

# Opinion / Politics

— EDITORIAL —

## We smell a gun grab in the works

Rep. Jeff Barker, Chair, House Interim Committee on Judiciary sent the following statement out last week:

"In the wake of the senseless shooting at Umpqua Community College on October 1, both Senator Prozanski and I have called a special joint meeting of the House and Senate Interim Committees on Judiciary. The goal of this hearing is to provide an opportunity for examination and discussion on the state's role in preventing and responding to these acts of violence. It is also an opportunity to look for areas where we, the Legislature, can make changes so our homes, schools, and communities are safer. Topics will include threat assessments, prevention efforts, mental health services, on-site security options, coordinated law enforcement responses, and community and victim services. As mass tragedies impact every town, school, and community,

I'd like to extend an invitation to you to participate in the hearing. It will begin at 9 a.m. on Thursday, December 17, and will be held in Hearing Room F at the Capitol."

On Wednesday, less than 24 hours before the hearing, Sen. Floyd Prozanski distributed an official letter dated December 16 to media announcing the meeting. This letter called the gathering "a hearing on active shooter events."

By the time this issue is out, the meeting will have come and gone.

We can't imagine what good a bunch of politicians coming together to discuss the topic of active shooting events could possibly do.

We haven't seen an issue with "coordinated law enforcement responses."

We certainly don't see a reason for State government to involve itself in a school's, town's or business's "on-site security options" or "victim service" to any degree greater than at present.

Considering Prozanski's history of attempted gun grabs and last year's SB941 debacle, we're suspicious. In fact, this hearing smells to us like the latest springboard from which to launch (read: inflict upon us) the newest gun control initiatives from Salem.

After all, we have a special legislative session coming up in February 2016.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

### Gun control rules

To the Editor:

A quick study—the four rules of gun control:

1. There will always be guns.
2. Criminals will always have guns.
3. The way to stop criminals is for law-abiding citizens to have guns.
4. You can't change the first three rules.

**Joe Bailey**  
Baker City

### No refugees, please

To the Editor:

Why I do not want any Syrian "refugees" on U.S. soil:

1. In order to do any kind of realistic vetting, you need some form of valid ID. Most Syrian "refugees" have nothing of the sort; therefore, you do not even have a starting point to do any kind of vetting.
2. In order to do any kind of realistic vet-

ting, you also need a functioning government to talk to. The government in Syria is in a shambles, courtesy of the Syrian civil war, therefore there is no one to talk to in order to do any kind of vetting.

3. Infiltrating terrorist fighters into enemy nations is one of the oldest tricks in the terror playbook. And given the fact that three-fourths of Syria is in the thrall of ISIS, such a trick becomes ridiculously easy.

4. We have more than enough homeless, poor and hungry people right here in the U.S. to be taking care of. Since when did a Syrian "refugee" come before a homeless American?

I say send them to Saudi Arabia. They have the money, resources and space to take them in easily. Plus, they can keep a better eye on them than we ever could.

**Dorian Atkins**  
Salem

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## State contract with travel agency questioned

Salem, OR - State Representative Gene Whisnant (R-Sunriver) has asked Oregon State Auditor Gary Blackmer to conduct a financial and performance audit of the Department of Administration's contract with Azumano Travel. Rep. Whisnant submitted his request to Director Blackmer on November 18, 2015, and asked that the audit specifically explore why the state's contract with the travel agency has not been competed or reviewed for performance since 2005.

"I was troubled to learn that the State of Oregon has maintained an exclu-

sive contract with Azumano Travel for more than a decade, without ever opening up that contract for competing bids," said Rep. Whisnant. "Further, it appears as though former Governor Kitzhaber approved a loan of taxpayer funds to Azumano Travel despite clear warning signs that the company was facing serious financial uncertainties. Our government has a responsibility to ensure that taxpayer dollars are managed in the most transparent and frugal manner possible. I am requesting an audit of the state's contractual his-

tory with Azumano Travel so that we may learn the full details of this relationship and discover how to prevent situations like this from occurring in the future."

