

Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Seventeen-year-old Weston-McEwen senior Bailey Munck testifies remotely from Pendleton on March 25, 2021, for Senate Bill 649, known as Bailey's Bill. The bill increases penalties for criminal sexual contact with an underage victim when the defendant is the victim's teacher.

Our View

Bill should not be used as political pawn

In the end, it is a shame a few Oregon lawmakers were forced to resort to a little-known, and hardly used, rule to get a bill that addresses criminal sexual contact off the ice and moving in the Legislature.

The legislation, Senate Bill 649 — also known as Bailey's Bill — boosts penalties for criminal sexual contact with an underage victim if the offender is the victim's teacher. The existing law delivers harsher penalties to a coach caught in the same situation as a teacher. The bill, named after Weston-McEwen student Bailey Munck, received easy approval in the Oregon Senate before it traveled to the House where, for reasons not clear, it stalled at the House Judiciary Committee.

The chair of the committee, Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Clackamas, "indicated" she was not going to give the bill a hearing, which prompted nine members of the judicial committee to invoke House Rule 8.20. The rule stipulates if a majority of committee members request a hearing in writing, the chair must set up a hearing within five days.

That set up a hearing for Tuesday, May 18, with another on May 24, along with a work session on the bill that same day.

Bynum's reluctance to move the bill may be connected to political brinkmanship, where it was going to be used as a bargaining chip regarding other legislation. Hopefully, that is incorrect. If it is not, then that should give readers — not to mention voters — pause.

A lawmaker should not regulate a bill that addresses a subject as sensitive and as important as criminal sexual contact to a mere chess piece on a broader political chess board.

The lawmakers who pushed for the hearing should be lauded. Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Milwaukie, who navigated the bill through the Senate, also deserve praise.

Bailey's Bill should not have ended up stuck in limbo in a committee of the House. The bill, once it reached the House, should have been acted on immediately.

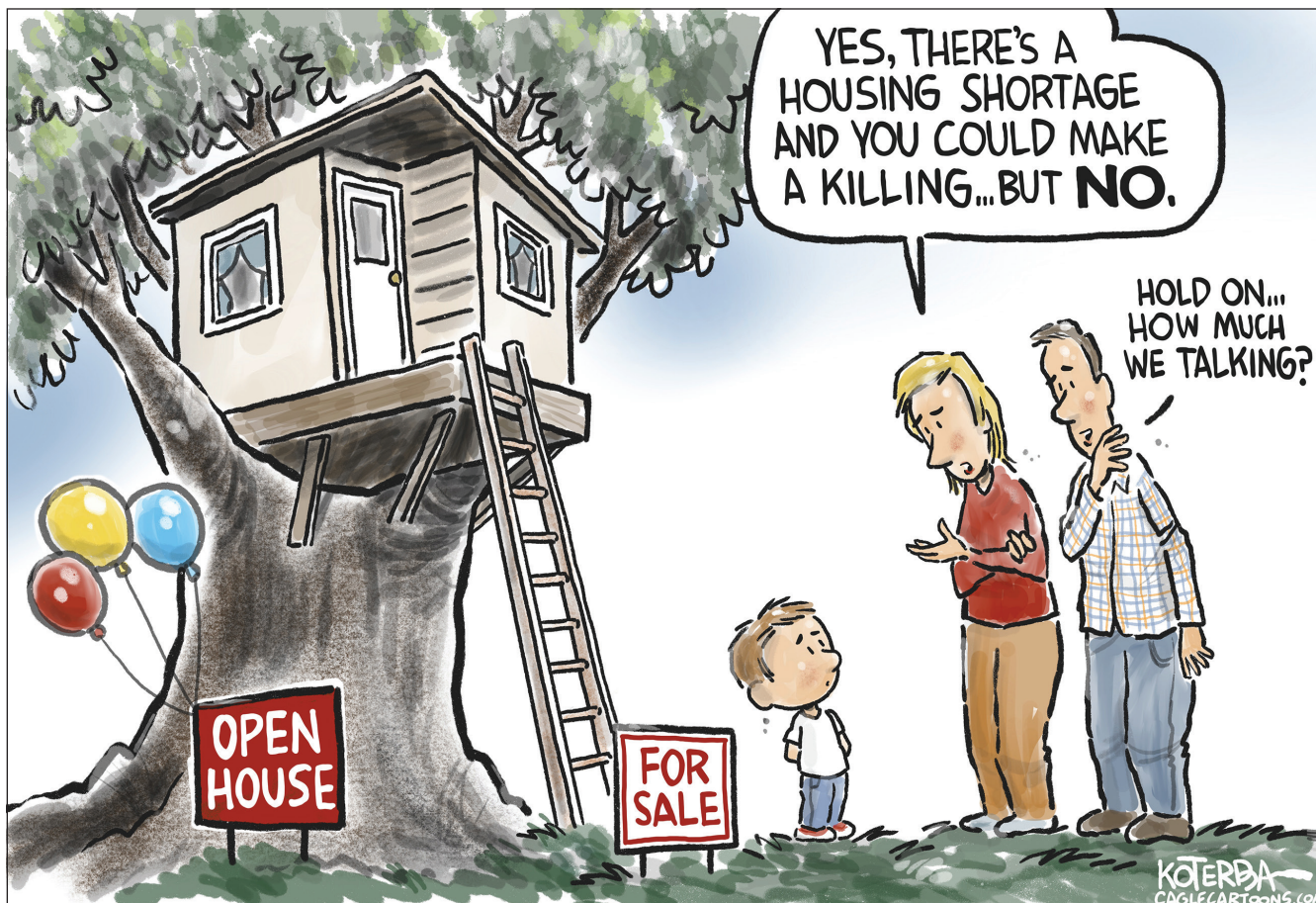
That it was not is troubling.

