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OUR VIEW

The toot heard round the world

In the past month we’ve reported on a wide swath of local issues, from drug courts to droughts, body cameras to budgets.

And yet one letter to the editor we published Saturday, a satirical send-up to the Pendleton city council’s decision to add marijuana odor to the nuisance ordinance, has generated more online views than all the other hard work combined.

First off, kudos to Peter Walters. Secondly, kudos to the word fart. It’s a funny word, and funnier still in print. Walters and the word combined to form an incisive and hilarious letter that clearly hit the right notes, using the straight-faced format of newspaper ink to question why some odors should be banned by name while others — namely, his roommate’s flatulence — should not.

Even before the letter was republished by websites Huffington Post, Jezebel, New York Daily News, Dave Barry’s blog, OregonLive and many others, it was getting plenty of comments on our site.

But then it “went viral.” It has now been viewed tens of thousands of times on our website in the past few days, with nearly a hundred more readers being added to the rolls every minute on Tuesday.

In the world of the Internet, that traffic is barely a blip, an imperceptible tick for news sites that feed off clicks and audience engagement. There’s an entire online industry for that, and it seems to be thriving. Your Facebook and Twitter feeds are surely filled each day with strange news from around the world, mostly from aggregators who cherry pick the best stories from the millions and millions of outlets whose work is available at the click of a mouse. For each and every one of our clicks, thousands more went to a site such as Huffington Post.

Yet Walters didn’t receive a dime for his Pulitzer-worthy creation, and the *East Oregonian* didn’t receive more than a few nickels for

doing the reporting that inspired the farticle and publishing the oeuvre of odor. That’s mostly the fault of newspapers, whose heads have been too far into council meetings and court appearances to think about new ways to make money in a digital world. But it’s also the fault of that digital world, a place where creators very rarely reap the fruits of their labor.

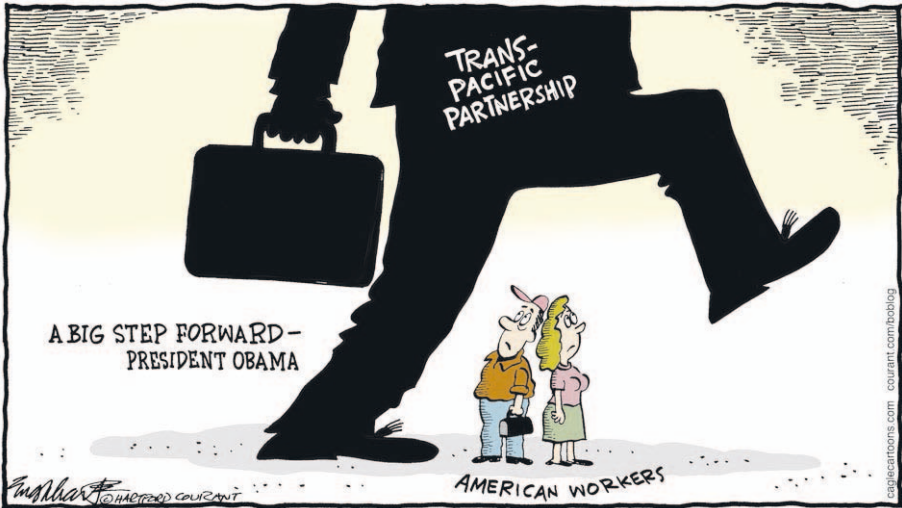
Now don’t get us wrong. We’re not greedy; in fact it’s nice to have some barb-throwing company for this latest bit of city council inanity. And no one should be disappointed about giving the world a laugh. It’s just that “going viral” can be many things: scary, thrilling, confusing, validating. But one thing it isn’t: profitable. We hope in the future, the world finds a way to reward the people who make a splash — something people love — be they letter writers or singing sensations or a person who gets that amazing video of the rainbow bending clear across the sky.

Sure, Walters’ letter smelled like something that could go far, but we had no idea he’d be doing Northwest radio on Tuesday and be the first thing that popped up when you type Pendleton into a search engine. Might keep an eye on the late night shows tonight, just in case Pendleton makes the monologues. We even had to update the old newsroom axiom: if it bleeds it leads, but if it stinks it gets links.

