

GUEST EDITORIAL

FROM THE EAST OREGONIAN

Getting real about marijuana

As President Donald Trump mulls his next choice for U.S. attorney general, we hope he chooses someone with a realistic view of legalized marijuana in Oregon and other states.

Billy Williams, the U.S. attorney for Oregon, will be a key player in the attorney general's future decisions. Williams will chair the Attorney General's Marijuana Working Group. His appointment was announced by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein on the same day that Trump ousted Jeff Sessions as attorney general.

Although it's not why Trump dumped him, Sessions vehemently opposed marijuana use. Marijuana remains illegal under federal law, but the Obama administration had told federal agencies to back off enforcement in states that legalized its use. Sessions rescinded that directive.

Sessions is now gone, recreational use of marijuana has been legalized in 10 states and medical marijuana in 33 states, and Trump has signaled he might support lighter federal enforcement.

Williams has been a vocal critic of Oregon's approach to legal cannabis. His office has prosecuted people who tried to ship marijuana out of Oregon, which is illegal under state law as well as federal law. He criticizes Oregon's oversupply of legal marijuana, which he contends has refueled the black market. He says the state's cannabis regulations and recordkeeping have been inadequate.

His concerns are legitimate. But, like it or not, legal marijuana is a reality and it is past time for the U.S. Department of Justice to recognize that.

It is ludicrous that the federal government still classifies marijuana in the same category of dangerous drugs as heroin and LSD, and that Congress has been loath to support federal research into the medicinal uses of cannabis.

It is disruptive to the economy that federal law blocks legal cannabis businesses in Oregon, and other states, from many of the banks, credit-card processing and other financial avenues that other legitimate businesses use. For financial institutions that do handle marijuana accounts, the resulting paperwork can be almost prohibitively expensive.

Cannabis remains largely a cash-and-carry business — from buyer purchases to payment of taxes — and those large amounts of cash make businesses and tax collectors a target for thieves. Other businesses also are wary of working with cannabis firms for fear that federal law enforcement will prosecute them for "aiding, abetting and conspiring" in marijuana activities.

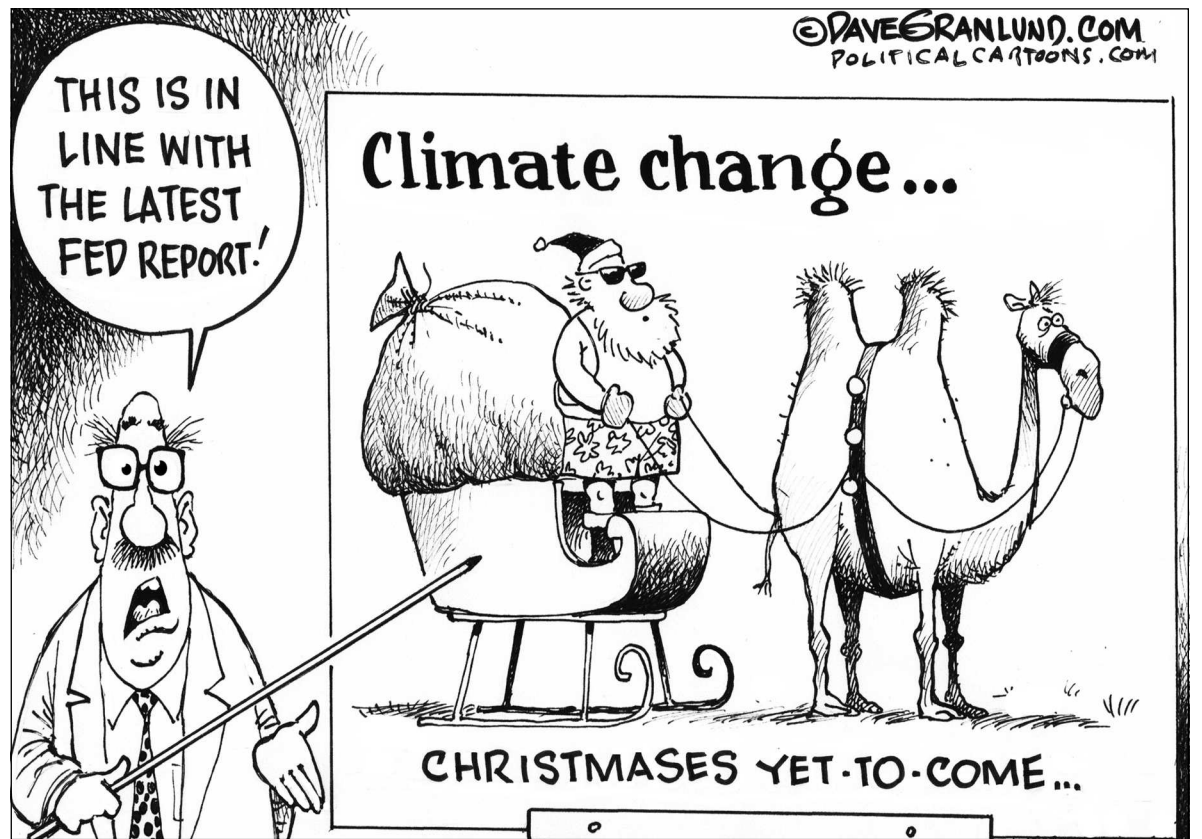
The cannabis industry in Oregon is maturing. Because the market is saturated with cannabis itself and shops selling it, prices have fallen by half — or more — and outlets gradually are consolidating. Business experts say these consolidations are necessary if local ownership is to remain viable when marijuana is legalized nationally and tobacco firms and other multinational corporations jump into the market.

