

GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE CORVALLIS GAZETTE-TIMES

Oregon voters should decide on death penalty

A bill before the state Legislature that would dramatically curtail the cases in which the death penalty could be applied passed the state Senate on Tuesday and now heads for the House.

But in the House, the bill might well run into a major roadblock: Speaker of the House Tina Kotek has said in the past she believes such a major revision in Oregon law should go to the state's voters. She said last week that she would need to read the latest version of the measure, Senate Bill 1013, before making a final decision — but it certainly is true that the speaker has the power to stop a bill from advancing in the Legislature.

Here's a case where Kotek is right: This is something that the state's citizens deserve a chance to consider.

To be fair, Senate Bill 1013 is a well-crafted and clever bit of legislation. The bill redefines the crime of aggravated murder (the only crime in Oregon statutes that can be punished by death), so that it includes acts of terror that kill two or more people. The bill has been revised so that it includes two other instances in which a defendant could be sentenced to death: cases in which the victim was under the age of 14 or in which a defendant killed another inmate while serving time for a murder conviction.

Other offenses that currently qualify as aggravated murder under state law, such as killing someone during the course of a rape or robbery, would be reclassified as another type of murder, and the maximum punishment for those would be life in prison without the possibility of parole.

The proposed legislation also would change one of the four questions juries must decide when considering whether to impose a death sentence. Oregon jurors now must determine whether a person guilty of aggravated murder is at risk of being a danger in the future. The bill would remove that question, which is fine: It's an unfair and unscientific duty to ask jurors to tackle.

The bill passed the Senate on Tuesday on a largely party-line 18-9 vote.

For a bill that has drawn a measure of attention this session, the floor debate in the Senate on Tuesday was remarkably restrained: Only Sen. Floyd Prozanski, the influential Eugene Democrat who's led the charge on the bill, spoke.

The main argument opponents have raised against the bill — and the very point that Kotek is pondering — is that such a major change to state law on capital punishment should be referred to voters.

And that's what the Legislature should do.

The verdict of Oregon voters over the last century on capital punishment has been mixed: Capital punishment was outlawed by voters in 1914 and then reenacted in 1978. Three years later, the state Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty was unconstitutional, paving the way for a 1984 initiative in which voters reaffirmed capital punishment.

Since then, though, the topic has been rarely revisited in Oregon. After then-Gov. John Kitzhaber imposed a moratorium on capital punishment in 2011, he made a halfhearted effort to goad the Legislature into action, but the proposal didn't gain any traction. Gov. Kate Brown has said that she plans to continue the moratorium but hasn't taken much of an active role on the issue.

Oregon hasn't executed a prisoner since May 1997; the state has 32 men and one woman on death row.

It's very possible that the opinions of Oregonians have changed since that 1984 initiative, as the national debate over the death penalty has taken intriguing twists and turns in the 35 years since then. But there's only one way to find out for sure. The Legislature should let voters decide.



Your views

Roberts: Especially grateful on Memorial Day

To the Editor:
I want to thank all the military and law enforcement men and women who put their lives on the line every day, and all those who have made sacrifices for our freedom and for keeping our communities safe. It is greatly appreciated beyond words.

May our gracious and loving heavenly father bless each of you and your families and keep you safe in his care, this is my prayer.

I pray that each and every one has a safe Memorial Day holiday.

Janice Roberts
La Grande

Nicholson and Crayton: Sarah Swanson, exceptional teacher, retires

To the Editor:
So often those who do the most in our community go unnoticed. They do their deeds without fame and under the radar. We feel it is important to point out one unique individual who has devoted more than 30 years of her life to the

children of La Grande. Sarah Swanson began her career as a kindergarten teacher at Willow Elementary School in 1989. She spends countless hours devoted to her students both in and outside of the classroom. You will see her at T-ball games, birthday parties, musicals, dance recitals and many other events as an observer and always showing her support.

On Sunday morning her car is parked in the empty school lot as she works hours preparing lessons to meet the needs of her students. She spends vacations working on student portfolios and records, preparing individualized lessons, and contacting parents. She has devoted her life to her students, making sure they receive the best education they deserve. Miss Swanson puts the needs of every child above all else.

