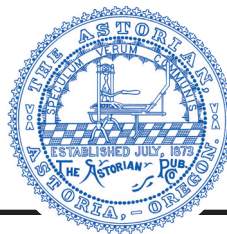


OPINION



the Astorian

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OUR VIEW

Do more to fight illicit pot trade

The legalization of recreational marijuana in Oregon has generated millions of dollars in tax revenue for the state, but rather than curtailing the black-market trade, as was promised, it has spurred the production of illegal weed across the state.

That, in turn, has caused untold problems for honest landowners and unwitting foreign workers pressed to tend the crops.

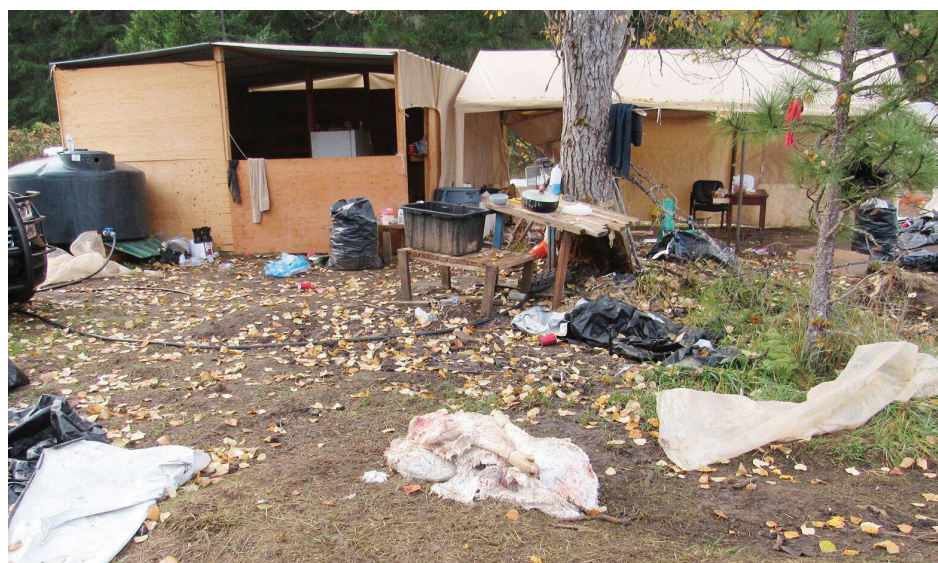
The state has failed in its obligation to stem the flow of illegal marijuana and to protect the people of Oregon against the ravages of that trade.

The burgeoning illicit marijuana industry has had devastating impacts on rural Oregon and agriculture. Illegal marijuana growers have stolen water, polluted the land and water, violated land use laws, driven up farmland prices, caused labor problems and endangered citizens.

Although new state laws and added funding are helping law enforcement officers deal with the issues, farmers and community leaders say more still needs to be done.

Eight years ago, when voters approved an initiative that legalized the regulated production, sale and possession of marijuana, it was sold as a win-win situation.

The state was to get millions in new tax revenue to pay for educa-



Kile Henrich

Living conditions at an unlicensed Oregon marijuana operation. In the center lies the remains of a pig carcass workers had been carving for food.

WE AGREE THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO STEP UP ITS ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS. BUT THE STATE NEEDS TO DEVOTE MORE OF ITS LEGAL MARIJUANA PROFITS TOWARD REGULATORY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT.

tion, mental health, alcoholism and drug services, the state police and drug treatment. Because marijuana remains illegal under federal law, an intense regulatory and licensing regime was supposed to keep legal marijuana out of black-market distribution channels and stepped up enforcement would check the state's robust illicit marijuana production.

Only part of that scenario has come true.

Revenue projections have exceeded supporters' wildest dreams as legal sales have topped \$1.1 billion per year.

In fiscal 2016, the state collected \$20.6 million in taxes from the fledgling legal industry, according to the Oregon Department of Revenue. For fiscal 2021, which ended in October, the state raked in more than \$178 million. Cities and counties that have imposed their own

taxes reaped more than \$28 million from the legal drug trade during the same period.

