

OUR VIEW

Abolishing police is not the answer

At least at first glance, the idea that police departments should be abolished in favor of other methods of protection seems so counterintuitive, it's difficult to know where to begin.

Yet, a recent survey by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center showed a total of 27% of respondents strongly, or somewhat, support the idea of abolishing their local police departments.

Instead of police departments, advocates suggest a system of social workers, counselors and mental health experts to fill in the police role.

The survey, though, also showed 67% of the people polled are against eradicating police departments. The polled consisted of responses from 1,400 adult Oregonians.

The issue was front and center last year during the George Floyd riots and protests as cases of police brutality gained closer scrutiny.

And the survey showed a slight majority of Oregonians back some type of reduced police funding and instead favor using the savings to pay for more public health, education and social services.

The results are interesting and the notion to abolish police departments carries a certain degree of curiosity, but it is, in the end, a bad idea linked to emotion rather than common sense.

The 2020 protests did a lot of damage across the nation, but they did push the issue of police miscues into the national conversation. Ultimately, that was a good thing. In a democratic society, no public agency or employee is above the public's review.

The George Floyd incident was a terrible injustice and those who were responsible — mainly former Minneapolis Police Department Officer Derek Chauvin — were dealt with by the justice system. Chauvin earned a 22-year prison sentence for his role in Floyd's death.

The problem is one of perception. A single horrendous act by a police officer somehow filled in as a statement on the entire community of law enforcement officers during the summer of 2020 protests.

Typically, police follow the law. They are not brutal. They are dedicated to serving their community and respecting civil liberties.

The issue isn't more social workers or mental health specialists — though they are needed — but better training and an acknowledgment that we need police.

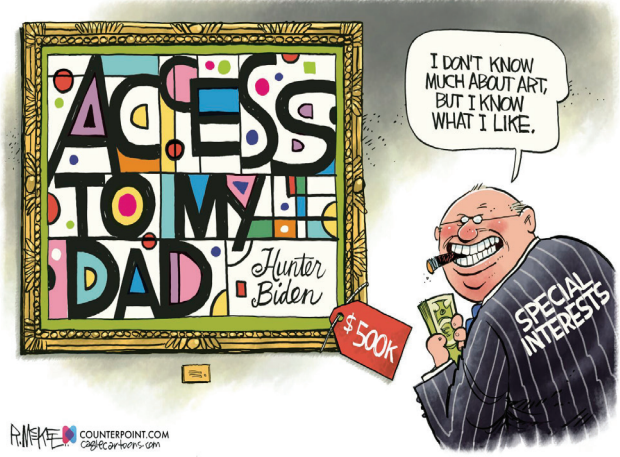
Human nature being what it is, we always will need a force of dedicated public servants to safeguard our homes and property. Should there be close oversight of our police? Of course. The public owes it to itself — and to the men and women who wear a badge — to be vigilant about police tactics.

But abolish police departments?

No thanks.

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A key pillar of democracy

ANDREW CUTLER
FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

They're dubbed "news deserts" and denote a community that lacks any type of independent news sources such as a daily or weekly newspaper.

There are more than 1,000 such places across the U.S. and their proliferation is a situation that worries me.

In our region, we are fortunate. We don't have to deal with such a circumstance. We are fortunate in another way too. EO Media Group, our parent company, remains dedicated to the small communities of Eastern Oregon. We strive to deliver high-quality news products to our readers on a regular basis.

News deserts trouble me because they represent areas where an important support beam of democracy no longer exists.

That means there are hundreds — maybe thousands — of voters who do not have access to important information. Information they can use to decide how, and when, they participate in our democracy.

Newspapers mean a lot of different things to a lot of different people. They exist as a public forum and as a small business.

A good newspaper is constantly balancing those two — at times competing — goals. Yet, always the focus is on the reader and on the hard work of giving readers the type of information they need. That "need" can be as simple as a notice of club or city council meetings or as important as giving voters critical background information about a potential candidate for political office.

Each of those news deserts reflect a failure in democracy and that should worry anyone who cares about the future of this nation. When the public does not have the information necessary to participate in a democracy, all of us lose.

Information is more important now than at probably any other time in our history. That's because there is a plethora of information from a myriad of different sources that often can't be fact checked.

A good newspaper fact checks information. Seeks independent sources about a specific assertion and then presents what it discov-

ered to the reader. Then, it is up to the reader to decide.

Of course, that isn't what many critics and naysayers preach: that the "media" is evil and full of misinformation or outright lies. Those types of assertions always irritate me because they're not necessarily true but are often taken at face value.

I can assure you, along with myself, our reporters work hard to get it right. We don't have an "agenda." Our focus is on our community of readers, first and always.

If we get something wrong we print a correction and take responsibility. We don't hide from mistakes. We admit them and move on.

News deserts are disturbing, but I am glad Eastern Oregon does not face such a situation. We will continue to provide the best in-depth coverage we can, for as long as we can.

Andrew Cutler is the interim editor of The Observer and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing the La Grande Observer, East Oregonian and four more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.

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