opportunities for expansion; "climate migrants" fleeing drought; and farmers seeking more secure water supplies.

The common thread is that farmers and ranchers are moving to places where they believe their businesses, and families, can better thrive.

The tax and regulatory climate on the West Coast has made it increasingly difficult for family farming operations.

Carbon policies have made fuel more expensive. COVID-19 regulations have reduced the availability of labor, and thus have reduced yield while increasing costs.

State legislatures have grown openly hostile to agriculture, proposing gross receipt tax schemes that would turn the already precarious economics of farming on its head.

They have adopted alternative energy policies that encourage converting farmland into wind and solar energy facilities. They've proposed increasing riparian buffers. They have restricted common pesticides, herbicides and fumigants.

Most farmers can't pick up and leave. But they can sell out to bigger operations.

Through increased regulation and legislation, state governments will hasten the consolidation of the industry, and the ruin of the rural communities that depend on a viable population to thrive.



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

The hierarchy of houseplants

From a hard fall frost that turns the vegetable garden lifeless and mushy until it's time to plant peas and early potatoes in spring, my primary puttering with plants centers on houseplants.

As a child, I rated my mother as a queen of houseplants. She nurtured pots of greenery growing in containers on a corner of our oak kitchen table. Most starts came from friends — African violets with their fuzzy leaves, ivies, dieffenbachia, snake plant with mottled leaves, Christmas cactus and ferns. Initially, the plant collection remained manageable.

In time, the folks bought a home and the plant collection grew. A tropical Norfolk Island pine tree that started out as a 3-inch sprout grew so tall it reached from the living room floor to the ceiling — and finally was donated to a library with an open-beamed ceiling. Mom's plants at home lined window sills and thrived on doily-topped end tables.

We visited homes where plant devotees grew vining, large-leaved specimens that wrapped around kitchen windows and cupboards. The macrame craze hit, which expanded the hanging plant collections to the point where carnivorous plants hanging down towards the kitchen table seemed a threat to one's steak dinner.

Fortunately, our family was spared the extremes. Dad pur-



Jean Ann Moultrie

chased a secondhand greenhouse and installed it in the back yard. Inside the 12-by-12-foot structure, Dad added benches. Initially, Mom moved in overgrown houseplants and laid out flats of potting soil to start flower and vegetable seeds.

The next era of plants — orchids. With these, Dad added grow lights and a misting system. Mom enjoyed the experience of growing the plants — she purchased orchid seedlings fresh from test tubes from orchid growers and babied them along for a few years before they bloomed.

Along with spring pansies and primroses, grocery stores and plant nurseries started to carry phalaenopsis orchids, known as "butterfly" orchids — one of the easier orchids to grow at home.

In time, Mom's greenhouse bulged with orchid blooms: paphiopedilums, also called lady's slipper orchid; dendrobiums with bright yellow-and-red blooms; and the flamboyant velvety blooms of cattleyas. The greenhouse orchids gave off a soft fragrance of vanilla and old-fashioned roses.

Years later, the task of repotting and caring for the plants became a challenge for my parents. They donated the orchid collection to a

community college greenhouse.

While visiting the folks one week, I spotted Mom as she spooned out a seed from an orange, planted the seed in a small pot, watered it, and placed it on a window sill.

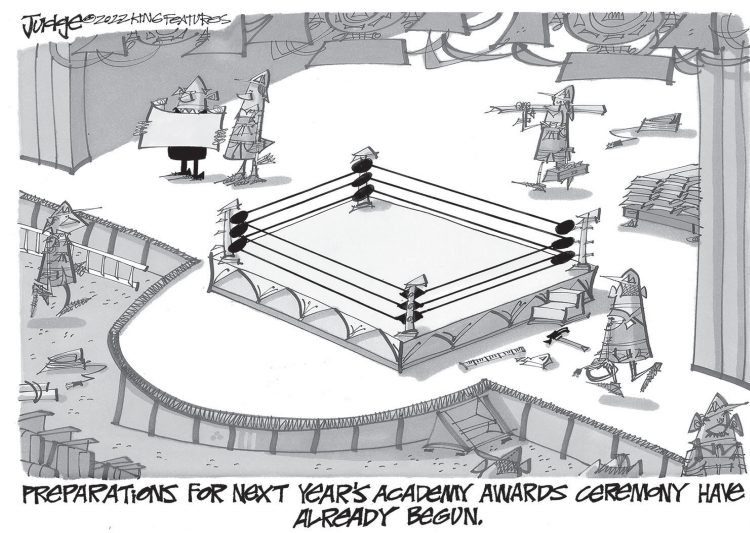
"When I was young," Mom said, "and couldn't afford plants, I'd take any seed I'd find in the food, like orange or apple, and watch them grow." She wasn't aiming for fruit — just the joy of nurturing some greenery.

While cleaning at home one day, I discovered a turnip in the vegetable crisper which had started to sprout. Inspired by Mom's story, I cut the top third off the turnip and stuck it in water in a shallow dish. The turnip leafed out and sent up two tall flower stalks. Blossoms the size of pinheads opened to a display of pollen grains. It seemed the heroic turnip tried to keep her ancestral line going.

I took a wisp of a cotton ball to try to pollinate the plant. If another turnip's pollen was needed, I was out of luck. I scraped off the turnip flesh that turned dark and changed the water frequently. No seeds formed. In time, my favorite turnip died.

Is it still too early to get outside and plant peas and potatoes?

Jean Ann Moultrie is a Grant County writer. She enjoys sharing garden seeds with kids and has helped install raised garden beds for seniors in care settings.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Anti-Dem letter distorts polling info

To the Editor:

A recent letter to the editor used a Quinnipiac University polling question to villainize Democrats in a mean-spirited, ugly attack. They're free to express their feelings. However, they need to be held accountable for propagating a pathetic lie created by political extremists.

The exact polling question (No. 8) asked: "If you were in the same position as Ukrainians are now, do you think that you would stay and fight or leave the country?" Nowhere in that question did the poll ask about America; rather, it was specifically about Ukraine. Context matters!

It's true — 52% of polled Democrats said they would opt to leave

the country (understood to be Ukraine), where conditions are horrific for civilians; defenseless people are being annihilated by a world military power — killing pregnant women, children, and old people unable to crawl from under the rubble of their homes. How in the world can politically toxic people twist that question to mean that Democrats would not stand and fight someone like Putin on American soil?

In fact, another question within that poll makes Democrats appear more supportive of military defenses than Republicans and Independents. Question No. 12 asked: "As you may know, the United States is a member of NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Its collective defense treaty states that an attack on one NATO country is an attack on all NATO countries. If Russian Pres-

ident Vladimir Putin goes beyond Ukraine and attacks a NATO country, would you support or oppose a military response from the United States?"

Well, surprise, surprise. Democrats (88%) said they would support a military response, while only 82% of Republicans and 77% of Independents declared their support for a United States military response to defeat Putin.

The humane values of Democrats (as evident in their response to question No. 8) only enhance their strong military support to defend against dictators. Expect no less from Democrats within our own borders. As Americans, we aren't defenseless — unless, of course, some of you with hostile feelings are incapable of standing together in troubled times.

Kay Scheurer Steele Ritter

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 • **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313, oregonlegislature.gov.
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