

The Sandy Post

Editorial & Opinion

Scott Newton, editor
Kimberly Nelson, advertising representative

Vote by mail has passed the test

The jury is in on voting by mail, and the verdict is that it should be continued.

A year ago, in a race for a position on the Sandy High School board of directors, 1,371 people cast ballots for one candidate or another. In the March 1986 election, almost 3,059 voted by mail.

(The shame of it, of course, is that only 30 percent — 3,059 out of 10,190 registered voters — were even interested enough to take the time.)

In Clackamas County, according to County Clerk Juanita Orr, turnout was up 40 percent for the issue of the library serial levy, which passed 29,821 to 27,575. Turnout for a special election normally runs about 13 percent. News reports from other parts of the state indicate increased voter participation because of the convenience of mail-in ballots.

We found the instructions clear, and the ballots easy to use. They were more convenient than physically visiting the polling place. It is common to think that by forcing people to travel to the polling place, that only the most concerned people will vote, which is seen as a good thing.

As valid as that point might be, the mail-in ballot is only the predecessor to something else. The world is being rapidly tied together by the telecommunications industry; we may all be voting someday from the computer terminal in our homes. A well-informed public will always be a worthy goal, but making it easier for the uninformed to vote is not a dangerous thing. As was proved in Sandy, those who are not interested will ignore the mail-in ballots just as they probably drove past the polling places in previous elections.

In addition, the library serial levy was a money issue, and the public approved it. It was estimated the library levy would cost the owner of a modest home about the same per year as a hard-cover book. The public will deal fairly with money issues.

It may turn out that the mail-in ballots save the county money. There are obviously some expenses incurred in maintaining 157 precincts over an area as geographically large as Clackamas County.

The Oregon Legislature should vote to proceed with mail-in ballots when it meets in 1987, and include primary and general elections as well as special elections in the package. Though the process undoubtedly faces some refinements, the vote-by-mail experiment has passed the test.

Letters to the editor

Joe Lutz worthy of U.S. Senate

Joe Lutz, candidate for the United States Senate, spoke to over 300 people at Sandy Union High School on Monday evening, March 31. It is unfortunate that more of the community didn't take advantage of the opportunity to hear Mr. Lutz' perspective on the issues facing our nation. He presented a well-researched and reasoned approach to a variety of subjects. It is also unfortunate that no one from the press considered the meeting important enough to attend.

In order to make wise choices when voting in the primary election in May, each of us has the responsibility to find out about the candidates and determine their positions on the subjects which concern us.

If you have not heard Mr. Lutz speak, you have missed some of the information essential to deciding for yourself whether or not he is worthy and capable of being one of Oregon's

United States senators. In my opinion he would do an excellent job of representing us in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Lutz caused me to think about many of the ramifications of current issues in our country. One of the most thought-provoking questions he asked Monday night was this: Is there any area of your life which is not in some way controlled by government? No one in the audience could come up with an answer. Can you? Benjamin Franklin said: "A nation of well-informed men, who have been taught to know and prize the rights which God has given them, cannot be enslaved. It is in the region of ignorance that tyranny begins."

It is not easy to be well-informed. It takes diligent research and careful thought. I challenge you to be a prepared voter in May.

Janet M. Albers
Sandy

Man apologizes for inappropriate comment

In view of the fact that I publicly, in this newspaper, used terms that were inappropriate, I wish to use the same medium to publicly apologize to Mr. Roland Cartisser, Mr. John King, and Mr. Clifford Koenig for my use of the term "unholy alliance."

This term was used without thought of its ramifications, and was unjustly used in referring to three men who have expressed the courage of their convictions by taking their public stands on issues regarding our local school. I have been advised that all three are fine Christian men, so the use of such terminology was even more inappropriate.

It has also been brought to my attention that Mr. Cartisser was not a

member of the Affordable Education Association, and my linking him to that organization was unjust.

As one who tries to be a responsible member of the community, I have fallen into the trap of allowing my zeal to lead me into irresponsible statements which I regret, and for which I apologize, not only to the individuals, but to the community as a whole.

The fact that I am on a different side of a particular issue from someone else is not an excuse to have made the comments I made in the letter.

Mel Lamm
Sandy

Where to write

Senator Steve Starkovich
S-223 State Capitol
Salem, Ore. 97310
378-8810

Representative Bob Shiprack
H-292 State Capitol
Salem, Ore. 97310
378-8784



Commentary

Decision on seat belts only postponed

by WILLIAM W. LENON

The recent decision by the Sandy Grade School Board to equip all newly-purchased busses with safer seats, and to include provisions for the installation of seatbelts, was a good one that could have been better.

It addressed a sometimes emotional issue that has to some extent split the community, and in its decision the board moved towards what it saw as the middle ground. Unfortunately, the decision does not resolve the issue, but simply postpones it.

But what exactly is the issue? As in most instances, two sides are represented: one feels that seat belts are essentially a proven safety factor, while the other sees a need for further proof. As with so many issues, this one cannot be seen as purely black and white, but in none-the-less easily recognizable shades of gray.

And, in the cold light of reason, reasonable conclusions can indeed be drawn.

Much of the controversy concerning the need for belt seats centers around two studies: one at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1972, and the other in Canada in 1985. The extensive U.C.L.A. study, one often cited by seatbelt opponents, concluded that "...the greatest single contribution to school bus passenger collision safety is the high strength, high back safety seat."

Such seats have padded backs and are spaced in such a way as to reduce chances of passengers being thrown over the seat in front, thus "compartmentalizing" them. However, what

many opponents failed to point out is that in the very next sentence the study also concluded that, "Next in importance is the use of ... a lap belt or other form of effective restraint."

