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OUR VIEW

Gearhart should vote 'no' on repealing vacation rental rules

Mention short-term rentals anywhere on the North Coast and it's bound to stir up a hornet's nest on property rights. Gearhart is a prime example.

Gearhart voters are being asked in an initiative, Measure 4-188, whether to repeal and replace the city's vacation rentals ordinance. The initiative has the town split between "Yes" and "No" factions, with both sides deeply divided and accusations flying back and forth. No matter the outcome, the issue isn't going away and the two sides must work together to resolve their differences.

We believe the best course of action is for Gearhart's residents to say "no" to the measure and urge city councilors to modify the existing ordinance — which has been in effect only a year — to correct any flaws. The council should listen to all residents, not just the "no's," and be open to making fixes. Here's why:

The ordinance, No. 901, was unanimously approved by the City Council and took effect late last year, prior to the general election. It came about after several years of expensive and painstaking development with overflowing public hearings and a compromise that grandfathered existing vacation rentals of less than 30 days as long as the owners applied and paid fees during a one-time, 60-day permitting period. It introduced regulations including occupancy limits, off-street parking plans, septic inspection requirements and permit transfer prohibitions that were never in place throughout Gearhart's history.

A high percentage of Gearhart's homes aren't owner-occupied, and some owners voiced loud objections. A contentious point is that the ordinance prohibits the transfer of a rental permit except in the case of inheritance, and those who don't have a permit but may want one don't have an option now to obtain one. The law was appealed to the state Land Use Board of Appeals, which said it fit the city's comprehensive plan and upheld it, further spurring the repeal and replace measure.

While the ordinance doesn't apply to rentals of more than 30 days, it does have potential flaws. One is the permitting was based on a cap rather than a percentage of homes. A percentage could have allowed more rentals with future city growth without greatly changing the landscape as it now exists, opponents say. Another is that while early last year the city amended its municipal code to require short-term rentals to pay a room tax for overnight lodging, the ordinance itself doesn't contain language defining a rental as a business or that a rental requires payment, even though that would seem obvious by the term "rental." As such, opponents say, someone who allows a friend to stay for a short time while looking for work or housing could technically be in violation even if money doesn't change hands. If that's the case, that's a reason to make a small fix, not blow it up.

Measure 4-188 is far more of a "nuclear option" than a fix. It not only repeals the existing ordinance, it replaces it with language that would allow unlimited short-term rentals and could eliminate some of the intended safeguards the council put in place. Importantly, it would tie the hands of future city councils because the replacement would require a public vote, rather than City Council action, on any amendment of the vacation rental ordinance or subsequent ordinances relating to vacation rentals.

Gearhart voters elected their councilors to govern, and rather than throw the baby out with the bath water, they should vote "no" on repeal and replace and tell the council to address the issue further.

What's the matter with Republicans?

By ROSS DOUTHAT
New York Times News Service

Thirteen years ago, in the midst of a different Republican administration, the liberal book of the moment was Thomas Frank's "What's the Matter With Kansas?"

In answering his title's question, Frank argued that hardworking heartland Americans were being duped by a Republican Party that whipped up culture-war frenzy to disguise its plutocratic aims. Middle-class and working-class Republican voters, he insisted, were voting against their own economic self-interest and getting worse than nothing in return.

At the time, Frank's analysis had two flaws. First, it minimized the importance of social issues, both their inherent moral stakes and their role in shaping the ecology of everyday life, of work and family and community. You don't have to be a dupe to be a "values voter" of one sort or another: Whether you live in Topeka or Manhattan, you just have to believe that some moral questions are more important than where to set the top tax rate.

Second, Frank minimized the extent to which Republicans, in the Bush era and before, did make a concerted effort to deliver for the middle class. The modern GOP was certainly solicitous of the interests of wealthy donors and corporations and always eager for an upper-bracket tax cut. But as Henry Olsen points out in his recent book "The Working Class Republican," Ronald Reagan also accepted the New Deal settlement and sought to balance his donor base's interests with his voters' pocketbook concerns — and George W. Bush did likewise.

