

KeizerOpinion

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Obama throws open 46 cell doors at last

By DEBRA J. SAUNDERS

President Barack Obama commuted the sentences of 46 federal drug offenders last Monday. In his first term, Obama issued one meager commutation; he was arguably the stingiest modern president when it came to the exercise of his pardon authority. Now, White House spokesman Josh Earnest noted, the president has issued 89 commutations—more than the previous four presidents combined.

Among the 46 commutation recipients, 14 were serving life sentences for nonviolent crimes. That's why the president had to act. The war on drugs distorted the criminal justice system so completely over the past few decades that, according to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, 42 percent of life sentences imposed in federal courts in 2013 were for drug offenses—as opposed to 12 percent for murder.

As a younger candidate, Obama had been highly critical of federal mandatory minimum sentences. Critics of the war on drugs had expected Obama to use his unfettered pardon power granted in the U.S. Constitution to commute the sentences of nonviolent offenders serving decades for their small-fish roles in the drug trade. After all, Congress could not stop him.

Instead, the president signed the Fair Sentencing Act, a compromise bill to reduce the disparity of crack cocaine to powder cocaine sentences in 2010—and asked Congress to pass further reforms.

In 2014, then-Deputy Attorney General James Cole announced an initiative to grant commutations to nonviolent inmates who had served more than a decade in prison, had good conduct records and would not

other views

have received such long prison terms under today's sentencing terms. This big batch of commutations establishes that the administration can do more than just talk.

PardonPower blogger P.S.

Ruckman is disappointed that it took six and a half years for Obama to act. He sees all the commutations that could have been. *Obama to Blaze Past Franklin Pierce*, read his blog's headline on Obama's moving from eighth place to ninth on his list of the 10 least merciful presidents. Still, Ruckman is impressed with how it is being done. So many presidential pardons and commutations in the past two decades, he told me, reflected what looked like "random acts of mercy;" they were "idiosyncratic." Monday's commutations, on the other hand, are generally in sync with pronounced policy positions. They're smart. Ruckman expects to see regular commutations now.

Will one of these 46 turn into a Willie Horton—the convicted murderer who raped a woman while wrongly furloughed from a Massachusetts prison, thereby undermining the 1988 presidential hopes of then-Gov. Michael Dukakis? There is no reason to believe it, said Julie Stewart of Families Against Mandatory Minimums, who noted, "Most people who go to federal prison are not violent." The presidential commutation recipients to whom Stewart has talked are eager to prove that the trust the president put in them was well-placed.

The White House likes to point out that criminal justice reform has become a bipartisan cause. It should be. There is no justice in sending people to prison for decades, even life, for nonviolent offenses.

(Creators Syndicate)

Ed Dougherty

To the Editor:

Ed Dougherty was an icon. For years in the Salem-Keizer area and beyond, Ed touched many lives through EJD Enterprises. Ed along with his wife, Jan, worked together for years to bring concerts and events to the people of our community.

Some of the greatest musicians from the 1960s, '70s, '80s and '90s were brought here thanks to Ed's dedication, passion and connections. Just a few of the many great musicians he brought to our area included; Johnny Cash, Donnie and Marie Osmond, Sonny and Cher, The Kingsmen (*Louie, Louie*) Paul Revere and the Raiders, Elvis Presley, The Beach Boys and the Mandrell Sisters.