Interestingly, results of the later Transport Canada tests seemed to indicate that belts were both unneeded and caused possibly dangerous head injuries. Three busses, one a 1966 passenger Blue Bird meeting present U.S. standards and two smaller busses, were tested in a 30 mph head-on crash using dummies of various sizes. Several of the dummies were equipped with instruments to record injuries.

The report concluded, in part, that the "...passive occupant restraint system... functions as intended during frontal impacts and provides excellent protection for occupants." The "system" referred to by the study is, of course, beltless compartmentalization.

Critics of the Canadian study later determined, however, that the dummies used were not of the more modern U.S. approved type, and did not mimic the flexibility of the human body. This lack of flexibility caused greater resultant injury to the dummies' heads. Nor, as critics further pointed out, did the study address the issue of side collisions and rollovers, both cases in which compartmentalization is of no use. Further, a crash between a bus and a car at 55 mph would be significantly less severe than the one sustained at 30 mph against the solid barrier in the test.

At this point it should also be noted that the original U.C.L.A. compart-

mentalization recommendations included a form of mesh which would enfold an occupant being thrown forward into the seat back. This requirement was later lobbied out of the final federal standards, thereby calling into question the entire presently accepted concept of compartmentalization.

Nevertheless, the two studies have led seatbelt opponents to conclude that restraints should not be installed until irrefutable proof of their value has been shown. Supporters, on the other hand, point out that opponents of belts in cars in the early fifties raised many of the same questions and concerns voiced now about bus restraints.

For example, what happens if there is an accident resulting in fire and children are buckled into their seats? This is a classic question with a classic answer: the occupants of any vehicle are far less likely to survive such an accident if they have been tossed about and have sustained severe injuries due to the impact, or are unconscious. A passenger who has been belted and remains conscious obviously has a far greater chance of survival.

Engineers, on the other hand, acknowledging the problem of the present lack of absolute proof in the issue, have called for the installation of belts in order to gain the necessary data to draw firm conclusions.

To certain people this attitude smacks of using children as guinea pigs in some possibly gruesome experiment. But, the evidence gained through years of automobile accidents provides heavy statistical odds in favor of such restraints.

Pediatricians and trauma personnel, who have dealt directly with victims of bus accidents as well as those in autos, have come out strongly in favor of seatbelts on busses. Indeed, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and most, if not all other pediatric associations, including Oregon's, have stated their support for belting children in busses. Others, including both the national and Oregon P.T.A., the director of the Oregon Traffic Safety Commission, Gil Bellamy, and a number of both national and local Oregon legislators, have also endorsed their use.

Significantly, the National Highway Transportation Board, which had previously come out against seatbelts on busses, has recently agreed to study and possibly reconsider its stand.

The N.H.T.B. reasons that if seatbelts serve no other purpose than to reinforce children's safety habits, their use as an instructional tool may outweigh all other considerations, proved or unproved. As most people realize, a habit is a hard thing to break.

As further testing to gain absolutely conclusive proof continues, and the community and the legislature become more involved, the writing on the wall becomes ever clearer: Seatbelts on busses are coming, later if not sooner. In the end it is only the degree to which communities are concerned about the well-being of their children that will determine if that timing is to be reversed.

The issue remains. But seatbelts on busses are coming.

Letter to the editor

Insurance wrong use for money

High property taxes closed our elementary schools last November. At that time I urged people to vote yes to get the children back in school then work on the problem itself.

Education is expensive but vital in today's world. However, as a member of the elementary school budget committee and a parent, some costs frustrate me more than others.

Liability insurance is necessary but a major irritation. The premium for the elementary school went from \$58,000 last year to a budgeted \$90,000 this year. The high school allotment for this insurance went from \$52,000 to \$78,000. These increases total \$58,000. Imagine the books, computers, sports, special tutors, etc. that had to be cut in order to keep the budgets under last year when these jumps in insurance had to be budgeted.

If you feel your tax portion of \$58,000 is too minor to be concerned with, please realize this is only the tip of the iceberg. You are paying increased rates for a wide variety of

goods and services due to huge insurance premium increases in nearly every business.

Some say insurance rates go in a cycle and to wait it out but that is little comfort to many businesses who will lose many services now available in fields as varied as recreational riding stables to needed day care centers.

Also, some say insurance companies are fabricating a crisis and are actually getting rich. Insurance companies may be partially to blame but common sense asks if this is such a lucrative field why are so many companies cancelling or not writing new policies or even going bankrupt.

It is important that tort laws be revised so that legitimate claims for any person can be paid but costly, frivolous nuisance claims should be strongly discouraged perhaps by using a panel of experts to determine what is worthy of trial. If the claimant loses but insists on a trial and loses again to a jury he should be liable for costs.

Ceilings should be set on non-

economic loss awards and attorneys need to have restrictions on the percentage they can collect from clients.

Attempts were made in the 1985 legislature to check escalating lawsuits and awards through legal reforms, however these proposals died in judiciary committees.

It may seem that I have digressed from the original topic of school funding but this only shows that school budgets are complex and affected by

many things. There are other areas such as statewide teacher negotiations that could save money but for now tort law reforms would be a good place to start.

I would urge all of you to contact Rep. Shiprack, Sen. Starkovich and Gov. Atiyeh urging action on the liability crisis now. Let's use our school budget for education.

Barbara Sah
Sandy

Policy on letters

Letters to the editor should be typed, double-spaced and signed. An address and telephone number should also be provided, although only the name of the letter writer and the city or area he is from will be published.

Letter writers may also wish to include a title or office held if it is appropriate considering the subject matter.

The news deadline of noon, Tuesday is also the deadline for letters to the editor.

Letters should be accurate, free of libelous remarks and in good taste. This newspaper attempts to publish all letters it receives from local residents. We reserve the right to edit letters to conform to style guidelines or for length. A preferred maximum length is 300 words.