Yes, the Republican in the White House while Frank was writing his jeremiad was the president of dividend tax cuts and a lower top rate. But Bush was also the president of Medicare Part D, No Child Left Behind, a big homeownership push and a larger child tax credit and lower rates for almost everyone, not just the upper class.

So Frank was wrong ... or maybe he was prescient. Because he was writing just before Bush won re-election to a second term without a clear middle-class agenda, which led to the unpopular pushes for Social Security reform and an immigration amnesty and to the collapse of Bush's political position. Then after Obama's election the GOP lurched away from the middle class in a more stark way than it ever did under Reagan or Bush or the Newt Gingrich speakership, embracing theories about how the working class was actually undertaxed, rallying around tax plans that seemed to threaten middle-class tax increases and promoting an Ayn Randian vision in which heroic entrepreneurs were the only economic actor worth defending.

The success of Donald Trump's populist candidacy seemed like a partial repudiation of this Randian turn, and a possible return to the middle-class-focused politics that had made Reagan and Bush successful — albeit in a more aggressively nationalist and mercantilist form. But as president, Trump has



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais
President Donald Trump's image is seen projected on a screen as he speaks at the Heritage Foundation's annual President's Club meeting Tuesday in Washington, D.C.

essentially become the Frankian caricature in full, draping the rhetoric of populism over an agenda that so far offers little or nothing to the middle class, making appeals to the religious right that are notable in their cynicism, and rallying his base through culture-war controversies distinguished mostly by their ginned-up phoniness.

So "What's the Matter With Kansas?" was a poor guide to the party of Reagan and George W. Bush, but thus far it is a very useful guide to the Trump administration. And two possible takeaways from this shift seem worth considering.

The first is that, for all its failures, not everything about the Bush era was disastrous, and there were ways in which the Bush White House had a clearer sense of what conservatism should offer to the common man than any its would-be successors have come up with since.

This doesn't excuse the disaster of Iraq or the various problems with Bush's domestic agenda, including the way that one of his middle-class-friendly policies, the push for homeownership, contributed to the housing bubble and the crash. But it is still a mistake for the right to dismiss the Bush agenda as merely "a failure and a fraud," as my friend Peter Suderman did recently in these pages, and also a mistake for liberals to suggest that Trump is just returning to the Bush playbook, as New York's Jonathan Chait did in a recent piece.

Because he's not really returning to it; indeed, as things stand in key respects Trump would benefit from imitating Bush. His tax plan offers much less to working Americans than did the Bush tax cuts. His larger agenda is much less thought-through than what Bush attempted in his first term. And if Trump wants to make his populism something more than just a con, he probably has to start with an issue — the child tax credit — that was part of both the Bush agenda and the Contract With America.

Appreciating Bush a little more, in this specific way, could offer some reason for optimism about the right. After all his administration was not that long ago, its record suggests that conservatism doesn't have to be a mix of Randianism and racial resentment, and there's no necessary reason that Republicans couldn't learn important lessons from Bush's failures (don't try to build democracies in the Middle East, don't pass an immigration

increase your base doesn't want, etc.) while also returning to his politically effective focus on the middle class.

But if you prefer pessimism, you'll dwell instead on the second takeaway from Thomas Frank's Trump-era vindication — namely, that a depressing percentage of American conservatives seem perfectly happy with the bargain that Frank claimed defined their party, with a president who ignores their economic interests and public policy more generally and offers instead the perpetual distraction of Twitter feuds and pseudo-patriotic grandstanding.

This dispiriting contentment is the sentiment you see from some of Trump's blue-collar supporters, who love his uncouth rhetorical war on his fellow coastal elites so much that they're willing to forgive him his threadbare policy agenda or else trust that gridlock and inertia will protect them from Republican bills whose actual contents they might probably oppose.

It's also what you see from a segment of religious conservatives, like those gathered at last week's Values Voters Summit, who cheered rapturously for an empty, strutting nationalism and a president who makes a mockery of the remoralized culture that they claim to seek.

