

Opinion

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

My take on Harney County

To the Editor:
Based on my personal observation from my visit to the Harney County Resource Center on January 18, 2016, there seems to be a disparity between what I've been reading in *The Oregonian* and what I witnessed firsthand.

Setting aside the actual argument of "how" these occupiers are furthering their message, we were welcomed and greeted with coffee, lunch, conversation, and total transparency to every question I asked. It was obvious that there had been no visible vandalism or theft.

The buildings were clean, their donations were organized and documented, their volunteers were in high spirits and everyone seemed to be carrying on with purpose and organization. I saw how some of the buildings that had been left by the previous employees had allowed them to be overrun with vermin and neglect, and how the current occupiers had cleaned them up and restored them to respectable levels of maintenance. Overall, in spite of the "terror" of the current occupants' actions, I never once felt remotely similar to how I am treated in government facilities in an apathetic manner as just another number to be dealt with (local DMV, Forest Service ranger stations, BLM office, etc).

And for all I've read about how the federal government would have dropped the

heavy hammer of violence and mayhem on these "terrorists" had they been folks of color, imagine my surprise when I spoke with several African-American volunteers who were working, cleaning, and busy with security details to further a peaceful message about government overreach.

Back in Burns, I felt no sense of any threat from the III% or from the refuge occupants.

From the locals I conversed with, I got the impression that those at the refuge in fact posed no threat of violence to the residents of Burns whatsoever.

While I noticed FBI personnel and local law enforcement in various places in town, I didn't particularly feel threatened by them either, although they were the only militarized presence I noticed.

Overall, it was a positive experience in my attempt at trying to understand why these Americans at the refuge have taken such drastic measures that are sure to alter the course of the rest of their lives.

Jake Brown
Halfway

Thank you

To the Editor:
The Baker County Press—wow what a newspaper! Sure was glad to read it and pass it around. Makes my paper sound like a Sunday school party and everyone has a bad heart.

Betty Otley
Burns

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— GUEST OPINION —

Session preview

By Sen. Ted Ferrioli

As I recall, Oregonians were sold on the idea of annual meetings with the promise that the "short" session would focus on balancing the budget, making small legislative "fixes," often referred to as "house-keeping measures," and responding to emergencies that need immediate attention from the Legislature.

I'm sorry to report that the "short session" has become little more than a setting for the Majority Party to pursue an over-reaching agenda of tax increases, regulation, and ideological issues dear to the Progressives who rule Portland and to a great extent, the rest of Oregon.

Democrats have proposed an increase in the minimum wage from the current level of \$9.25 to as much as \$15.00 per hour in the Metro area, and \$13.50 elsewhere in Oregon. This proposal comes on the heels of mandatory paid sick leave, and together they threaten to raise overheads to such a degree that the result will likely be layoffs and business closures across the state.

The minimum wage increase will fall particularly hard on rural communities close to Idaho and Nevada, which have much lower labor costs and much more robust economies. The Governor, Speaker, and Senate President favor this proposal, leaving House and Senate Republicans opposed to the plan and fighting for the survival of small business in Oregon.

Democrats are also proposing a "Cap and Trade" mandate that will raise energy costs for everyone including businesses and families, disproportionately hitting the poor, elderly, school districts and those on fixed incomes.

This concept puts the state government in charge of the fuel and energy costs, unfairly benefits alternative energy suppliers at the expense of consumers and traditional energy businesses, all with little or no measurable effects on carbon emissions, reduction of global warming or reducing the size of Oregon's miniscule carbon footprint.

In addition to these anti-business measures, Democrats are proposing a mandate for affordable housing that will force construction contractors to build a certain amount of below-cost housing units for people of limited means, to be paid for by higher costs passed on to more traditional home buyers.

Democrats also propose to modify constitutional, voter-approved limitations on property taxes by changing the system from one based on assessed valuation to a system based on floating real mar-

ket value. The changes would also allow local governments to increase the maximum constitutional caps through a voter-approved local option levy. These changes will raise local property taxes and further increase the cost of housing for Oregon families and fixed-income seniors.