Although I had known Ed for 40 years, I recently had the chance to get to know Ed much more in depth in the last six months. After

letters

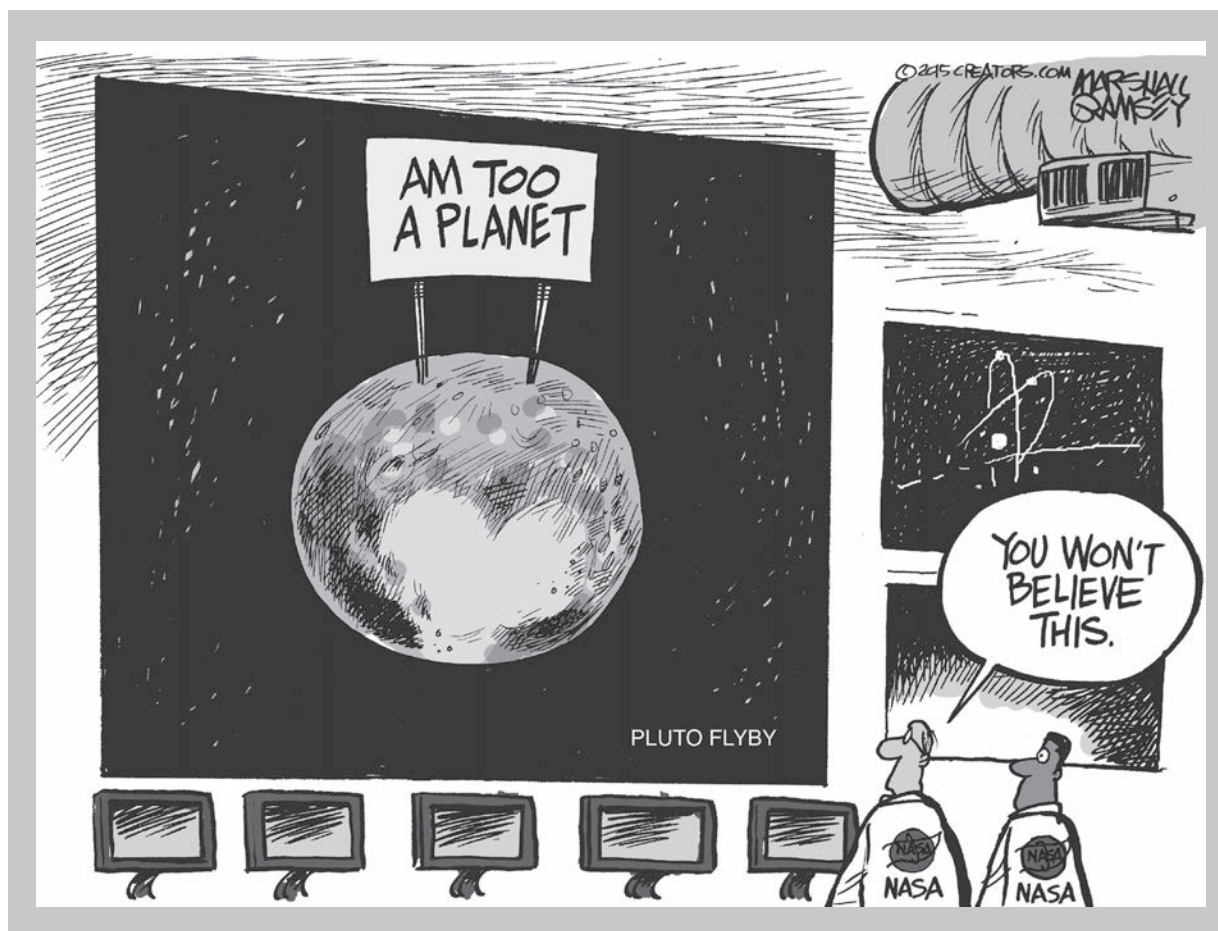
he fell ill back in February, I spent quite a bit of time with him and heard many of his incredible life stories.

What was reaffirmed was just how big his heart was. He was one of the kindest men I have ever known and was always helping others. The love he had for his wife and family was immeasurable. Ed taught me a lot about the music industry, concerts and events. I admired and respected him so much and he will be incredibly missed.

Clint Holland
Keizer

The Keizertimes welcomes all points of view.

