

Opinion

— EDITORIAL —

Our Representative Republic

Whenever any group of citizens dislikes a new State law or City ordinance, we hear the same phrase repeated again and again: “Why didn’t we get to vote on this?”

Most recently, for example, we received messages stating—and we’re tightly paraphrasing here, “Why did City Council vote instead of we the people? Why didn’t we get to vote on that marijuana ordinance?”

The answer is that you did—indirectly. America, like most states and cities, is not a direct democracy, contrary to popular belief these days. This editorial may seem to some like a lesson in middle school Civics, but we’re a Representative Republic. We want to hammer this point home because so often the structure of our political system is misunderstood, its positives lost behind the arguing of single, hot-button issues.

In a direct democracy, elected officials wouldn’t exist for the most part. Every issue would hit a ballot, meaning voters would be receiving a deluge of ballots in the mail throughout the year, and a 51% majority would prevail on any issue. A direct democracy in a nation our size would be unwieldy, cumbersome and too often tarnished by mob rule.

This simply isn’t the way our system is set up.

In a representative republic like

America, we vote for officials to take elected positions that represent us. Then, on our behalf, these men and women whom we’ve determined to best reflect our interests and ideologies, argue for us, their constituents. They cast their votes on issues as our representatives.

James Madison writes in *The Federalist*, “As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust: So there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government (that of a Republic) presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form. Were the pictures which have been drawn by the political jealousy of some among us, faithful likenesses of the human character, the inference would be that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self government; and that nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another.”

Our founding fathers and Constitutional framers gave quite a bit of thought to human nature. Because of this wisdom, in our representative republic the government was therefore created as Constitutionally limited with powers divided between three separate branches: Executive, Legislative and Judicial. Within each state inside that Republic exists the same branches.

Elections count within this system of checks and balances—of indirect votes and representation. Your votes matter. Those who don’t like the outcome on laws and issues should become involved in the process and help elect the officials who best represent your views.

Our system isn’t perfect, but if you participate, you help shape your own government one vote at a time.

—*The Baker County Press Editorial Board*

— GUEST OPINION —

Latest gun rights grab must stop

By Kevin Starrett
Special to The Baker County Press

The latest push for universal gun owner registration, (SB 941) in the guise of “background checks,” has been much in the news recently. Oregon’s most outspoken opponents of gun rights have once again created legislation that would require law abiding Oregonians to request police permission to trade, sell or give guns to other law abiding Oregonians.

One could easily attack this effort on purely philosophical grounds. What other rights would you be willing to subjugate to the whims of the state’s permission? Your right to practice the religion of your choice? Your right to write a letter to the editor? Your right to associate with whom you choose?(Ok, that’s already illegal.)

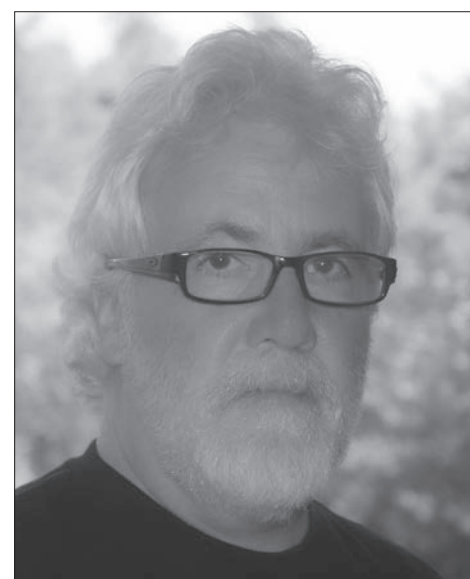
But on a far more practical level, the real problem with the expansion of the requirement to ask for the permission of the police to exercise a right is the fact that the background check system simply does not work.

As Director of the Oregon Firearms Federation, hardly a day goes by that I am not contacted by someone who has been denied a firearm s transfer simply because the state database is faulty. While that would certainly be an inconvenience and irritation to many, imagine being a woman living alone in fear of a stalker or other violent predator. The only protection you have is piece of paper marked “restraining order” and the promise the police may arrive in 15 minutes should you be lucky enough to be attacked in your home near a telephone. Now the faulty database could cost you your life.

SB 941 is even worse in some respects than previous year’s versions of the bill. SB 941 does not even allow you to conduct a background check yourself, something currently allowed by law should you choose to do it. Now, all private transfers to non family members must be conducted through a licensed dealer who may charge whatever fee he wants to, if he is even interested in the hassle.

There is no provision in the bill to deal with a “delay,” something that happens with alarming frequency due to the poor condition of the State Police database. Delays can take weeks or even months.