Democrats are also working on a proposal that would remove an individual's right to buy firearms based on a report that they pose a "danger to themselves or others." The report can be anonymous and will not be checked for validity or accuracy. A 30 day "hold" will be put on the accused so they would fail firearms background checks. The accused will not be notified of the hold, and would only learn of the restriction if they tried to purchase a firearm. The "hold" could only be removed upon the report of a medical professional refuting the allegations, or by a court order lifting the "hold." However, a new report could be filed every 30 days.

Oregon has many pressing problems like the unfunded PERS obligations. PERS premiums will increase by as much as 30 percent in 2016-17.

The Oregon Health Plan added more than 250,000 new enrollees since its inception, and health care costs are still spiraling out of control with no plan for sustaining vital programs.

Our schools have become a laughing-stock with some of the worst attendance and lowest graduation rates in the Nation.

Against a backdrop of plunging stock market values, stagnation in major economic sectors and disruptions in our global shipping infrastructure, the Governor has granted generous pay increases to state employees and will likely support massive tax increases to cover burgeoning state expenses.

Worst of all, the "short session" will provide little or no opportunity for citizens to personally engage in issues as public hearings will be limited largely to "invited testimony" and in most cases, held with a one hour notice before action on bills, most of which will have an "emergency clause" that prevents a citizen referral to voters.

I don't believe most Oregonians envisioned this type of governance when they approved annual session and I don't believe they support the way public participation is being squelched.



Submitted Photo
Sen. Ferrioli represents Senate District 30, which includes Baker County.

— GUEST OPINION —

Trump's poll numbers show that voters are tired of same ol' thing

By Anne Marie Gurney
Special to The Baker County Press

To be clear, this isn't an endorsement of Donald Trump in his bid to be president.

The organization that pays my salary doesn't endorse, work for, or otherwise support candidates for any elective office.

And even if we did, it's hard to see The Donald getting much love from The Freedom Foundation.

Still, his inexplicable—to some—popularity with enough voters to make candidates of both parties nervous is worth analyzing because of what it tells us about ourselves as Americans and our festering disaffection with the political process.

Back in 1980, you may recall, the chattering class and the leftists it represents were similarly dismissive of Ronald Reagan. After all, the smart money said, he was too conservative, too old, and just too dumb to be president.

All he did was win two landslide elections, end the Cold War and usher in the longest-lasting economic expansion in American history. Now who looks "dumb?"

Donald Trump is no Ronald Reagan, heaven knows, but both strike a chord with the electorate precisely because neither had any use for carefully triangulated, deliberately vague talking points calculated to offend absolutely no one.

Where most candidates are consumed with tomorrow's tracking polls and terrified of angering potential donors, Reagan always spoke his mind and let the chips fall where they may.

In his own way, so does Trump, and voters are responding.

Up to a point, it almost doesn't matter what you stand for ... as long as you do it in a firm and forceful way. If Reagan proved



Submitted Photo
Anne Marie Gurney is Oregon coordinator for the Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that promotes free markets and limited, accountable government in the Pacific Northwest.

that to his doubters 35 years ago, Trump's current momentum provides even more conclusive evidence, given that he arguably stands for much less.

The same phenomenon is even more obvious in the other party, where Bernie Sanders – an avowed Socialist – is nonetheless giving establishment Democrat Hilary Clinton all she can handle and more.

Is it because his ideas make more sense than hers? Are you serious? In point of fact, both would be an unqualified disaster for this country.

The difference is, Sanders isn't trying to fool anyone about who he is, while Hilary can't help herself. Deceit is in her DNA.

Sanders is no Reagan either, by the way. While he and Trump may share The Gipper's penchant for plain talk, neither is anywhere near as likeable.

More importantly, it's one thing to have firm convictions and enunciate them unapologetically. But it also helps if those principles have a track record of success in the real world, as Reagan's unquestionably did.

At the end of the day, no one is saying Trump or Sanders will even earn their party's nomination, let alone win the presidency in November. Or that they should.

The moral of the story is that modern voters are so tired of weasel words and so starved for real leadership that two men who otherwise couldn't come within sniffing distance of the White House are confounding the "experts" and running ahead of the projections simply by speaking their minds.

Just imagine how presidential someone with actual qualifications for the job would look by doing the same.

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