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I fought the good fight this year

from the capitol

By BILL POST



The legislative session just came to a close and as your state representative, I wanted to take a moment to fill you in on some of the highlights from the past months. You may remember that this is my first time representing you in Salem, and it has been an incredible experience. There is one thing that has stood out to me most: the power of building relationships. Relationships are how good things get accomplished for our state.

Keep in mind, the majority party didn't need the minority party votes for any bill this session, they had all the numbers, yet they killed many of their own bills including a transportation package that would have made a real difference for Oregon's roads and bridges. The partisan bickering you often hear about was not as prevalent this session as was the bickering between the House Democrats and the Senate Democrats.

Before coming to the Capitol I made a couple of promises: I would do nothing to hurt Oregonians and I would try to make a positive difference. I introduced very few bills. One bill made life easier for small businesses. I was honored to be there

as Governor Kate Brown signed the bill into law (HB 2969).

I was privileged to serve on the Judiciary Committee and as such was pleased to support bills that would increase the statute of limitation for rape victims and make it easier to prosecute sex traffickers (HB 2317 and HB3040).

By far, the issue I heard from you most about, though, was SB941, the universal background check bill. I want you to know I tried to do everything I could to protect your Second Amendment rights. I introduced a HB3528, a workable alternative to SB941. I also championed HB3093, a concealed handgun license reciprocity bill that passed on a *strong* bipartisan vote out of the House 57-1, only to die in the Senate Judiciary Committee without letting the Sen-

ate vote on it (this speaks to the interparty bickering).

There were more than 4,000 bills introduced this session. I voted no 285 times (more than every representative except one) because that is not good government. Some of those no votes included the controversial "Clean Fuels" bill, the mandatory paid sick leave bill and the bill that would require small businesses to provide a retirement plan—all of these laws will hurt small business and agriculture.

The legislature will not convene again until February 2016, but that doesn't mean I won't keep working for you. Our committees have quarterly meetings to prepare for the next session, and my office is always here to serve you.

Don't ever forget that I work for you. We may not agree on every issue, but I always appreciate hearing from you and you'll always know where I stand. Hopefully I'll see you at a summer event or just around town in our community.

(Bill Post represents House District 25. He can be reached at 503-986-1425 or via email at rep.billpost@state.or.us.)

The flag that still divides the nation

gene h. mcintyre

A USA Today/Suffolk University poll of 1,000 adults conducted in June revealed that 42 percent of those polled view the "Stars and Bars," the most popular among the flags of the Confederacy, as a racist symbol of hate that should be removed from state flags and other official locations. Another 42 percent among those polled see it as representative of Southern history and heritage and not racist. Do these percentages stand to represent all Americans? We don't know.

In the wake of the Charleston massacre, Amazon and Walmart have announced they will no longer sell Confederate flag merchandise. Ebay says it will stop offering Confederate items on electric auction, Mississippi's GOP speaker of the house calls his state flag "a point of offense" and even Kentucky's Mitch McConnell, majority leader of the U.S. Senate believes the statue of Jefferson Davis, the Confederacy's president, now in the state capitol, belongs in a museum.

However, there is no doubt that the battle flag of the northern Virginia army will—until we decide unanimously to put it away—survive any inclusive effort to send them to museum locations. Why? Because it is so entrenched a symbol of yesterday's glorifications of manhood, even though it was short-lived over five years of efforts to protect and preserve a 300-year history of slavery that the northern states fought to end.

Looking for its appearance in post-Civil War times finds examples of the flag's survival from its raising by Marines on Okinawa during World War II to more recent appearances in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pentagon has never tried to do anything about its ubiquitous appearance in fields of battle overseas and on U.S. bases subsequent to the Pentagon's dedication on January 15, 1943.

The Confederate flag regularly flew over the barracks of the U.S. base in Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. Then, too, not only did the Confederate flag fly in Vietnam but the burning cross, the Klan robe and hood and racist slurs were common there. On Christmas Day, 1965, during a Bob Hope troop performance, a number of white soldiers in a mixed audience paraded in front of the attendees with a Confederate flag to an apparent Hope approval. It's been reported that Con-

federate flags were commonly sold on the streets of Saigon.

