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School Resource Officers in Salem-Keizer schools

By RICHARD RIGGS

Recently the Superintendent of Salem-Keizer Public Schools allowed the district's School Resource Officer (SRO) contract to expire, effectively removing SROs from our schools. The decision was made in response to claims the current model of SROs in schools disrupts the learning environment and disproportionately impacts students with disabilities, LGBTQ and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), even though a student led task force made up entirely of BIPOC students concluded that SROs are needed in S-K schools. I agree with the student task force. SROs are needed in our schools and we need to create an accessible, equitable and safe learning environment for all children so all may thrive; systematic reform is needed.

There is no guidance under Oregon law on what, when or how SROs and school administrators should work together. There are also no common standards for SRO training and qualifications as there are for all other education professionals. Within the same school district it is possible for children committing the same acts in different schools to receive very different outcomes. One may be disciplined by their principal while the other could be arrested and referred to the criminal justice system, with possible life-long impacts.

Oregon is uniquely positioned to ensure all students receive fair and equal treatment in schools by enacting statewide standards for SROs. All law enforcement professionals in Oregon must be certified by the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training and SROs should be no different. Additionally, the Teachers Standards and Practices Commission, which licenses all education professionals, should provide guidance for school administrators who work with SROs, so it is clear whether the administrator or

guest OPINION

SRO should take action to discipline a child. The legislature must enact these reforms now.

SROs must be held to higher standards than the average patrol officer and have mandatory training on youth development, restorative justice and trauma-informed practices, mental health issues in youth, recognizing bias, and best practices for interacting with disabled, LGBTQ, and BIPOC students. When SROs are in schools they should also wear casual yet professional clothing that would make them less intimidating to the many students who hold negative associations with uniformed police and find SROs disruptive to their learning. These practices and requirements have been implemented effectively in many states and school districts across the country. Most importantly the SRO must focus on school safety and take a back seat to school administrators, teachers and counselors for normal youth development issues and every effort should be made to keep children out of the criminal justice system.

Ultimately the issue of whether SROs are in S-K schools is a community decision. After talking to hundreds of community members during my campaign it is clear the community supports SROs in schools. The BIPOC student led task force came to the same conclusion. It's time for the district to heed community voices, not ignore them.

(Richard Riggs is a candidate for Salem-Keizer school board position #1 and is the Western Region Director for the Oregon State University Extension Service.)

Climate change in Keizer?

Guest COLUMN

By JIM PARR

Have you noticed that March, and so far April, weather has been noticeably cool? Daily average temperatures are running about five degrees below normal and the early morning hour temperatures have been closer to eight degrees below average. Numerous low temperature records have been broken around the area over the past several weeks. So are the current cool conditions a sign of climate change or just a reflection of typical seasonal variations?

There are simple parameters that can be observed and monitored to help detect both seasonal variations and what may be longer term changes in climate. For example, in the Keizer-Salem area, Red Bud trees generally bloom beginning April 15th but blooming can occur earlier or later depending on early springtime temperatures. In Alaska, they monitor "ice-out" dates on local rivers which dates, when compared to historical averages, provide useful climate trend lines. Whether it is ice out in Alaska or on the Great Lakes or the first springtime appearance of bees and blossoms in your yard, there are clues as to the state of the atmosphere and climate. Being observant and keeping a record of the dates of these annual occurrences can be both fun and useful.

After several consecutive drier than normal years, this winter has brought closer to expected precipitation to western Oregon. Presently we are a bit dry again and northwest Oregon could quickly slip back into abnormally dry conditions and, once again, drought.

The current east wind weather pattern is a drying pattern and farmers are already irrigating some of their fields! Most of Oregon and the rest of the west is currently experiencing drought. In California, based upon observations and modeling, scientists and engineers are planning for shorter but more intense winter wet seasons and the changes to water storage management plans that will be required. Similar changes in water management may also become necessary in the northwest.

Things change with climate and always have. It is now known that about 400,000 years ago, Greenland was ice free. The last ice age affecting Oregon was ending about 11,000 years ago. We may in fact still be melting out from the last ice age. Ice ages predictably come and go but the frequency and timing of ice ages can be altered by global warming. Whether you agree or disagree with climate change, one clue that might persuade you is this: all five of the warmest years on record for the continental United States have occurred within the past decade.

This year is the 21st anniversary of the "U.S. Drought Monitor", a service provided by the USDA and NOAA. The Drought Monitor publishes weekly and monthly updates to changing drought conditions across the country. The USDM website is easily found and offers useful information for daily and seasonal planning affecting farming and land and water resource management. Whether you agree or disagree with the concept of climate change or global warming, it is a good time to become aware of current conditions and what changes likely lie ahead.

(Jim Parr lives in Keizer.)

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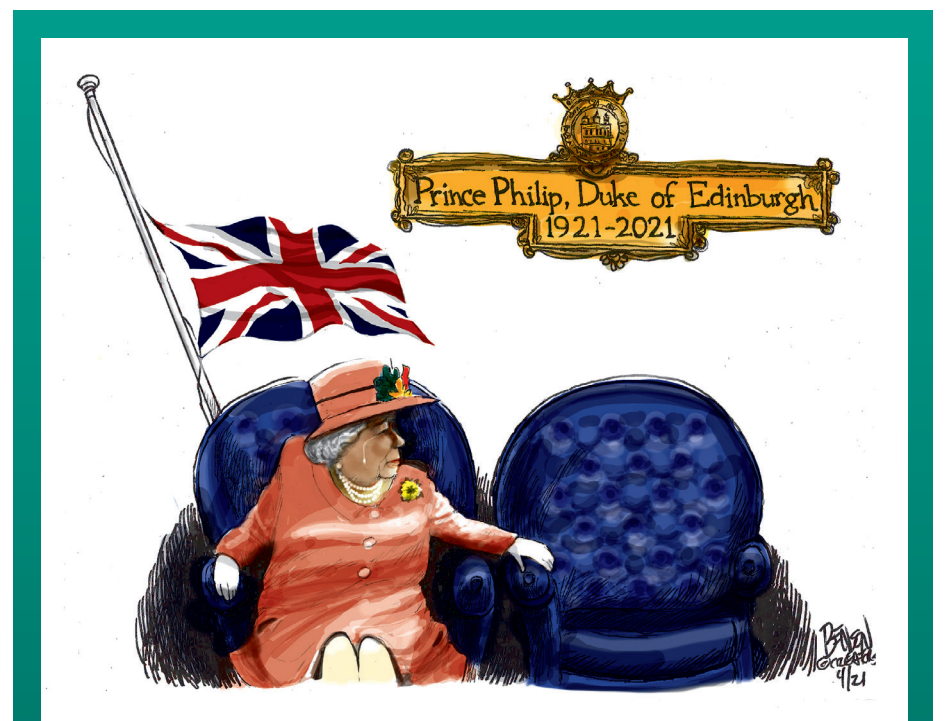
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