Note that I don't mean the religious conservatives who supported Trump reluctantly and in a transactional spirit, and who welcome his conservative judicial nominees. I mean those who plainly prefer his brutish braggart's style to the sort of public decency that Bush or, in a different way, Mitt Romney offered — and who either spin elaborate fantasies about Trump the Christian or laud him as a Conan-esque warlord they think will drive their enemies before them.

For these Trump-besotted believers, you get the sense that the Bush administration's attempts to devise a substantial socially conservative agenda, from bioethics to marriage promotion to faith-based initiatives and more, are remembered not for being timorous, limited or flawed (all of which they were) but for being simply boring. Far better to have a president who really sticks it to those overpaid babies in the NFL and makes the liberals howl with outrage — that's what a real and fighting conservatism should be all about!

What's the matter with the Republican Party? Many things, but right now above all this: Far too many Trump supporters, far too many conservatives, have seen the then-inaccurate caricature that Frank painted 13 years ago brought to blaring, Technicolor life by Trump — and they've decided to become part of the caricature themselves, become exactly what their enemies and critics said they were, become a movement of plutocrats and grievance-mongers with an ever-weaker understanding of the common good.

The path out of caricature requires a different moral vision. It requires new ideas and new thinking and new models of leadership. But it also requires looking backward, to Bush and Reagan, to a Republicanism that had a thousand flaws but also understood a few important things Trump's party has deliberately forgotten.

AN APPRECIATION

Astoria benefited from Bloomfield's determination and generosity

By STEVE FORRESTER
The Daily Astorian

If you examine the early history of cities and towns in the West, you invariably find the names of women who brought arts and culture to those places. And if you look at celebrated restoration projects, you'll find women at the forefront.

It was the Mt. Vernon Ladies Association that took the financial challenge of restoring our first president's home. It was Jacqueline Kennedy who stood in the way of Grand Central Station's demolition. Doing that, Kennedy launched the restoration ethic, which places like Astoria now take for granted.

Marge Bloomfield was a latter day version of this archetype and

Astoria benefited from her determination and generosity.

When I visited with Marge and her husband, Ted, over lunch at Ira's Restaurant (now Drina Daisy) in 1988, my intent was to recruit them to the cause of restoring Astoria's Liberty Theatre, a building that was in a death spiral. Within two weeks, Ted had died.

One always needs luck in a risky venture. The earliest days of the campaign to restore the Liberty were marked by the good fortune of talents that came our way. Marge Bloomfield was one of them. In the wake of Ted's passing, she joined the board. Vera Blore was another. The wife of then-commander of Coast Guard Group Astoria Gary Blore, Vera became our development director. She brought East Coast fundraising experience and she was a driven professional.

In a communication to me on



Marge Bloomfield

Monday, Vera referred to Marge's "steely resolve." A titanium backbone is the essential characteristic of the western cultural pioneer. Abigail Scott Duniway, the Oregon suffragist and newspaper publisher, had it. I observed it in Lanny Hurst, who led the 1970s drive to preserve and restore Portland's Old Church.

I vividly remember when the Liberty board in 1999 faced the urgent need to raise \$60,000 for a second option on the building. Marge was one of the six donors who came forward to meet that challenge.

On another occasion, Marge brought the renowned interior decorator Norman Yeon (brother of the architect John Yeon) into the theater. With flashlights in hand, Marge and I showed Yeon the theater's architectural gems, including the Joseph Knowles paintings. I found Yeon difficult to read. But Marge's persuasiveness and long relationship with Yeon yielded a five-figure gift to the restoration.

The Bank of Astoria president, Cheri Folk, was not the only board member who was stunned at my choice of Marge as the chairwoman of our construction committee. In that capacity, she met almost weekly

with Rickenbach Construction, the project's lead contractor. A restoration as extensive as the Liberty Theatre is rife with pressing choices.

Most of all, we benefited from Marge's life in the performing arts. She had few illusions about how theaters work. One of the Liberty's unique assets is an array of retail spaces at the street level. Those provide rental income. But even with that, cautioned Marge, the theater will not make money. It will require constant fundraising, she said. And so it has.

Marge was more than a hard-headed professional colleague. I discovered the depth of my feelings about her last Sunday when Margaret Bloomfield called with news of her mother's passing.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of *The Daily Astorian*, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.