

OUR VIEW

Vet bill sidelined for now

Oregon veterinarians apparently won't begin participating in the state's prescription drug monitoring program any time soon.

It's disappointing because some people do abuse drugs prescribed for their pets and a House bill might have helped prevent that. But there were concerns about the bill.

House Bill 4129, which would have allowed the state Veterinary Medical Examining Board to opt into the program, was, presumably, too complicated for lawmakers to deal with in the short, 35-day session of the Oregon Legislature. Fortunately, Rep. Cheri Helt, R-Bend, who was a chief sponsor of the measure, says she plans to try again in 2021.

At least one veterinary group, the Oregon Veterinary Medical Association, continues to have concerns about the measure. Among other things, says OVMA's executive director Glenn Kolb, computer programs designed for veterinarians and those used to track prescription drugs aren't compatible, making the transfer of information from one system to another difficult.

Meanwhile, Kolb says, his association spends time helping its members learn to recognize when human pet owners are seeking dangerous medications for their own use. It also offers advice on relieving an animal's pain without using opioids at all. It's part of education efforts that also include classes about reducing the use of antibiotics.

It may be that the OVMA will remain lukewarm, at best, about joining the state's prescription drug monitoring program, but that shouldn't put a damper on the effort to include veterinarians in it. And, in fact, the state Veterinary Medical Examining Board is working to improve its rules governing the way veterinarians handle the drugs they dispense.

Yet education and tighter rules don't address the full problem. The state's prescription drug monitoring program remains the critical missing piece, for without it the task of tracking drug abuse becomes nearly impossible. Helt knows that. That's why she plans to try again next year.

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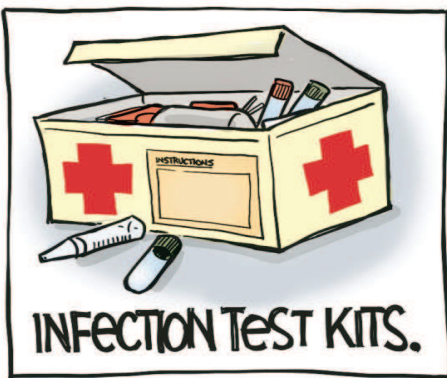
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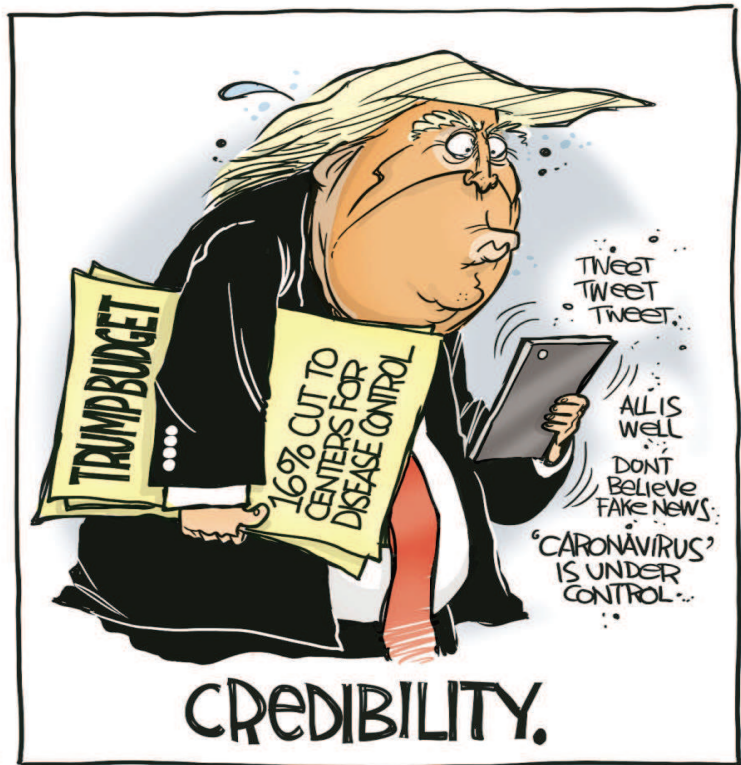
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... IN SHORT SUPPLY...



