

Editorial

What you won't see on November ballot

It now appears as though two measures we were looking forward to seeing on the Nov. 8 general election ballot won't be there after all.

Despite earlier favorable signs, members of the Committee to Keep Eugene Nuclear Free now say they will not have collected enough signatures before today's deadline to place their version of a nuclear-free zone on the ballot. Supporters of a ballot measure to ensure city funding for public cable television access also report that they will come up short on their signature goals.

While these are humbling defeats for supporters of these measures, their non-appearance on the ballot should not indicate that matters are closed, or that the people have spoken. Far from it.

Spokespersons for the Committee to Keep Eugene Nuclear Free claim that there are enough willing people in the community to place their measure, an initiative to amend the city charter, on the ballot. The problem is in a lack of time. The campaign to gather signatures did not start until after a city council meeting on the nuclear free zone last month. There is every reason to believe that this costly tactical error, and not a lack of community interest, is the cause for the initiative's failure.

And to the Keep Eugene Nuclear Free committee's credit, the group is promising to continue their efforts and place their measure on the 1990 ballot.

Supporters of a measure that would dedicate a portion of the cable TV franchise fee paid by TCI Cablevision of Oregon to operation of public access cable TV also said that a lack of campaign workers is responsible for their failure. They will continue working to get their measure on Springfield's city ballot; in Eugene, the council has already decided to fund public cable with the franchise revenues for the 1988-89.

We want to lend our continuing encouragement to these two campaigns, and hope that the public will have a chance to decide on these issues soon.

Meanwhile, yet another measure of interest failed to make the state ballot. Supporters of the Oregon Marijuana Initiative were well below the required number of signatures on their petition, marking the first time in several general elections that the perennial measure, which always fails miserably at the polls, will not be on the ballot. We imagine that these people will continue to pursue their lost cause, but feel that they should probably give up.

Enjoy the great weather, but watch out for fires

High temperatures have been turning up in three digits lately, and the skies are a solid dome of blue. It's a wonderful summer.

It's also a very dry one, though; dry enough to force the Eugene Public Safety Department to close Skinner's Butte, Spencer Butte and the Ridgeline Trail due to the extreme fire danger.

While these areas are favorite recreation spots for Eugeneans, we implore our readers and their friends to respect the Safety Department's decision and stay out of these locations.

Skinner's Butte Park is still open to the public. While you are there, or at any other natural landsite, please be aware of the dry season and be careful with fire.



Commentary

U.S. should take up Iran's deal

After a decade of rhetorical threats and terrorist acts, The Islamic government of Iran is trying to turn nice.

Like the obnoxious barroom drunk, who in a moment of clarity realizes he has been an ass and buys a round for everyone in the house to make up for the trouble he has caused, Iran is suddenly trying to buddy up to the United States

Commentary by
Thomas Prowell

and clean up its image before the rest of the world. It would seem that the attrition of a futile war with Iraq and the destruction of an Iran Air jetliner with its civilian passengers have been sobering enough to cause Iranian leaders to rethink reckless policies.

The drink that Iran wants to buy for the United States is quite the peace offering, too. The second most powerful leader in Iran, Hashemi Rafsanjani, indicated Tuesday that Iran could use its influence in securing the release of nine American hostages held in Lebanon. The catch: the United States would have to pick up the tab for the drink.

The United States currently holds over \$1 billion in Iranian assets, frozen since the 1979 seizure of the American embassy in Tehran. If the Reagan administration were to release these assets, then Iran would work toward releasing the hostages.

It's easy to be suspicious of this troublesome nation and its newly found interest in peace, and the administration has already turned down the offer.

But in this case, it may be better for the White House and State Department to tone their own constant rhetoric, consider the latest Iranian deal, and drink deeply of it. In simple terms, the United States should release at least some of the Iranian assets and bargain for the release of the hostages.

It is not usually the best course to bargain with a terrorist nation, but in this instance, it is the only course. First of all, we know that the Iranians can live up to their word; they have the necessary leverage on the Lebanese kidnappers, mostly pro-Iranian Shiite Moslem extremists, to win the release of the hostages.

And they've proved it historically: three American hostages were released during the infamous Iran-Contra arms pipeline in 1986 and early 1987.

Of course, that whole sordid affair is one big reason the Reagan administration feels it cannot accept the Iranian offer. After that enormous black eye, the President and his staff must be extremely nervous about doing anything that seems as though we were paying ransom for the hostages again.

But a ransom payment is not what is involved in the Iranian offer. At its basic level, they would return something they have of our (citizens) for something we have of theirs (money).

President Jimmy Carter ordered the seizure of about \$9 billion dollars in Iranian assets in 1979, as a response to the takeover of our embassy in Tehran by Moslem students. Most of the assets were handed back over to Iran as part of the release of those hostages in 1980. We still hold \$1 billion in Iranian assets, and an international court in The Hague is considering another \$2.5 billion in dubious Iranian claims.

So the money is not really ours, and we would not be paying a ransom. The Reagan administration's decision to hold the assets would seem as unlawful as the illegal detainment of American citizens, on the international level.

To not use the assets as a bargaining chip also goes against the very reason why they were seized in the first place. President Carter did not order the assets to be held to punish the Iranians, but to force a settlement with them. We

must someday release these assets. Why else do we hold them if not to cut a deal with Iran?

The refusal to deal now with Iran also ignores very crucial developments within that country, and passes on big opportunities for the United States.

The hellfire days of the Khomeini revolution are over. The religious leader is ill and he is most likely near death; his declining influence occurs at the same time as the power of conservative factions grow. Witness their successful urging of restraint after the Iran Air incident. Witness the possible end of the Iran-Iraq war, a conflict Khomeini promised to fight "to the last drop of blood."

The possibility of a new rapprochement between the United States and Iran is there, but the Reagan administration will have to come half way. After Khomeini dies, there could be a power vacuum in Iran. If we want a friendly government to ascend to the top, we have to start choosing sides now and giving them help. Securing the release of frozen assets would be a diplomatic coup for those pro-U.S. conservative factions.

If there is one troubling aspect of the Iranian offer, it is the fact that some of the assets they want released include military equipment and spare parts ordered, but never shipped, by the Shah of Iran before his fall.

Perhaps these military assets should continue to be held, until we are sure that Iran does not plan to continue its war in the Persian Gulf. With negotiation, perhaps a settlement excluding these arms could be worked out.

Regardless, the White House should look more closely at this Iranian peace offering. If we don't raise a drink together with the Iranians now, then American hostages, held in Lebanon for years already, could continue to drink alone for some time to come.

Thomas Prowell is an editorial page editor for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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