

Ontario a good site for prison facility

Last week, it was announced a new medium-security prison would go up in the Eastern Oregon town of Ontario. And as could be expected, some Ontario residents, as well as other Eastern Oregon inhabitants, are extremely miffed.

During the 1989 legislative session, money was appropriated to construct a 550-bed prison, which eventually could be expanded to house as many as 3,000 inmates.

Albany was the first choice for the prison site, but local residents stormed the capitol building to protest the proposal. Boardman, another Eastern Oregon town, was also mentioned as a possibility. Locals shot that proposal down too.

Finally, Ontario, a town right near the Idaho border, was selected.

The prison has polarized the Ontario community. As what usually happens in this sort of situation, no one is ambivalent toward the prison. Either you see it as a boon for the local economy, or you see it as a serious threat.

We support the decision to put the prison in Ontario.

Gov. Goldschmidt has made a big deal about his "prison reform" plan. He managed to get lottery funds released to build the prison, and he is trying to make a sweeping overhaul of the whole state correctional process. The Ontario prison is just one step in his plan.

There are many people in and around Ontario (and no doubt, Idaho as well) who would rather see the prison anywhere else. Most will admit a prison is necessary. They just don't want it in their community.

Prisons are not nice things to have on your doorstep. They tend to scare off local businesses, and drive real estate prices right into the ground. Also, the thought of an escaped prisoner walking around your town is not a pleasant one.

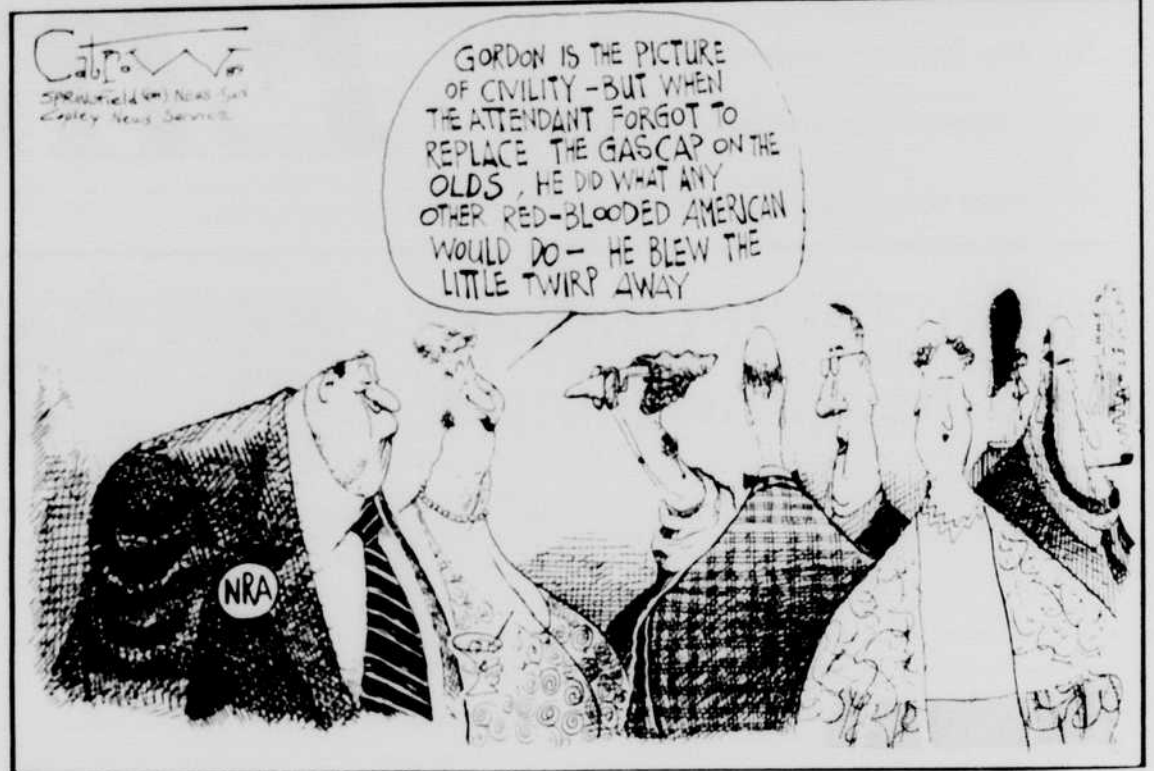
However, prisons are an unfortunate part of our society. If they are needed, they have to be constructed somewhere.

Realistically, the prison needs to be built away from a population center. You can't dump a medium-security facility in the middle of Portland. Not only would the land be too expensive, but more people around the prison would constitute a bigger threat.

Ontario residents worried about security have a right to be. However, the town will most likely become police center for that part of Oregon. Saying Ontario will become one of the safest places to live is trite, but not very far off the mark.

The town's economy will not suffer either. In addition to the jobs the prison itself will bring in, the whole facility should prove to be a boost to the town's businesses.