But to make matters even worse, the numbers provided by the Oregon State Police make it clear that background check system legislators want to expand is not even used to prevent criminals from getting guns. For all the false and bloated statistics provided by anti-gun groups, it is extremely rare for a prohibited person to be prevented from getting



Submitted Photo

Kevin Starrett is the director of the Oregon Firearms Federation, a state wide, no-compromise gun rights organization founded in 1998. Kevin was born and raised in New York City and saw first hand the damage that attacks on gun rights can do. He is determined not to allow those kinds of attacks to succeed in Oregon.

a gun because of background checks. While most people who are denied are denied in error, (and now it’s their problem to prove their innocence) the tiny numbers who are actually identified as felons, or mental defectives are virtually never arrested or prosecuted.

In September of 2014, 136 people (0.73% of the total transactions) were denied transfers. The number of “felons” arrested? Two.

Of the 15 people who actively “wanted” the number arrested was four.

In October of 2014, 196 people were denied out of 19,901 total transfers. The number of felons arrested? Not a single one.

Eight people were denied for “mental health” reasons. None were taken into custody.

In November of 2014, 203 people were denied firearms transfers. Of those, 149 were identified by the police as “prohibited persons” or felons. The number of those arrested? A grand total of one.

Clearly all the other “bad guys” who were denied transfers at that time and place were free to leave and obtain guns elsewhere. So the figures thrown around by the gun control crowd are meaningless. But the fact is, far too many of those people should never have been denied in the first place.

In every case, a Kitzhaber mandate has required an Oregon State Trooper to leave patrol to conduct an “investigation.” Time after time those troopers have no idea why they are being sent to investigate people who have done nothing wrong. Just imagine when this failed system is extended to when you want to give a gun to someone you’ve known your whole life.

Similar legislation was passed in Washington by ballot measure. It has proven to be an unenforceable bureaucratic nightmare.

Let’s not make the same mistake in Oregon.

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

USFS ignores public sentiment

To the Editor:

For us dealing with the forest service for the past fifteen years, on a nearly daily basis, this action is well past due. It becomes more apparent every day since the Travel Management Plan, was withdrawn two years ago.

Nearly as disappointing—the press. In eastern Oregon, I find it hard to believe anyone on the staff of the newspapers can print these misleading forest service press releases as breaking news. Intentional misleading the people in regards to roads closures is blatant propaganda coming from the USFS at this time

It is not news the TMP, is on hold. (How many roads have been closed during this so called pause?) Nothing has changed since it was shot down two years ago. Insinuating this is a new development, once again, rightly confirms the lack of confidence we have in the forest service being capable of speaking forthright.

Press release from Mr. Peña, March 19, 2015, “It is my expectation that all three forests(including the Umatilla) will continue to address natural resource concerns and public access need as a part of ongoing project level decisions and forest restoration projects.” What we know from this statement, road closures will occur in these projects providing a backdoor for closures. Bartering of roads to escape litigation is common anti at the table of collaboration. Travel Management is not on the burner but is cooking under the guise of every single project in the Blue Mountain Forests.

The forest service has a problem and it’s time to own up. This agency, was forced to withdraw a TMP, then was confronted last fall with the problem of 11 counties withdrawing support for the agencies proposed Blue Mountain Forest Plan. Still, yes still they continue down a road of ignoring public sentiment. Intentionally disregarding the message and presenting the illusion of public engage-

ment.

A question plagues me, “Why are the forests in such miserable condition?”

Wanda Ballard
Baker City

Sheriff’s office handled Huntington situation well

To the Editor:

I was favorably impressed with the common-sense handling of the recent disturbance in Huntington involving the local Sheriff’s Department. Your reporter Eileen Driver set out the story in details, which supported the professional and level-headed conduct of Deputy Hoopes and Interim Sheriff Ash, and others involved.

At a time when the news of the nation is dominated by a deliberate media-instigated blitz of horror stories of militarized police buildups and unjustified atrocities against citizens, and of court decisions appearing to condone unconstitutional due process rights violations by police, it is understandable that the entire brotherhood of law enforcement would adopt a warlike attitude of “us against them.”

The recent Huntington event was surely a test of relations between our Sheriff and the people, and happily it did not reveal support of the much-publicized typical SWAT mentality of kicking down doors, shooting the family pet, lobbing dangerous stun grenades, and shooting anybody not seeming to cooperate—just to serve a warrant that is likely defective.

We approve of the reasonable response taken by our Sheriff, and are reminded that these Deputies are our neighbors and friends. They are not our enemies. Foreign troops on our soil and mercenaries supporting Agenda 21/NWO and federal agents knowingly operating outside of their Constitutional jurisdiction and authority are the real enemies of the people.

Jim Iler,
Oath Keeper
Baker City

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