Rep. Whisnant's decision to request the audit came after Willamette Week reported that Oregon officials used Azumano Travel to book a recent trip to Asia. Willamette Week's reporting also raised questions about the scope and nature of the state's contractual history with the travel agency.

— GUEST OPINION —

## The feds and education

By Sen. Mike Lee

There is much to like in the Deseret News' Dec. 6, editorial, "Utah's congressional delegation confronts a changing Washington environment."

The editorial correctly notes that Paul Ryan's recent election as speaker of the House is an encouraging development. I wholeheartedly agree. It was an honor to accept Ryan's invitation to introduce him at his first major policy address at the Library of Congress last week. He outlined a bold and innovative conservative policy agenda that Republicans can begin implementing under a new president in 2017.

The editorial also correctly criticizes the current "all or nothing" environment in Washington, which has led to far too many fiscal cliffs, legislative logjams and government by crisis. As Ronald Reagan advised, conservatives should be ready to take half a loaf when they can get it, and then come back for the other half later.

Unfortunately, the Every Student Succeeds Act that Congress passed this week prevents conservatives from doing exactly that. And it enshrines some pretty terrible education policy into law in the meantime.

Proponents of the bill claim that ESSA "allows states to set their own academic standards." What proponents of the bill do not tell you is that the bill also gives the secretary of education final veto power of all state education plans. If he doesn't like a state's academic standards, he can deny that state's plan and withhold its funding. This is a substantial stick that could force states to implement federally preferred education plans.

Proponents of the bill also claim that ESSA replaces the federal "accountability system with state-designed accountability systems." What they do not tell you is that the bill keeps most of the old No Child Left Behind annual testing mandates in place.

Proponents of the bill correctly note that the bill does eliminate federally mandated teacher evaluations. But while that particular stick may have been eliminated, the bill also spends almost \$3 billion on teacher training carrots that only increase federal influence on what is taught in our classrooms.

Proponents of the bill also argue that the bill "limits" the education secretary's "authority to prescribe interventions and school improvement strategies." What they fail to mention is that there were already three similar prohibitions on the secretary (in three federal statutes: No Child Left Behind, the Department of Education Organization Act, and the General Education Provisions Act) that the secretary violated in the process of implementing Common Core the first time. Without a substan-



Submitted Photo

Mike Lee is a U.S. Senator from Utah.

tial enforcement mechanism — losing money — a future secretary will be just as able to side-step words intended to roll back his or her authority.

Finally, proponents of the bill also claim that it "consolidates dozens of individual federal programs into a single block grant for education." This is just plain false. While the bill does collapse some programs into others, it also creates six brand new grant programs, leaving about 40 total different programs for states to navigate.

Reasonable people can disagree about the bargain ESSA struck. Maybe a 12 percent increase in education spending is worth getting rid of mandatory teacher evaluations. Maybe giving Hillary Clinton a \$250 million down payment on her federal pre-K agenda is worth consolidating a few programs.

But if you are looking ahead to 2017, if you want to set the table for "effective political leadership in an incremental collaborative environment" under a new Republican president, then the ESSA is a disaster.

The bill reauthorizes K-12 federal educational policy through 2020 — the end of the next president's first term in office. That means this bill effectively handcuffs the next president on education policy, effectively preventing any conservative education reform from being advanced.

And that is a tragedy. The entire Utah delegation is united behind a conservative vision of local control for K-12 and pre-K education. We almost certainly will not reach that vision in one "all or nothing" step. We most certainly should be willing to accept incremental steps towards conservative goals.

But details matter. As President Obama has taught us, the Department of Education will find the tiniest loophole for federal control, and then force an aircraft carrier through it. This bill leaves far too many of those loopholes wide open.

More importantly it prevents conservatives from coming back later under the next president to achieve more incremental reform. That is a loss for all Utahns, and that is why I am pleased our entire Utah House delegation voted against the bill.

— CONTACT US —

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