Nobody wants a prison in their backyard. But if you need to build one, Ontario is a good as site as any.



County police should rethink ATV use

How thoughtful of Honda Motors to donate eight of their 3-wheel all-terrain vehicles to the Marion County Sheriff's Department. The county in Oregon, which includes the city of Salem, plans to use the ATVs for search and rescue operations and for the county jail.

How thoughtful of them to bestow these vehicles on the police force free of charge, considering they used to sell for \$2,000 apiece. They don't sell them anymore, however, because of one minor problem: three-wheelers were banned from the market in April 1988, due to the numerous accidents and fatalities that arose from their use. But hey, just because six people a week died from riding ATVs in 1987, does this necessarily mean they are unsafe?

How thoughtful of Honda to also give \$4.7 million to Karl Oberg of Salem, who suffered brain damage and broken bones in his face after he fell from his ATV. He sued Honda in April and the court agreed with the assertion that the ATV was more to blame for the accident than was the driver.

But the Marion County Sheriff Department seems to be quite grateful for the Honda's gift. They say they will extensively train the officers in the use of ATVs, and that the vehicles will help when roads are too narrow or the snow is too deep for Jeeps. This benefit is legitimate, but the force doesn't seem to take the concerns about safety risks too seriously.

When asked about the proven vulnerability of ATVs, Lt. Jerry Blaylock retorted, "We also use horses, and people fall off them, too. We use planes, and they sometimes fall out of the sky."

That's a nice logical connection, isn't it? Perhaps this guy just can't see past Honda's generosity and thoughtfulness to think rationally.

A national lawyers group, however, is taking the situation more seriously. They are going to court Monday to seek the release of documents obtained in the Oberg case against Honda. A protective order in the case required Oberg's lawyers to return all documents obtained from Honda, and they are prohibited from telling the public what they discovered about ATV safety hazards. According to Arthur Bryant, the director of the group, "What these companies want to keep secret is exactly what the public needs to know."

In addition, Oberg's lawyer, who has already seen the classified documents, had this reassuring comment about ATVs: "They are death machines."

But the Marion County police aren't listening. They refuse to wait to see what may be disclosed should the documents be released Monday. They have accepted these "death machines" with open arms.

How thoughtful of them.

Letters

Misread

I have a few words in response to both Richard Noyes' and Myles Brand's comments regarding the demonstrators at the science complex dedication last Sunday. Both writers interpreted the rude, sometimes offensive behavior of several demonstrators as an example of an infringement of free speech.

Perhaps so. And yet to see free speech as the core issue is to misread the tenor of the afternoon. The issue seems more appropriately to be one of priorities.

Students did not disrupt a legitimate forum of "free-speech." They disrupted a reflexive, largely self-congratulatory formal affair. In other words, influential politicians and University administrators came to Eugene not to exercise their "free-speech" rights

on integral problems; instead they came to dedicate the construction of a building.

Their thoughts on such an "issue" can hardly be construed to be on the same footing as clear cutting our forests and finally offering long-overdue medical coverage for our GTFs. Indeed, the proceedings were disturbing precisely because they symbolized how University and community issues seem not to be on the same discursive level as this type of academic officialism.

And so, along with Brand and Noyes, I too felt insulted. Only I was insulted by a University which tends to maintain the decorum of a ceremonial event rather than engage compassionately with the pain and distress of its student body.

Lou Caton
Eugene

Refuse

An open letter to Mark Hatfield and Neil Goldschmidt, Oct. 15, 1989.

As a scientist and a concerned citizen, it is my opinion that the forests of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest have been substantially overcut and mismanaged. Past and present policies are causing excessive erosion, threatening important watersheds, and endangering a variety of species of life.

Your presence at the dedication of the new science complex at the University of Oregon suggests that you care about science. Yet you seem uninterested in the overwhelming scientific evidence that mismanagement of our public forests is harming important

ecosystems.

I am disappointed that you have allowed economics and politics to become more important than the health of the Earth. Because of this, I refused to take part in Sunday's dedication ceremonies.

Joseph Minato
Geology

Difference

I'm a graduate teaching fellow. I have no health insurance because I can't afford any on my stipend. I support several environmental causes. I believe in most of what that activists believe in, but there is a world of difference between arguably justifiable civil disobedience for a good cause, and what happened in Willamette Hall on Sunday.

Jeering a freely elected U.S. Senator infringes on his free speech, and undermines the respect due a democratically elected leader.

Suppose the shoe were on the other foot, and a group of lumberjacks shouted down a "politically correct" Senator? Wouldn't that be labeled bully-boy tactics?

It's a slippery slope too. If jeering Hatfield is O.K., why not dump sawdust on the Senator to really drive the point home? Or little pieces of wood. Or not so little pieces of wood. Or why not rev up a chain saw whenever he begins to speak?

Beginning to sound like a banana republic? What happened Sunday was disgraceful and embarrassing.

David Fashena
Biology