The broader issue, though, is appropriate punishment for those who prey on our children. This bill will fix a glaring hole that seemingly gives instructors a lighter punishment when they, in fact, should receive the same penalty as coaches. It will close a dangerous loophole.

The other key piece of the bill is it has wide, bipartisan support. Currently, such unity among lawmakers is rare and when it occurs should be advanced as quickly as possible.

This time lawmakers did the right thing and voters should be pleased.

And Bynum's constituents ought to have a word with her about her actions.



My Voice

Our freedom requires responsibility, not home arsenals



EVELYN SWART JOSEPH

When referring to the early colonial days, some people conclude that since the colonists had to fight to gain independence from the tyranny of the king of England, patriots now must have home arsenals to fight our current government. They believe that the Second Amendment to the Constitution requires that there be no limits to the amount of armor they collect and prepare to use.

There is a different way to think of the Second Amendment and the way it relates to the Declaration of Independence. As an exercise toward understanding "freedom" on one Fourth of July, a group of us reenacted the colonists' deliberation for the Declaration of Independence. We were assigned opposing positions, those agreeing to separate from English rule and those who were reluctant to change the status quo. As the group read the historical document, we noticed that the phrases at the beginning of the document were, and still are, used frequently:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

The Fourth of July group read through what seemed a never-ending list of grievances against the king of England. Sure, the colonists were against paying taxes to the king because they suffered extreme abuses by the dictator king. The king's soldiers were the controlling power in the colonies even during times of peace. Just read the long list of abuses listed in the Declaration of Independence and you will appreciate our freedom today.

The Declaration of Independence is a powerful reminder of the reasons our founders wrote the Constitution as they did. Those ideas or concepts form a contract structuring the U.S. as a free country. We citizens are free from tyranny and authoritarianism because the patriots who designed our Constitution made it a "government of the people, by the people and for the people."

As a result, the lives we live today are far different from the oppression the colonists experienced. We have civilian control of our government. We vote for our representatives and let them know what we want in our

country. Our representatives raise taxes to maintain the government services we want or need. At least that is the way our government is designed.

We disagree with one another, but the majority rules. The majority rules by a system of Law and Order that is dependent on the loyalty, responsibility and education of the people. But, a country is successful only when a majority of its citizens believe in those basic foundational rules and accept their citizenship responsibilities.

I believe that by understanding the reasoning of the Constitution builders, we should have no need to be suspicious, fearful or ready to fight our government. With a system of Law and Order that supports freedom, men and women of goodwill have no need to be armed with high-powered military equipment and ammunition to protect their homes, property, families. Muskets were enough for the patriots in 1776 and they ought to be enough for patriots in 2021.

Freedom requires responsibility, not home arsenals.

Evelyn Swart is a retired educator who lives in Joseph and believes education is an important solution for understanding the issues we face.

Letter

It is time to part ways with big government in Salem

I read with interest and totally agree with Mike McCarter's Other Views column in the May 1 edition of The Observer.

For way too long rural Oregonians have lived under the thumb of a Democratic governor and Legislature that design the rules and laws to fit the metropolitan scene, totally ignoring the lifestyle of ranchers, loggers and citizens in rural Northeastern Oregon. As former Oregon Rep. Mark Simmons said, and I believe hundreds of others agree, it is time to part ways with them in every legal way available.

I would say to the folks in rural Oregon that it is time to divorce ourselves from the big government in Salem and the metro area.

Duane Berry Imbler

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