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OUR VIEW

Reefer madness!

The Pendleton city council doesn't know how or why it will attempt to ban marijuana in the city — but that's not going to stop them from trying.

Tuesday night's work session and city council meeting was dominated by more questions than answers when it came to regulation of the drug and shops where marijuana will soon be sold.

There was little public involvement, despite the council's good faith efforts to welcome community input. We think the unenthusiastic response — that council members are

receiving dozens more calls about the location of the next statue than the future of marijuana — is telling.

We believe that the public isn't as concerned with legalized marijuana in their community as the city council thinks it is. Sure, area voters leaned heavily against Measure 91 by a nearly 2-to-1 margin. But now that it is passed and will soon be law, we'd rather learn to live with it than continue to tilt against windmills and fight the endless cannabis war.

Surely the public is not as concerned with marijuana as Pendleton police chief Stuart Roberts, who is toeing the line of advocating for a political position, which would be against Oregon statute. That statute clearly states that public employees may not engage in political activity — such as promoting or opposing an initiative or referendum — while on the job. Being “on the job” can include activities where the person is acting, or appears to be acting, in an

official capacity.

Roberts' railing against marijuana may seem to some (state lawyers most importantly) to be advocating for a political position. And his economic arguments — that a glut of cheaper, legal marijuana would bolster the black market and lead to more robberies and crime — would, if true, break every economic tenant known to modern man.

It is strange, too, that the sheriff's office claims it will need more funding in a world of legalized marijuana.

There will no doubt be an increase in incidents of

“driving while high” and officers will need training and expertise to help combat this new rising crime.

But we just don't believe most marijuana users are of any concern to law enforcement. And some of the time, money and energy they have been using to combat such non-problematic law-evaders will save them some dollars and hours.

The next year is going to be weird. There will definitely be some things about Measure 91 that plumb don't work. It will take a ton of tweaking to make it a law we can live with. But the best way to do such work is by having your head out of the sand, confronting reality and focusing on the next hurdle.

This impetuous sprint to ban some unknown upcoming development — when not yet knowing if it is even legal to do so, and possibly breaking state codes in the pursuit of doing so — is what they warned us about 70 years ago. It's reefer madness!

The public isn't as concerned with legalized marijuana as the city council thinks it is.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



YOUR VIEWS

It's educated people who are against vaccines

Many studies to determine the general profile of people who refuse to vaccinate their children show that these people are largely highly educated, wealthy and environmentally conscious. In fact, many wealthy people send their children to private schools so they will not be forced to vaccinate their children. What do these anti-vaccine highly educated people know that the pro-vaccine people do not?

Loree McKenna
Pendleton

Centennial Park statue isn't a rusty stirrup

There was a recent letter to the editor related to the topic of bronze statues. The writer was adamant about how statues in our downtown area should only depict themes related to the Round-Up and pioneers. He mentioned “the rusty stirrup now sitting at Main and Dorion.”

Unfortunately, the letter writer made a mistake by describing the sculpture at Centennial Park as a “rusty stirrup.”

All bronze statues on Main Street have plaques explaining their significance with the exception of Stella Darby. The plaque at Centennial Park does not reveal anything about the artist or the art work. It simply says, “This park was built with contributions of time and money from Pendleton citizens in the centennial year 1980.”

Even without an explanation on the sculpture's plaque, one can see it's not a

stirrup because of its shape.

I'm certain that the letter writer and his posse are now intrigued by the mystery of the art work. What else could it be if it's not a stirrup?

According to the Smithsonian Institute's Art Inventories Catalog, the name of the sculpture is “Möbius Strip” and was created by Wayne Tassen using Corten steel. It is listed under the topic of Abstract-Geometric.

The “rusty stirrup” has that appearance because Corten steel was used. It eliminates the need for painting and develops a rust-like appearance whose patina changes over time. Since this art work was created to honor the city's centennial, the material symbolizes how the town will change over time.

What is a “Möbius Strip”? No, it's not another strip club in Umatilla. Mathematicians use the term to express the concept of taking an object and putting a half twist on it, making it “non-orientable,” which means that you can't give the object a front and a back.

Geometric figures were popular art forms in the '80s. A well known symbol in mathematics and physics is the one used for infinity, which happens to be the shape of our sculpture. Infinity means without limit and I believe that is what the artist had in mind when he created his artwork. In 1980, Main Street was thriving. The outlook for the future was optimistic as residents saw unlimited potential for the hub of economic activity in Eastern Oregon.

Pendleton has a rich colorful history but it's time to blaze new trails.

Jerry Cronin
Pendleton



OTHER VIEWS

The vaccine lunacy

A few years back, an acerbic friend of mine who was a recent transplant to Los Angeles told me that she itched to write a satirical novel with the following narrative:

A group of wealthy, educated people in Santa Monica who deliberately didn't vaccinate their children subsequently take them on a “poor-ism” trip to a developing country. The goal is to make them wiser and more sensitive to suffering in the world. While being sensitized, the kids catch diseases that they could have been inoculated against. Some of them die.