America is headed that way. Almost two-thirds of Americans support legalizing marijuana.

At the Nov. 6 election, the rural Oregon towns of Ontario, Joseph, Klamath Falls, Gates, Sumpter and Clatskanie either rejected or rescinded prohibitions against selling recreational marijuana. Numerous other cities and counties voted to tax marijuana sales. Nationally, Michigan became the first Midwestern state to legalize recreational marijuana. In the South, Missouri approved medical marijuana.

Dozens of pot bills will be introduced in Congress next year, some with bipartisan support. During the next decade, the overwhelming majority of states are projected to have some form of legalized marijuana.

Yet the U.S. Department of Justice remains woefully behind the times.



Gun advocates should pay cost of guards

Some people believe that I reject not only Donald Trump but his every word and policy. For example, that I disagree with denying refuge to victims of violence as inhumane and un-American and a violation of federal and international law. Or that I think our president threatens our very democracy each time he derides other branches of government or denigrates a press that holds government accountable. But to think I disagree with Trump about everything would just be wrong.

Since the Parkland school shooting, I've considered Trump's proposal to place armed guards in every school and realized Trump is right. With armed guards at our schools, we can protect the rights of everyone who wants to carry a firearm AND the rights of people who wish to be protected from such people.

Trump's proposal is not minor. Following the Stoneman Douglas shooting, Trump declared that the school needed 150 guards to protect approximately 3,100 students, about one guard per 20 students. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that approximately 76.5 million students currently attend American schools, kindergarten through graduate school. At Trump's proposal of one guard per 20 students, we'll need 3,820,000 guards to protect our children from the risk of becoming the next school carnage.

It's not really clear how we'll pay for the guards needed to protect our children from Second Amendment devotees gone bad. First, there's the

My Voice ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Morrison

question of pay. The average starting teacher earns around \$38,000. Certainly an armed guard, responsible for the safety of students and staff, who arrives early, stays late and attends after-school activities, should earn as much. So the annual cost of Trump's school safety program would be more than \$145 billion. (For perspective, Trump's plan would require 118 guards to protect La Grande's 2,355 students, at an annual cost of more than \$4 million).

You might think \$145 billion is a huge figure. But this is just a cost of protecting children in a world where firearms cannot be restricted.

Clearly, few schools could afford to hire guards. But this really isn't a difficult question. Guards who protect students from shooters are really just protecting the Second Amendment. By preventing even more massacres, the federal government would eliminate the Second Amendment's harshest crit-

ics and the strongest proponents of gun control. A tax dollar toward the salary of an armed school guard is a tax dollar spent in defense of the Second Amendment.

Concerns about cost shouldn't be an issue. Trump has promised \$12 billion to compensate farmers and ranchers for the costs of his trade wars. What's another \$145 billion for the safety of our children and protection of Second Amendment rights?

But the cost of protecting students while defending the Second Amendment is hardly one that all Americans should be expected to bear. We face an epidemic of shootings by, well, shooters. And because gun advocates are the ones who resist any restrictions that might reign in those shooters, it only makes sense for them to pay the true cost of their unrestricted right to bear arms.

School safety, at \$145 billion per year. There really are things that Trump and I can agree on.

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THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896
(USPS 299-260)

The Observer reserves the right to adjust subscription rates by giving prepaid and mail subscribers 30 days notice. Periodicals postage paid at La Grande, Oregon 97850. Published Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (except Dec. 25) by Western Communications Inc., 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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Send address changes to:
The Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850
Periodicals postage paid at La Grande, Oregon 97850

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