Sarah is a listener and puts everyone at ease with her smile. Her soft voice and gentle ways make her an exceptional kindergarten teacher for youngsters just beginning their educational journey. She encourages her students to explore using hands-on

experiences that make lasting memories.

Miss Swanson is retiring at the end of this school year. It has been a pleasure and an honor to be her colleague and friend. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Sarah for her endless patience, caring manner, motivation and persistence that inspire children to be their best. We wish you pleasant days in your retirement!

Lisa Nicholson
and Bernie Crayton
La Grande

Dearing: Illegal aliens are not Oregonians

To the Editor:
I oppose granting driver's licenses to "undocumented residents." Government documents given to illegal aliens tend to legitimize their presence. We absolutely should not encourage, yet alone allow, them to stay.

This country belongs to its citizens only. No alien has the right to come here and take a share of our limited resources. No alien has the right to break into our country any more than they have the right to break into our homes.

In April 2013, Senate Bill 833 passed, which would have offered driver's licenses to illegal aliens. A referendum referred the bill to the ballot as Measure 88. Oregon voters rejected illegal-immigrant licenses by a margin of 2-1.

Now HB 2015 has been introduced in defiance of the will of the voters. A statewide poll finds that Oregonians still overwhelmingly oppose granting driver's licenses to illegal aliens.

Worse, an "emergency" clause has been attached to HB 2015 that would prevent opponents of the bill from blocking its implementation through another citizens' veto referendum, even though they have the constitutional right to do so.

The Legislature should represent and honor the will of the citizens of Oregon and defeat this measure. Legislators and all state officials represent the citizens of Oregon only, not the citizens of foreign countries.

Those favoring granting driver's licenses to illegal aliens should nevertheless respect the will of the majority.

John S. Dearing
Corvallis

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.
U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. Phone: 202-224-3753. Fax: 202-228-3997. Website: merkley.senate.gov/. Email: merkley.senate.gov/contact. Portland office: OneWorldTrade Center,

121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; email elizabeth_scheeler@merkley.senate.gov.
U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510-3703; phone: 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. Website: wyden.senate.gov. Email: wyden.senate.gov/contact. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La

Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; email kathleen_cathey@wyden.senate.gov.
U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2185 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515-0001, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Website: walden.house.gov/. Email: walden.house.gov/e-mail-greg. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, email jorden.noyes@mail.house.gov.

State Sen. William S. Hansell (29th District/Pendleton): Salem office: 900 Court St. NE., S-423, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1729. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/hansell. Email: sen.billhansell@oregonlegislature.gov.
State Rep. Greg Barreto (58th District/Cove): Salem office: 900 Court St. NE., H-384, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1458. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/barreto. Email: rep.gregbarreto@oregonlegislature.gov.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50
You can save up to 34% off the single-copy price with home delivery.
Call **541-963-3161** to subscribe.

Stopped account balances less than \$5 will be refunded upon request.

Subscription rates per month:
By carrier.....\$11.80
By mail, all other U.S.\$15



A division of
Western Communications Inc.

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)

COPYRIGHT © 2019 THE OBSERVER
The Observer retains ownership and copyright protection of all staff-prepared news copy, advertising copy, photos and news or illustrations. They may not be reproduced without explicit prior approval.

Phone: **541-963-3161**
Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-422-3110
Fax: 541-963-7804
Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com
Website: www.lagrandeobserver.com
Street address: 1406 Fifth St., La Grande

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

STAFF

Regional publisher.....Karrine Brogotti
Regional circulation directorKelli Craft
News clerk.....Lisa Lester Kelly
Sports editorRonald Bond
Reporter.....Dick Mason
ClassifiedsDevi Mathson
Customer service repSharon Magnuson

Home delivery advisorAmanda Fredrick
Customer service repMollie Lynch
Advertising representativeKaren Fye
Advertising representativeJuli Bloodgood
Advertising representativeAmy Horn
Graphic design supervisor.....Dorothy Kautz
Graphic designCheryl Christian