

property taxes would go away, the population might be amenable to looking at that sales tax again. I understand that residents feel a sales tax is regressive, but from all the letters and articles about “yet another fee,” might a sales tax be worth another look?

Kim Kelly  
Eugene

**Don't Give Up**

The topic of homelessness is a constant issue in this area. What they fail to mention is that one must either have an income or a voucher to get housing. The process of government assistance for disability often takes many years to receive. It's like they want you to give up. You are just a burden to society. You have no value as a human being. It's all your fault that your life ends up like this.

It's really no wonder that people give up to a life of addiction, or worse — death. I see these people every day when I take my walk in downtown Eugene. I have also never felt threatened or intimidated by anyone downtown. I listen to their stories and often share some laughs. I will often smoke a cigarette with them and tell them that I hope their life gets better.

Patricia Cunningham  
Springfield

**Showcase the Nonprofits**

For years, KLCC organized the well-attended BrewFest to lighten the dark winter days. Like many others, I volunteered for several years and greatly enjoyed seeing so many in our community come together under one roof to clink glasses and try wonderful Oregon beer. I understand from KLCC staff that they can't sustain this event anymore and that drinking culture is on the decrease, but how about a new winter event with a nonprofit twist?

The southern Willamette Valley has a cornucopia of incredible nonprofits that need our support, and sometimes our volunteer efforts. I'm sure many folks (including myself) remain unaware of the variety of local nonprofits, and a fair to highlight these efforts and showcase potential volunteer opportunities would certainly help better our community.

There could be a variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, food, entertainment and more to really make this event shine. In this political climate, I'm finding that channeling my emotions towards useful community support brings the most peace possible given the circumstances. Let's make it happen, Eugene!

Sara Meyer  
Eugene

*Editor's Note: If folks want to help set it up, Eugene Weekly is in — a nonprofit event would be great with our annual Giving Guide!*

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# MS. FREEMAN GOES TO SALEM

Testifying in the Senate to prevent book bans

**T**he hero of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* is a newbie U.S. senator who speaks on the Senate floor for 25 hours to save himself and democracy. I did not have 25 hours when I went to Salem March 3 to speak to the Oregon Senate Committee on education. I had two minutes. But, like Mr. Smith, I was an innocent, and, in my own small way, I was trying to save democracy.

I belong to Authors Against Book Bans and drove to the Capitol to testify in favor of Senate Bill 1098, introduced by a former teacher, Sen. Lew Frederick of Portland, and co-sponsored by another former teacher, South Eugene's own Rep. Lisa Fragala. In brief, the bill would prevent schools from banning books when banning them constitutes discrimination based on race, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation.

For example, a district couldn't pull the picturebook *And Tango Makes Three* because a community member complained that both penguin parents happen to be male, or *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* because it foregrounds Native Americans. The bill also makes technical support available to libraries dealing with a challenge.

It turns out that if you live in Eugene, you have to get up pretty early in the morning to testify before a Senate committee. They meet at 8 am. But I-5 is straight, and parking on Court Street was easy. Outside of Hearing Room B at 7:30 am, good news awaited: The American Civil Liberties Union had brought doughnuts. Inside, a few dozen would-be speakers milled around. Authors Against Book Bans grabbed two rows in the front, a chess move to prevent the opposition from occupying prime real estate.

But where was the opposition?

Not a MAGA hat or a pitchfork in sight. Cinematically, this was disappointing.

The Oregon Senate Committee on Education, as I'm sure you know, has five members. Four were on hand, including Sen. Frederick, who is the chair. To introduce the bill, he made a rousing speech that invoked Seneca, Toni Morrison and Dr. Seuss.

Then it was the public's turn. We would-be speakers, all registered in advance, now waited for Frederick to call on us. If you're live and in person, you sit in one of three chairs at a witness table. To the right is a monitor counting down the seconds to two minutes. Should you go over the limit, an alarm bell rings. Mortifying.

If you're testifying remotely, your image appears on a wall-sized screen. Of these folks, the most interesting was a drag nun from the Portland Sisters

of Perpetual Indulgence who said he had left his native Malaysia decades ago for fear of being caned under a law enacted in 1871. I cannot tell you how disappointed I was that his video was not working.

The hearing was due to close at 9:30 am. At about 9:15, Sen. Frederick announced some people would not have a chance to speak, and I realized I might be among them. Disappointment? Relief? Before I could decide, my name was called, along with Cat Winters. Winters, who lives in Hillsboro, is a brilliant, award-winning novelist and also an Author Against Book Bans.

We seated ourselves at the witness table. The timer began to spin. Cat testified that as a teen she would have felt less conflicted, less weird, less unholy, if she had had books that represented her own sense of self. Some of the books she's written are exactly that, and she knew from readers that they could be lifesaving.

Cat beat the timer!

Then it was my turn. I spoke slowly and made eye contact exactly as taught by my junior high school English teacher. Most everyone else had gone either for heartfelt or statistics. I went for mild humor on the way to make the point that pro-book is pro-family. Sen. Janeen Sollman was the only one to react with a smile, and if I lived in Forest Grove, she would have my vote.

I beat the timer, too!

Then it was over and, to my surprise, no one had spoken in opposition to the bill. The nearest thing was committee member Noah Robinson (R-Cave Junction), who had said, “We all know some books aren't appropriate for children.”

I don't entirely disagree with him and, in fact, flashed back to reading a few racy paragraphs of my parents' copy of *Tropic of Cancer* when I was 10.

Scarred for life? Possibly so. But I can say with authority that no school library in the state of Oregon has a book by Henry Miller in stock. In fact, according to testimony submitted by Emily O'Neal, Oregon's Librarian of the Year for 2024, there are no age-inappropriate books in libraries in Oregon, owing to a rigorous and well-established vetting process already in place.

As for *True Diary of a Part-time Indian* (recently challenged in Seaside), I just finished it. The 14-year-old hero does talk about masturbating and physical



Illustration by McKenzie Young-Roy

responses to girls' bodies, but to what high school kid is this breaking news? In fact, reading about it just might provide comfort: You, kid, are not weird. You are just like everybody else.

*True Diary* is also emotionally resonant, informative, and, in the end, hopeful. Please, people, read the whole book before you freak out over acknowledgment of body parts.

After the hearing, I bought postcards of the Capitol building at the souvenir shop (there is a souvenir shop!), had coffee with three other AABB members, and drove home.

The deadline to submit written testimony on SB 1098 closed 48 hours after the hearing. By then, more than 600 people had weighed in, more than two-to-one in support. Fragala's testimony makes the two key arguments for protecting the freedom to read: 1) All students deserve to see themselves, their families and their communities represented in the books and learning materials utilized in our schools. 2) The representation of many voices, cultures and histories in school libraries promotes democratic values.

The Senate Committee on Education is majority Democrat, so the bill can be expected to proceed from there, either to the ways and means committee (if it is determined that it has a fiscal impact), or directly to the house. To express support or (I clutch my pearls) opposition, contact your state senator or representative.

And speaking of the legislative process — *Mr. Smith* (directed by Frank Capra, starring Jimmy Stewart and Jean Arthur) was controversial when it was released in 1939, with critics arguing that a movie about corruption in U.S. government only gave fascists in Europe ammunition. The movie-going public disagreed, making the film hugely successful and one of the most celebrated in the American canon. This is because, well — Jimmy Stewart. But also because moviegoers read the message differently: Yes democracy can be corrupt, but it is also resilient.

*Eugene resident Martha Freeman is the author of 35 books for children, including Kitty vs. Kindergarten, which will be released in June. Order now from your local independent bookstore.*