After the surrender at Appomattox, former Confederacy

soldiers who became Union soldiers flew it when they fought Native Americans throughout the West. The war with Spain in 1898 saw vindication of the "Old Cause" when troops from the South reveled in the exploits of former Confederate generals as they attacked with rebel flags in hand. With Spain defeated, President William McKinley took a victory tour of the South, hailing the valor and the heroism that the men from the South showed in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and China. Congress soon thereafter authorized the return to United Confederate Veterans the Confederate flags captured by Union forces during the Civil War.

World War I brought more goodwill by North to South. Before American troops were sent overseas, they marched in Washington, D.C. Some 10,000 in number wore the gray and were reviewed by President Woodrow Wilson—the Stars and Bars flag of the Confederacy was carried at the head of the parade. When in 1917, Wilson finally got the U.S. into the war he segregated Washington and purged African Americans from federal jobs in order to generate support for entry among Southern men he wanted to serve. Incidentally, it was Wilson who started the presidential tradition of laying a Memorial Day wreath at

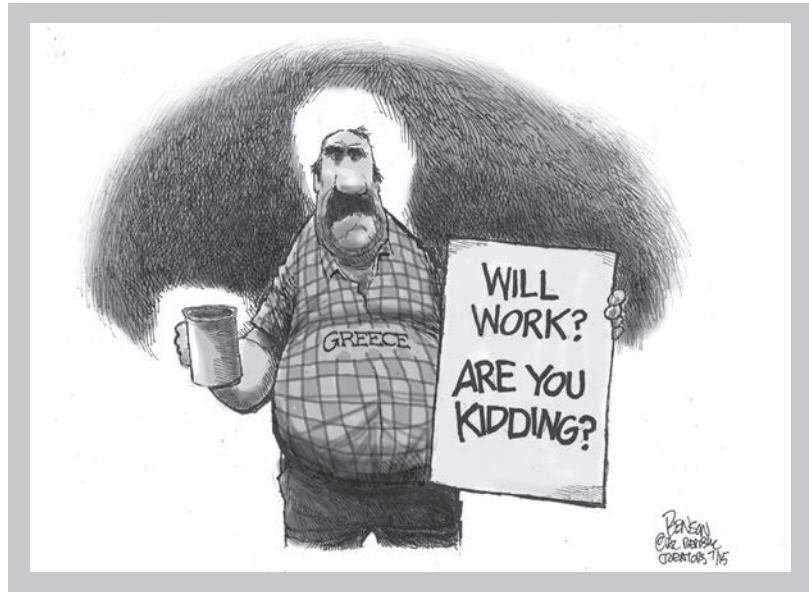
Arlington Cemetery's Confederate War Memorial. President Barack Obama continues the tradition.

The Confederate flag has continued to fly overseas. It was carried into Iraq in 2003. In Afghanistan, at the infamous Bagram Theater Internment Facility, a platoon implicated in the torture of detainees, known as "The Testosterone Gang," hung a Confederate flag in their tent. Many Americans have wanted for years to have the flag disappear due to the desegregation of American troops that took place 67 years ago during President Harry S. Truman's administration.

The U.S. could be so much better and safer than it is. A major part of what holds it back is that so many American citizens of darker skin color are reduced in status due to prejudicial attitudes towards them. This fact persists in American life even though African American and Hispanic population numbers are slowly taking over as the majority of persons living in the U.S.

The location of Confederate flags makes no difference whatsoever when we do not change our outlook on others who differ only in appearance while under the skin are the same in every way. It is high time Americans work much harder at a one nation union which is the only way we can truly represent ourselves to the world as a country that walks like it talks and displays only the American flag in all public places, here and abroad.

(Gene H. McIntyre's column appears weekly in the Keizertimes.)



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