

Oregon votes to ban restaurants from offering plastic straws

By Sarah Zimmerman
Associated Press

SALEM (AP) — Oregon will ban restaurants from automatically offering single-use plastic straws under a measure passed by lawmakers, making it the second state to enact restrictions on plastic straws.

The House voted 48-12 late Wednesday night to prohibit restaurants from providing single-use plastic straws unless a customer asks. Drive-thrus could still offer straws, as could healthcare facilities.

California previously passed limits on plastic straws.

Gov. Kate Brown told reporters Thursday the move is about raising public consciousness of plastic’s effects on the environment and is meant to encourage more environmentally friendly lifestyle changes.

“Raising awareness to show the extent that we’re so reliant on plastic is really important,” she said.

On the floor, lawmakers discussed a widely shared 2015 video showing a sea turtle in distress as scientists remove a plastic straw stuck up its nose, which led to public outcry and moved cities and companies like Starbucks and Whole Foods to eliminate their use of plastic straws.

But the video, which has more than 35 million views on YouTube, didn’t completely move House Republicans, who said that restricting straws makes little difference to the environment and will only cause bureaucratic headaches.



In the PINES By T. Lee Brown

The old ways

One day a few years back, I staked out my favorite table in the bustling coffeehouse. It was an antique school desk, wobbly and funky, resting near the great stone hearth.

I was new to Sisters. I’d visited many times, but now I actually lived here. We camped in a little trailer in Deschutes National Forest. Then we bounced around furnished homes, from Black Butte Ranch to Pine Meadow Village.

Sisters Coffee, with its brews and breakfasts and friendly strangers, felt more like home than our rentals. I liked the people, the taxidermy, the cowboy pictures on the wall—and, tucked inside a bathroom, one photo of cowgirls.

I set down my antler mug of decaf that day and commenced eavesdropping. At the big slab table behind me sat five or six white men. On their heads, on the table, sat five or six hats: trucker, cowboy, baseball.

I’d smiled as I walked past, but none met my eye nor smiled back. Perhaps this was the old-school crowd I’d heard about: the unwelcoming, closed-off core of Sisters.

The topic of discussion was deer in the road. There

was enough camo at the table to suggest the roads were not the only source of venison nearby.

I wished I were a hunter, wished I knew whether I had the guts to pull the trigger on a beautiful buck. I grew up raising cattle but did not kill the animals. A mobile slaughter van came around for that.

The conversation had a slow, expansive quality. Everyone quieted when the eldest gentleman spoke. He held forth wonderfully on the subject of a moose in the road, a moose (somewhere, some years ago; this was a story, after all) that would not move no matter what the automobiles and their humans did.

The men moved on to discussing weaponry. One guy described a safety mechanism on his revolver, and was corrected by another explaining the difference between a revolver and a pistol.

There was irritation in both voices. “I know, I know. This was a semiautomatic.”

The safety he described reminded me of the Glock 27 I took out for a spin once. You just kind of squeeze the trigger halfway and that’s “safety off,” you’re ready to shoot.

A law officer friend told me you should never draw a handgun unless you’re prepared to shoot, and you should never shoot unless you’re prepared to kill. At the range, I almost didn’t shoot the little Glock at all. To do so would be to acknowledge that I am capable of killing.

Bang, bang. I was surprised how many shots found their mark.

At the coffeehouse, Nick Drake came on over the stereo. An upset gal in thick makeup talked to a man whose face glowed blue

from his laptop screen, open to Facebook. Coffee-klatsch moms grouped at the counter in their puffy jackets.

The men began what sounded like a well-worn discussion: “We don’t call 911” in an emergency, and “I figure havin’ an unloaded gun around the house is like havin’ a car with no gas.”

But when these fellows imagined guns in the city, in the hands of “urban” people, their attitudes changed. Their Portland didn’t sound like mine, though I lived in Northeast Portland for years. Theirs sounded terrifying, with gang bangers on every corner.

Portland State University was brought up. “Too many _____,” said one man.

“It’s a liberal school,” another agreed.

I imagined what it would feel like to be a _____, stopping for coffee on my way through Sisters, Oregon, to overhear that conversation in a room full of white people.

This was before the Great Emboldening of 2016. Nevertheless, I felt like a trespasser on the men’s territory. As I might do in a foreign country, I sat with my anger and discomfort, silent.

Most of the men spoke

in a “country” dialect familiar across America. Funny, though; I heard one of them use that rural accent to describe growing up not on the farm, not out on the range, but in a city.

My own accent is a mendering Western one, suggesting nowhere in particular. Yet, it occurred to me, perhaps I had just as much right to Central Oregon as the men at the adjoining table.

Perhaps all the _____ did, too.

None of us was the first one here. Indigenous peoples had that honor.

Sisters Coffee feels different these days. Slick prints of coffee beans adorn the walls where the cowboys and cowgirls once hung. The antique desk is gone from the hearthside, replaced by a proper table. I can’t help but miss them.

In Sisters, as in the city I escaped from, the old-schoolers and their traditions may get swamped by newcomers... swamped until there is nothing left to save of the old, nothing that hasn’t already been placed under glass or reproduced on a T-shirt.

It’s an awful thought.

But some of the old ways aren’t worth preserving.

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