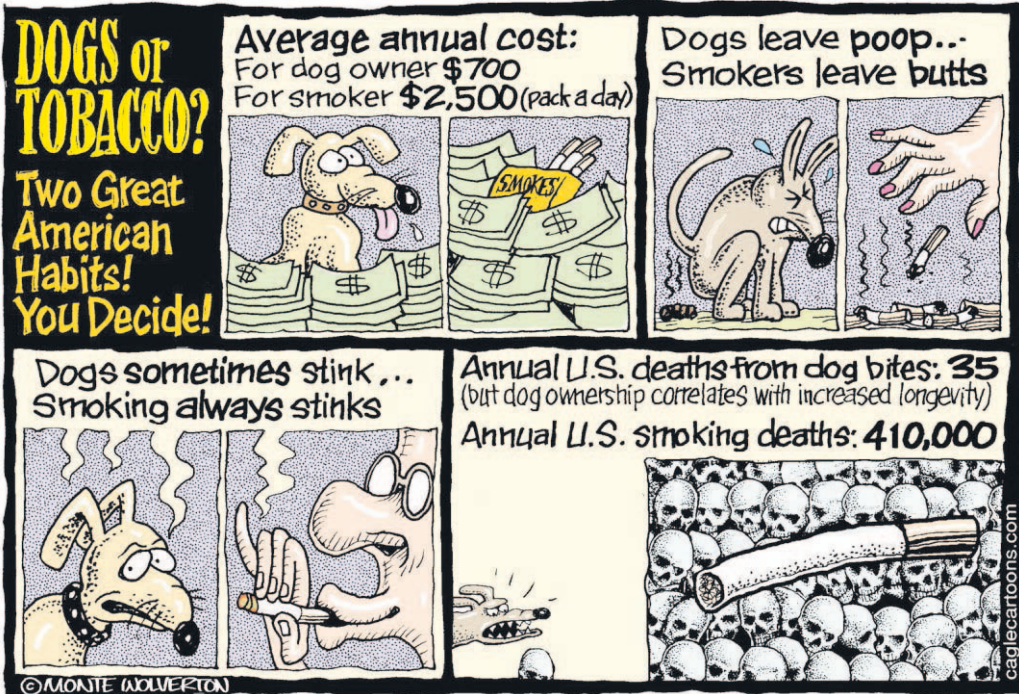
But that stink will soon die down and the Internet will quickly move that spotlight on to the next person-of-the-minute. Don’t fret. If local councils continue to create comical and discriminatory rules in order to harass and intimidate legal marijuana users, we imagine it won’t be long until they’re again the butt of jokes across the country. Unfortunately, that’s not going to translate into much local economic development.

A fart-free town, on the other hand ...

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.



OTHER VIEWS



Smoking, vaping and nicotine

We need a national debate on nicotine,” said Mitch Zeller. Zeller is the director of the Center for Tobacco Products, a division of the Food and Drug Administration created in 2009 when Congress passed legislation giving the FDA regulatory authority — at long last! — over cigarettes. In addition, the center will soon have regulatory authority over other tobacco products, including electronic cigarettes, which have become enormously controversial even as they have gained in use. Through something called a “deeming rule,” the center is in the process of asserting that oversight over e-cigarettes.

Opponents of electronic cigarettes, which include many public health officials, hope that the center will treat these new devices like it treats cigarettes: taking steps to discourage teenagers from “vaping,” for instance, and placing strict limits on the industry’s ability to market its products.

Proponents, meanwhile, hope that the center will view e-cigarettes as a “reduced harm” product that can save lives by offering a nicotine fix without the carcinogens that are ingested through a lit cigarette. In this scenario, e-cigarette manufacturers would be able to make health claims, and adult smokers might even be encouraged to switch from smoking to vaping as part of a reduced harm strategy.

When I requested an interview with Zeller, I didn’t expect him to tip his hat on which direction he wanted the center to go, and he didn’t. Indeed, one of the points he made was that the FDA was conducting a great deal of scientific research — more than 50 studies in all, he said — aimed at generating the evidence needed to better understand where to place e-cigarettes along what he calls “the continuum of risk.”

Zeller is a veteran of the “tobacco wars” of the 1990s, working alongside then-FDA Commissioner David Kessler, who had audaciously labeled cigarettes a “drug-delivery device” (the drug being nicotine) and had claimed regulatory authority. Zeller left the FDA in 2000, after the Supreme Court ruled against Kessler’s interpretation, and joined the American Legacy Foundation, where he helped create its hard-hitting, anti-tobacco “Truth campaign.” After a stint with a consulting firm, Pinney Associates, he returned to the FDA in early 2013 to lead the effort to finally regulate the tobacco industry.

“I am fond of quoting Michael Russell,” Zeller said, referring to an important South African tobacco scientist who died in 2009. In the early 1970s, Russell was among the



JOSEPH NOCERA
Comment

first to recognize that nicotine was the reason people got addicted to cigarettes. “He used to say, ‘People smoke for the nicotine but die from the tar,’” Zeller recalled.

This is also why Zeller found e-cigarettes so “interesting,” as he put it, when they first came on the market. A cigarette gets nicotine to the brain in seven seconds, he said. Nicotine gum or patches can take up to 60 minutes or longer, which is far too slow for smokers who need a nicotine fix. But e-cigarettes can replicate the speed of cigarettes in delivering nicotine to the brain, thus creating real potential for them to become a serious smoking cessation device.

But there are still many questions about both their safety and their efficacy. For instance, are smokers using e-cigarettes to quit cigarettes, or they using them to get a nicotine hit at times when they can’t smoke cigarettes? And beyond that there are important questions about nicotine itself, and how it should be dealt with.