As a plot, it lacks subtlety (and compassion). But as a parable, it's crystal-clear. You can be so privileged that you're underprivileged, so blessed with choices that you choose to be a fool, so “informed” that you're misinformed.

Which brings us to Disneyland, measles and the astonishing fact that a scourge once essentially eliminated in this country is back.

You've probably heard or read about the recent outbreak traced to the theme park. But there's a chance that you're unaware, because it hasn't received nearly the coverage that, say, Ebola did, even though some of the dynamics at work here are scarier.

It started in mid-December and is now believed to be responsible for more than 70 cases in seven states and Mexico; 58 of those are in California, which of course is where the park is — in Orange County, to be more specific.

As it happens, there are affluent pockets of that county where the fraction of schoolchildren whose parents have cited a “personal belief” to exempt them from vaccinations is higher than the statewide average of 2.5 percent. That's also true of some affluent pockets of the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas.

It used to be that unvaccinated children in America were clustered in impoverished neighborhoods; now they're often clustered among sophisticates in gilded ZIP codes where a certain strain of health faddishness reigns. According to a story in *The Hollywood Reporter* last year, the parents of 57 percent of the children at a Beverly Hills preschool and of 68 percent at one in Santa Monica had filed personal-belief exemptions from having their kids vaccinated.

Why? Many of them buy into a discredited theory that there's a link between the MMR (mumps-measles-rubella) vaccine and autism. They're encouraged by a cadre of brash alarmists who have gained attention by pushing that thinking. Anti-vaccine panic was the path that the actress Jenny McCarthy traveled to innumerable appearances on prominent news and talk shows; she later demonstrated her singular version of concern for good health by working as a pitchwoman for e-cigarettes.

Other parents have separate or additional worries about vaccines, which can indeed have side effects. But they're weighing that downside against what they deem to be a virtually nonexistent risk of exposure to the diseases in question.

And that degree of risk depends entirely on a vast majority of children getting vaccines. If too many forgo them, we surrender what's known as “herd immunity,” and the risk rises. That's precisely what health officials see happening now.

In 2004, there were just 37 reported cases of measles in the United States. In 2014, there were 644. And while none of those patients died, measles can kill. Before vaccines for it became widespread in 1963, millions of Americans were infected annually, and 400 to 500 died each year.

“I don't think its fatality rate has decreased,” said Daniel Salmon, a vaccine



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

expert at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. “We just haven't had enough cases for someone to die.”

An estimated 90 percent of unvaccinated people who are exposed to the measles virus become infected, and they themselves can be infectious four days before they develop a telltale rash.

But what's in play is more than one affliction's resurgence. The size and sway of the anti-vaccine movement reflect a chilling disregard for science — or at least a pick-and-choose, cafeteria approach to it — that's also evident, for example, in many Americans' refusal to recognize climate change. We're a curious species, and sometimes a sad one, chasing knowledge only to deny it, making progress only to turn away from its benefits.

The movement underscores the robust market for pure conjecture — not just about vaccines, but about all sorts of ostensible threats and putative remedies — and the number of merchants willing to traffic in it.

Look at Dr. Oz, a cardiothoracic surgeon now drawing millions of viewers daily as a television host peddling weight-loss tricks. The British Medical Journal recently analyzed dozens of his shows and determined that more than half of the suggestions he doled out didn't have sound scientific backing.

The Internet makes it easier for people to do their own “research” and can lead them to trustworthy and untrustworthy sites in equal measure.

“It can be difficult to know what to believe,” said Kristen Feemster, a infectious diseases specialist at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. “So many people can be an expert, because there are platforms for so many voices.”

Salmon noted that the sheer variety and saturation of media today amplify crackpot hypotheses to a point where they seem misleadingly worthy of consideration.

“People say things enough times, there must be some truth to it,” he said. “Look at the proportion of people who question where our president was born or his religion.”

And we in the traditional media don't always help, covering the news in an on-one-hand, on-the-other-hand fashion that sometimes gives nearly equal time to people citing facts and people weaving fiction.

I'm not entirely baffled by the fear of vaccines, which arises in part from a mistrust of drug companies and a medical establishment that have made past mistakes.

But this subject has been studied and studied, and it's abundantly clear that we're best served by vaccinating all of those children who can be, so that the ones who can't be — for medical reasons such as a compromised immune system — are protected.

Right now, Salmon said, only two states, Mississippi and West Virginia, limit vaccine exemptions to such children. If the anti-vaccination crowd grows, other states may have to move in that direction.

There's a balance to be struck between personal freedom and public safety, and I'm not at all sure that our current one is correct.

We rightly govern what people can and can't do with guns, seat belts, drugs and so much more, all in the interest not just of their welfare but of everybody's. Are we being dangerously remiss when it comes to making them wear the necessary armor against illnesses that belong in history books?

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since June 2011, joined the *New York Times* in 1995. Over his years, he has worn a wide variety of hats, including chief restaurant critic and Rome bureau chief.

LETTERS POLICY

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