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The Blue Mountain Humane Association in La Grande has been a troubled nonprofit for years. The organization recently has undergone major changes to its board, adding more members, electing a new president, Beverly Beach, and bringing on a shelter manager, Erin Davis.

The Observer started sniffing around for what the local humane association was up to after rumors arose about goings-on at its shelter at 3212 Highway 30. One asserted police were involved in some vague action at the shelter (didn't happen). Another was about a big changeover at the board.

The Observer in a Feb. 20 article reported the board re-do and cracked the lid on past problems at the shelter, including a mention of how the previous director used the place as his home.

Beach said, "We're moving forward here," referring to the association and shelter's sketchy past.

She made that statement Wednesday, Feb. 19, in The Observer newsroom. Beach and Association Secretary Bri Troutman marched into the newspaper and raised a ruckus about the story reporter Sabrina Thompson was working on. The story essentially dismissed rumors and reported the board changes.

Beach said the all-volunteer board is striving to improve operations at the animal shelter. We wanted to report what that entailed. Beach —



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK
PHIL WRIGHT

while in The Observer newsroom — told Thompson she would have access to the shelter for photos of the work there as well as to other board members after their meeting Monday.

That did not happen. Thompson went to the shelter to pursue the story, but Beach denied her any access and refused to answer questions. She also said the rest of the board would not comment.

We pushed for comment anyway. The lone board member to respond, Mary Horn, refused to say anything.

The notion of talking to the public only after the dust settles during a time of change is wrong-headed in the face of community members wanting to know more. Clamming up rather than opening up creates the very space rumors need to flourish. The Blue Mountain Humane Association board seems grossly unaware it operates in a small community. You think social media is fast? The original social media networks of small-town gossip remain at least as fast.

The folks running the association may mean well, but shutting out The Observer means shutting out the very public the association seeks to build trust with.

And throwing up a wall of silence

did not stop the paper from publishing a second story that relied on more details from the association's own meeting minutes and tax documents about its finances and disagreement between the board and the shelter's director at the time.

But the nonprofit is not the only player here. Union County pays the Blue Mountain Humane Association \$50,000 a year to house and care for animals the sheriff's office brings to the shelter. County Commissioner Matt Scarfo is right in his assessment that open lines of communication the shelter is establishing will be important to ensuring the previous issues do not happen again.

"I have heard they have been cleaning things up," he said.

But that is hardly any reassurance about how the shelter is operating with public money. Given the local humane association's track record, the county owes it to the public to not just hear "they have been cleaning things up" but to check it out and ensure the situation is improving.

The county controls the purse strings in this deal, so it certainly can make sure the public money it spends to care for strays is indeed going to that end.

The Blue Mountain Humane Association also needs to be straight with the public and transparent about how it is improving operations.

Nothing is stopping that sort of a lack of common sense.

Your views

Bill Miller will bring needed change to sheriff's office

After nearly 30 years of working in law enforcement, I retired as the lieutenant from the La Grande Police Department in 2017. I have lived and served in this community my entire career, and I care deeply about the citizens of Union County. I do not take the endorsement of a candidate lightly. Over the past several years, I have personally observed many internal struggles within the Union County Sheriff's Office, and I believe it is time for a change in leadership.

A sheriff must be a person with integrity and high ethical standards, who leads by example. He must accept responsibility and embrace the concept

of holding himself to a higher standard. It is important that he cares about the people he leads and values what they have to offer to the agency.

A sheriff should strive to be an effective leader who believes in and supports his subordinates. He must work hard to address issues and take steps to increase morale. When these things happen, employees learn to believe in his leadership and will support him and work hard for him. This will equate to better service to the citizens of Union County.

Having rank does not make you a leader, nor does it give you the respect of others. You must work hard to earn that respect. I believe Bill Miller has the ability to make the changes that are needed. Bill knows firsthand what the

issues are within the sheriff's office, and he is motivated to take action. Bill has served in many positions of leadership in law enforcement and elsewhere. He is a well-rounded individual with many skills and abilities. He has served his community with honesty and integrity for many years. He believes in transparency and will work hard to gain the trust of his subordinates and those in the community.

Bill will do the right thing, even when nobody is watching. He will serve the citizens of Union County with professionalism and honor. Therefore, I am endorsing Bill Miller as the next sheriff of Union County.

Derick Reddington
Cove

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