

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak briefly as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE PEOPLE OF RURAL OREGON AND THE STEENS MOUNTAIN

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. President, last week I spoke in this Chamber of the damage that has been inflicted by this administration upon the people and communities of rural Oregon. I spoke specifically about communities such as John Day and Roseburg, communities where the failure of this administration to keep its word with regard to timber harvests has brought great harm to families, communities, schools, and to their roads.

I am grateful to this Senate and the Senator from Washington for his leadership on this issue and voting last week to put the interests of children and families above a survey of fungus, snails, and slugs.

I return to the floor today to share with my colleagues a story about another rural Oregon community, one that is facing an uncertain future because of possible actions by this administration.

I traveled this past weekend to the community of Burns, OR, in Harney County. Harney County is small in population and large in area. About 8,000 people live in this county. It is roughly the size of the State of Massachusetts. It includes part of the largest Ponderosa pine forest in the whole Nation. It includes over 100,000 head of beef cattle on vast open ranges. It includes the Steens Mountain.

I would like to speak to you about the Steens Mountain and what this administration proposes to do with it.

Let me begin by saying that to fly over the Steens Mountain, and to tour it on the ground and from the air, as I did last Saturday, is to see some of the most breathtaking scenery in this country or any other; and to stand on the ridgetops of the Steens is to view unspoiled vistas of the Kiger Gorge, the Alvord Desert, and other true national treasures. From its peak you can see the States of Idaho, Nevada, California, and nearly all of Oregon. It is a very special place.

The Steens Mountain has remained unspoiled for one simple reason: The people of Burns and Harney County love Steens Mountain. Through unique partnerships between the Bureau of Land Management and private land owners, who own almost 30 percent of the mountain, they have found a formula that has worked. Harney County residents take great pride in their stewardship of the mountain that one rancher referred to, to me, as a "tough old girl." At the heart of their stewardship is the commonsense principle of multiple use.

Their pride is very justifiable. According to the Bureau of Land Management, over the past 30 years essentially 100 percent of upland and riparian conditions on the Steens Mountain that needed improvement has, in fact, been improved.

I traveled to the Steens in response to a trip that Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt made there several weeks ago. After touring the mountain and praising what had been accomplished by local citizens, Secretary Babbitt also announced that only Uncle Sam could be trusted with the future of the mountain. He said that before this administration left office, he wanted to designate the mountain as a national conservation area or as a national monument; no matter what had been done before and how well it looked, still we cannot trust local citizens; we need to trust those with the wisdom of the bureaucracy in the beltway. Such a designation, as he proposed, would have far-reaching impacts, not only on the future of the mountain but on the future of those who live and work in its shadow.

Such an announcement would run counter to the significant efforts of the Southeastern Oregon Resource Advisory Council. It is known locally as the RAC. The council is made up of individuals from conservation groups, resource groups, public bodies, and Federal agencies that have assumed the responsibility of exploring the proposal for a Steens Mountain National Conservation Area. This cooperative approach is the type of open and public process that I support and one that should be supported by this administration. But this group now labors under the certainty that, no matter what they decide, a decision has already been made here that the administration will make a designation.

I plan to meet with Secretary Babbitt in the very near future. I hope to do it with my colleague from Oregon and Congressman WALDEN who represents this area. When we do, we will share the frustrations expressed to each of us by citizens of Harney County when we have visited there. They have asked me why this administration is trying to impose a solution where there is no problem. The old adage that this is "a solution looking for a problem" has never been more true than when applied to the Steens Mountain.

They asked me why this administration does not trust them to continue with their excellent management techniques and innovative practices that have been at the heart of their stewardship. They asked me why this administration would be promoting a designation that would undoubtedly bring more visitors to the area, thereby harming the very environment they supposedly seek to protect. And they asked me if the Secretary's promise to work with them in the months ahead

was real or whether this administration has already made up its mind.

I would also like to put on the record the taunting that is being made to the administration by some members of the environmental community from organizations that support more Federal involvement on the Steens Mountain. It was said in the open, in the presence of the media, that Secretary Babbitt and this administration were being urged to find a legacy other than the impeachment scandal. They were literally saying: Grab private land, and you can grab a better legacy for yourself. They were urging a version of a domestic "wagging of the dog."

I pray that this is not so because this is not the basis for good land management. Oregon does not need such an insult as was being urged upon this administration by some in the environmental community.

The bottom line is that I believe the future of the Steens Mountain in Harney County is in much better hands with the folks who live there—folks such as County Commissioner Dan Nichols and ranchers such as Fred Otley and Stacey and Elaine Davies—than it is, than it ever will be, in the hands of Federal bureaucrats who reside within the beltway.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. GORTON. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative assistant proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VOINOVICH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 5 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE "13TH MONTH"

Mr. SMITH of New Hampshire. Mr. President, earlier today, there was quite a bit of colorful rhetoric and blustering on the floor by the Democratic Party about reports in the Washington Post today that Republicans were going to create a "13th month" to allow more spending on education and other programs.

Lest I be accused of partisanship, I think many of you know I am an Independent. So those who say I am going to speak on behalf of Republicans, I guess, would technically be wrong. I don't pretend to speak for the Republicans, and I am not privy to what was said in any meetings with the Republicans regarding the so-called 13th month. But let me speak for myself as an Independent and say I don't support a 13th month for any fiscal year.