Yet, the illicit trade continues to boom. Law enforcement sources say the value of illegal weed — grown in many cases by foreign drug cartels — far exceeds that produced by regulated growers. During raids in 2021 alone, according to public records, southern Oregon officials across four counties — Jackson, Douglas, Klamath and Josephine — seized pot exceeding \$2.7 billion in value.

Criminal growers are stealing water, infringing on the rights of farmers who produce legitimate crops. Unfettered by environmental regulations and good stewardship practices, they lay on fertilizers and pesticides without regard to the potential ecological damage.

They have held foreign workers impressed to tend the crop in virtual slavery. Local property owners have been threatened and are wary of sharing information with police.

Police and the regulatory agencies are overwhelmed.

We agree that the federal government needs to step up its enforcement efforts. But the state needs to devote more of its legal marijuana profits toward regulatory and law enforcement.

It's time for the state to fulfill its obligation to protect the people of Oregon.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Get the facts

I've been a Gearhart taxpayer since 1987, with 20-plus years of going to City Council and Planning Commission meetings.

In 2015, Gearhart assembled a fire station committee to find the best location for a new fire and police station, going by state and federal codes for tsunamis and earthquakes. There were three-plus years of public meetings before we presented our findings to the City Council.

Our top choice: Lesley Miller Dunes Meadow Park. Not because it's a park or has an ocean view, but because it's close to city center, was the highest point (at the time), and was already Gearhart property costing about \$5 million. It wasn't about feelings, but about the safety of our citizens and costs.

It was rejected. There was outcry by some, because it's a park, even though it was to take up only a small portion of Gearhart-owned park property.

The High Point property came up for sale, at \$3 million to \$4 million just for the property. After the city spent thousands testing the ground, the owner decided not to sell to Gearhart.

Now, we're at the Highlands Lane station, a higher point, further inland and with a higher cost. The longer we wait, the more it'll cost ... substantially!

I certainly hope those fighting against a new fire station all this time realize the substantial amount they've cost Gearhart taxpayers, whether it passes or not. Five million dollars at the park then, and now almost \$15 million. Next year?

All City Council and Planning Commission meetings are open to the public. Get the facts!

