

Mandate for change looking the same

President-elect Bill Clinton ran his campaign around a mandate for change, claiming he would shake up Washington's business-as-usual policies.

But if Clinton follows through with his plan to appoint Sen. Lloyd Bentsen as treasury secretary, the only change we'll see is Bentsen's signature, not Nicholas Brady's, on the bottom of U.S. currency.

Bentsen isn't necessarily a bad choice. He has a solid reputation as the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. He is a veteran lawmaker and is believed to relate well with the various factions of Congress. Conventional wisdom says you want someone familiar with federal taxes and the budget deficit, which Bentsen does.

And Bentsen, a conservative Democrat, will also ease the fears of businessmen across the country — many of whom worried Clinton would appoint an anti-business maverick. Rest assured, Bentsen will not leave businesses out to dry.

At issue here is the will of the voters. Sixty percent of the nation voted for "change" — as the popular buzzword went. Whether it be Perot or Clinton, voters wanted a break from traditional government and from the constant bickering between Republicans and Democrats. Even Bush claimed he would shake things up in his second term as president.

Clinton was elected for his promise of change. But Bentsen is anything but different.

But Lloyd Bentsen is a traditional Washington insider. He has served in the Senate for 20 years and has worked under every president since Richard Nixon. As chairman of the finance committee, he was subject to special-interest lobbying and backdoor dealing.

Clinton said he was going to shake things up, but it looks more like he's slowing things down. He has to prove his commitment to change is genuine by appointing an expert from outside the traditional Washington sphere.

Another factor to consider is the effect of Bentsen's leaving the Senate. He could actually do more harm than good for Clinton. As finance committee chairman, he has jurisdiction over such issues as Social Security policy, health care, trade and welfare — all crucial Clinton interests.

And if Bentsen were to give up his Senate seat, it would likely be captured by a Republican, thereby upsetting Clinton's Senate balance. Given Clinton's insistence on increasing the number of Democrats in Congress, losing Bentsen, one of the more influential Democratic senators, would be painful.

Again, making Bentsen treasury secretary is not a disastrous move. He probably will work well with both parties and will ensure a strong presence within the Clinton administration. But Clinton was elected for his promise of change, and Bentsen is anything but different.



OPINION

Rude cyclists make all look bad



Dave Sez

David Strother

I'm a bicyclist. I used to say that with no shame. Along with the pleasure of cycling itself, I've felt pride as a member of the earth-friendly community of cycle commuters.

But when some members of any community behave inappropriately, all members suffer the consequences. And today in Eugene, several times a day, every day of the week, I find my head hanging low in embarrassment and humiliation, shamed and disgusted by the discourteous and just plain rude actions of my peers.

You know who you are.

You routinely race through red lights or stop signs or both, flying across in front of traffic. You don't use a headlight at night, you ride with your hands in your pockets, or you carry someone on your handlebars. Sometimes you ride the wrong way down a one-way street, or you fly down a grassy slope, jump a curb and run a fast diagonal across the intersection. You're fast, you're cool, you're in control, and you use pedestrians for slalom poles, zipping and twisting down crowded sidewalks.

In a world of perfect justice, sooner or later you'd crack up, break a few ribs or a few teeth, learn your lesson and start cycling more responsibly. But ours isn't a perfect world, and you get to keep on being rude, stupid and dangerous. And the rest of the cycling community absorbs the costs of your self-indulgence, because all cyclists end up getting tarred with the same brush and we lose credibility among motorists and pedestrians alike.

Yes, there is a serious courtesy problem in the Eugene bicycling community. And because this is America, where law enforcement so deeply permeates our political and popular culture that it is fast becoming our national religion, it's not surprising we've chosen to deal with the cycling courtesy problem by treating it as a law enforcement problem.

I don't profess to know how

to make rude people into nice people, but the law-enforcement approach is not the solution. Law enforcement certainly has an important role, but as it's currently being applied to this problem, it is arbitrary, ineffective and counterproductive.

Take the case of the University Office of Public Safety and its ballyhooed ban on bicycling on campus sidewalks. Whoever came up with this one apparently lives in a simple, tidy fantasy world where all the bad cyclists use sidewalks and all the good cyclists use streets, and if you move the bad cyclists to the streets then they'll become good cyclists.

Get real! In the first place, rude and selfish cyclists aren't likely to abide by silly little rules. But more to the point, the problem here is reckless cycling. It has nothing to do with sidewalks. Those inconsiderate and dangerous cyclists who menace the sidewalks are still dangerous and inconsiderate after they've been moved to the street.

In fact, if "public safety" really is the concern, then this policy truly is counterproductive; to the extent that enforcement has been effective, the dispersed body of University cyclists has been forcibly re-concentrated onto the few campus streets. So, the pedestrian's most frightening and dangerous gauntlet, 13th Avenue, has experienced a sharp increase in the density of cyclists, both good and bad, swooping, zinging and gawking. Now 13th Avenue really is dangerous. Way to go, public safety.

For rules to be effective they have to fit reality, which is subtle and complex. Reckless cyclists on crowded sidewalks should be ticketed, not for riding on the sidewalk *per se*, but for riding *recklessly* on a crowded sidewalk. Effective enforcement would differentiate between the zany cyclist who zooms along the narrow, busy paths around Deady Hall, and the friend of mine, a long-time cautious cyclist, ticketed for slowly coasting 15 yards from the Knight Library to Kincaid Street down a deserted late afternoon sidewalk.

Then there is the Eugene police department's laughable

For each truly reckless cyclist officers land, they pull in about five others for the most petty and asinine of 'violations.'

"crackdown" on bicycle violations. If you ever find yourself doubting justice is arbitrary, go spend a morning in traffic court watching the hundreds of poor souls hauled in by EPD's widely cast violation net.

This is largely a case of preying on the easy target. The most flagrant and dangerous violators are zippy, speedy and hard to catch, so the officers content themselves with bagging the slow-moving cyclists, who ironically tend to also be the most cautious and courteous. For each truly reckless cyclist officers land, they pull in about five others for the most petty and asinine of "violations."

This predatorial style of law enforcement again turns out to be counterproductive, eroding respect for the law and incurring the contempt of cyclists by teaching us that bicycle laws, meaningful in theory, have in practice been reduced to stupid annoyances and petty police power trips. Way to go, EPD.

The sad and ironic thing is that there is nothing in these institutions or processes that seeks to make the discourteous cyclist aware of his or her discourtesy. We sail right past the mostly educational essence of the problem.

Oh, well, given the half-hearted and misdirected efforts of OPS and EPD, the odds of getting caught are still probably fairly low, even for the most egregious of violators. This probably means, sadly enough, that you can feel pretty free to continue to cycle in your inconsiderate and self-indulgent ways, much to the detriment of those of us who want to promote both cycling and respectful and decent cycling habits.

David Strother writes a monthly column for the Emerald.

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