“When nicotine is attached to smoke particles, it will kill,” said Zeller. “But if you take that same drug and put it

There are still many questions about both (e-cigarettes) safety and their efficacy. For instance, are smokers using e-cigarettes to quit cigarettes, or they using them to get a nicotine hit at times when they can’t smoke cigarettes?

in a patch, it is such a safe medicine that it doesn’t even require a doctor’s prescription.” That paradox helps explain why he believes “there needs to be a rethink within society on nicotine.”

Within the FDA, Zeller has initiated discussions with “the other side of the house” — the part of the agency that regulates drugs — to come up with a comprehensive, agency-wide policy on nicotine. But the public health community — and the rest of us — needs to have a debate as well.

“One of the impediments to this debate,” Zeller said, is that the e-cigarette opponents are focused on all the flavors available in e-cigarettes — many of which would seem aimed directly at teenagers — as well as their marketing, which is often a throwback to the bad-old days of Big Tobacco. “The debate has become about these issues and has just hardened both sides,” Zeller told me.

It’s not that Zeller believes nicotine is perfectly safe (he doesn’t) or that we should shrug our shoulders if teenagers take up vaping. He believes strongly that kids should be discouraged from using e-cigarettes.

Rather, he thinks there should be a recognition that different ways of delivering nicotine also come with different risks. To acknowledge that, and to grapple with its implications, would be a step forward.

“This issue isn’t e-cigarettes,” said Mitch Zeller. “It’s nicotine.”

■
Joseph Nocera is a business columnist for The New York Times, and a staff writer for The New York Times Magazine.

YOUR VIEWS

Odor nuisance ordinance is a nuisance

In response to the addition to the nuisance ordinance to include the smell of marijuana: I speak for many when I say this is ridiculous. Marijuana is as legal as alcohol and tobacco and can be consumed by those over the legal age. While I will not be one of those partaking in its consumption, it was voted on and passed by registered voters. Forgive me if I am wrong, but being voted on by voters is more than I can say for this ordinance — although this addition does pose some valid questions.

If I am in my yard and my neighbor’s garbage can offends me, can we fine that? Maybe for the noxious black plume of smoke from diesel trucks? Better yet, impose a fine for the methane emitted from horse/cattle manure and ban all parades. What if I am a vegetarian and my neighbor barbecues meat and the smell crosses onto my property? Can we get a fine for all these? Why? They are just byproducts of consumption. Exactly like consuming marijuana or growing

the flower will produce a byproduct, a smell.

A similar rule was attempted in Denver and failed because it was an extremely subjective measurement.

Some people’s noses are more sensitive than others. Some odors offend some but not others. Will a disagreement with your neighbor suddenly influence the sense of smell? I do know that I do not want police to waste time and resources on a frivolous ordinance. It is a slippery slope when we begin policing personal preference.

It is very interesting to see our officials become like dealers looking to cash in any way they can on marijuana. I understand the need for more worthwhile statues and raised sidewalks or possibly changing the parking scheme of downtown again but this is an unjustified and absolutely ridiculous ordinance. As a taxpaying homeowner in this community I find this to be a sad attempt to grasp at a fleeting prohibition for the sake of revenue.

Marijuana is here to stay and has legal status, we have to deal with it. To put it in perspective,

when you go to your fridge and grab a beer and sit down to watch your favorite sport, be thankful that back in 1933 the sound of a beer can opening was not determined to be offensive and a finable offense.

Joshua Nelson
Pendleton

Travel management plan a shell game

It’s been described as a shell game, it’s been delivered as a saving grace for the “sustainability” of our nation, and it is so important that is has taken at least five forest supervisors and eight years to complete — but one thing is for certain, they don’t want you knowing what you’re getting in the travel management plan, and they surely do not want you having a true voice in the discussion.

Currently the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is working on Subpart A of the plan. This part is where the Forest Service decides how many and what roads are needed (or more importantly not needed) to manage the forest. One would think the supervisor’s office would hold

meetings with the residents of the region to find out their specific uses and needs and work that into the equation; unfortunately, that isn’t the case. I personally have a request in from September of 2014 for the draft document outlining those minimum roads numbers. As of today, I still have no document.

Why, you might ask? Well, it’s pretty simple: because they don’t want us to know. See, it’s pretty hard to sneak something through when everyone knows what you’re doing, and so the Forest Service simply keeps us in the dark until they file the report with their regional office in Portland. They’ll say, “We asked them to participate in the maps session and that should count for meeting their needs,” but it doesn’t.

Currently in Eastern Oregon exists a draft document of the Subpart A report, and the roads it intends to identify for closure. And by the end of 2015 the WWNF will release that plan to the regional office for acceptance.

The question is, will you allow them to do it without standing up and saying no?

If you have time, please send an email to tmontoya@fs.fed.us requesting the draft Subpart A report and tell him travel management planning cannot move forward until all uses are protected in the Subpart A report.

John D. George
Bates, Ore.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.