TOM THIES
Gearhart

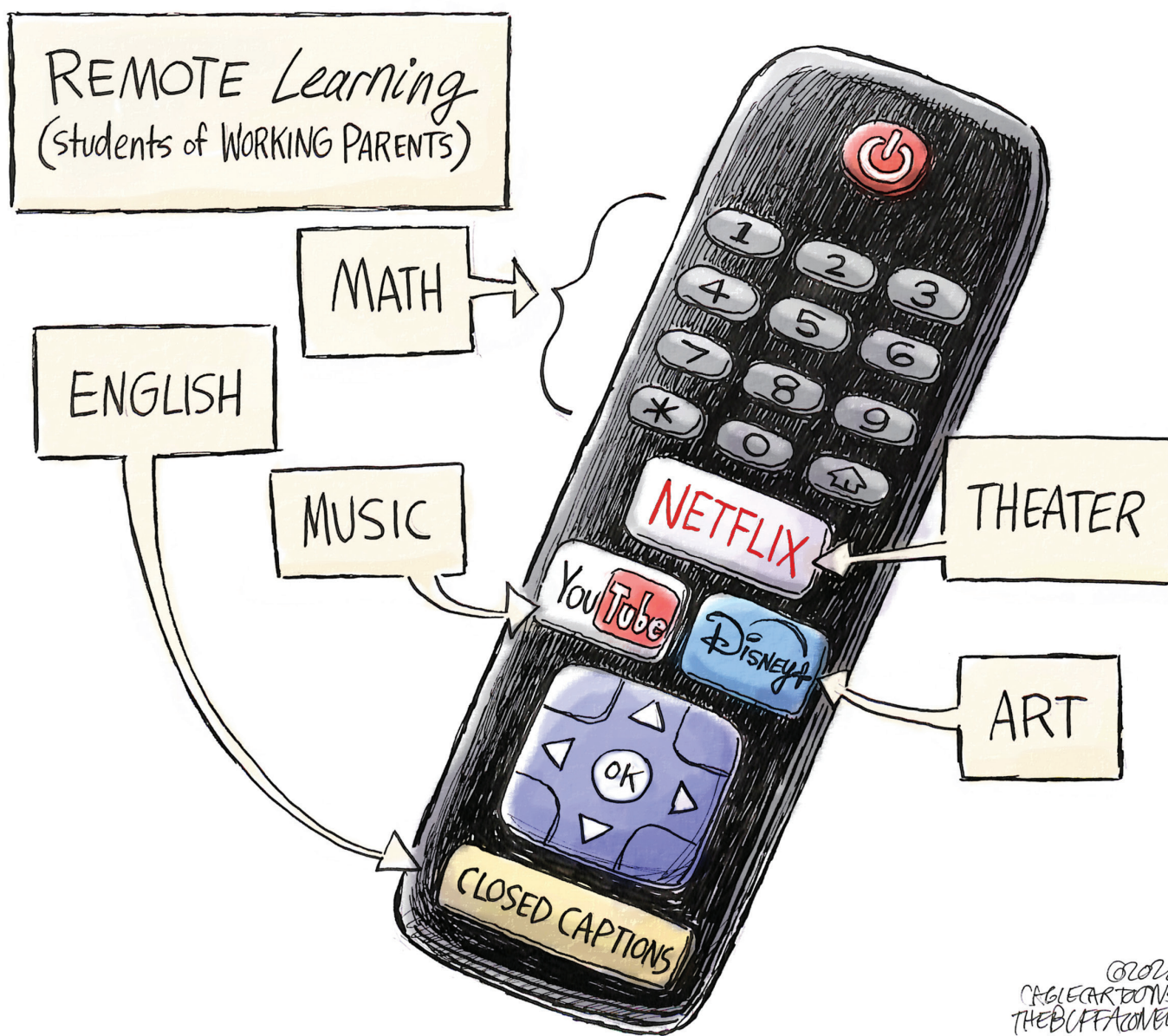
Hold on

In response to Matt Janes' letter, "Go fly a kite" (The Astorian, Feb. 3): Hold on.

Let's consider President Joe Biden's accomplishments under very unusual circumstances. Normally, a new administration is welcomed into the White House to speed the transition from the previous administration immediately after an election.

Since former President Donald Trump would not concede, nearly three months was lost. Then because of that, probably three months more lost to catch up, which didn't begin until Inauguration Day.

Biden immediately signed executive orders eliminating what he considered bad policy, rejoined the Paris climate



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LETTERS WELCOME

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to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

accord and reset our relationship with NATO and world leaders.

He and the Democrats passed the American Rescue Plan, which saved our economy from collapsing. The coronavirus raging, he managed to get vaccines into hundreds of thousands of people's arms with rather great efficiency.

Don't blame him for anti-vaccine propaganda or inflation and supply chain

issues. They are economics 101, supply and demand, results of a worldwide shut down.

With his leadership, Congress passed the long-awaited infrastructure bill. Trump gave tax breaks to the rich, dismantled and demoralized a lot of administrative departments such as the National Security Agency, State Department and Department of Justice. Biden was tasked

with putting all that back together again, the Humpty Dumpty scenario.

Admittedly, Afghanistan was a disaster, but he's human. We make mistakes. No president would have made that a clean withdrawal.

Give the guy a break. He deserves a lot of credit — and that was just his first year — minus six months, in my opinion.
BONNIE LIVELY
Astoria

Moral bankruptcy

From the Feb. 2 online edition of The Oregonian, the following headline: "Portland traffic crashes report: 70% of pedestrians killed were homeless."

Does it follow that 70% of pedestrians seen these days on downtown streets are homeless, or does it only seem that way?

The value our society at large places on human life is a national disgrace, and an indication of moral bankruptcy.

GARY DURHEIM
Seaside