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OUR VIEW

Counties will say no to marijuana, yes to leeching off taxpayers

Back in November, citizens of Umatilla and Morrow counties voted resoundingly against Measure 91, which legalized recreational marijuana in Oregon. In Umatilla County, 12,122 people opposed the measure while just 7,181 were in favor.

It didn't matter, as we all know, and the statewide issue easily passed by more than 200,000 votes. That made Oregon the third state in the country to legalize the sale and possession of marijuana and gave legislators about seven months to get regulations and taxes in place by the time it became law.

Those legislators did nothing but procrastinate for about six of those months. The Oregon Liquor Control Commission, which was tasked with overseeing regulation of the drug, did little more than take notes and shift personnel. But now, as the deadline to legalization draws near, a flurry of activity is underway. One piece will directly affect us here: the ability of local governments to ban marijuana businesses in places that opposed the measure back in November. Morrow and Umatilla counties fit that bill.

There is little appetite among elected officials in both counties for allowing marijuana business. If given the legal ability, bans are certain to be put into place. While Eastern Oregon has been a fertile ground for new ideas in education, agriculture and energy, there has been no interest in experimenting with drug reform.

But what do we gain from refusing to participate? Maybe a few slaps on the back from the similarly-aged, in the short remaining period when anti-marijuana voters are the majority in our small slice of America.

According to the Pew Research Center, 84 percent of people opposed marijuana legalization in 1969. That number has dropped steadily in the decades since, and now just 44 percent of people hold that same view. A majority — 53 percent — now favor legalization, a 12 percent jump in just 10 years. Now legal in four states and the District of Columbia, marijuana will be an annual ballot measure across the country, with legalization coming out on top more often than not.

But despite the gradual acceptance being won across the country, that virtue still has not penetrated the local brain trust — or the citizens at large.

"How many deaths is it going to take?" asked Pendleton Police chief Stuart Roberts of city council, while advocating bans and stoking fears about the destruction and death brought by legalization.

Former Pendleton city councilor and local businessman Keith May continued with the hyperbole, saying he would close his business and move away if a marijuana shop opened on Main Street.

Their cause is a lost one. It won't take long — maybe a few months of life passing by as usual — until their fears are found to be unsubstantiated. In that time, some of those 12,122 voters will rethink their decision and the ban will soon become a political liability, not to mention an economic one.

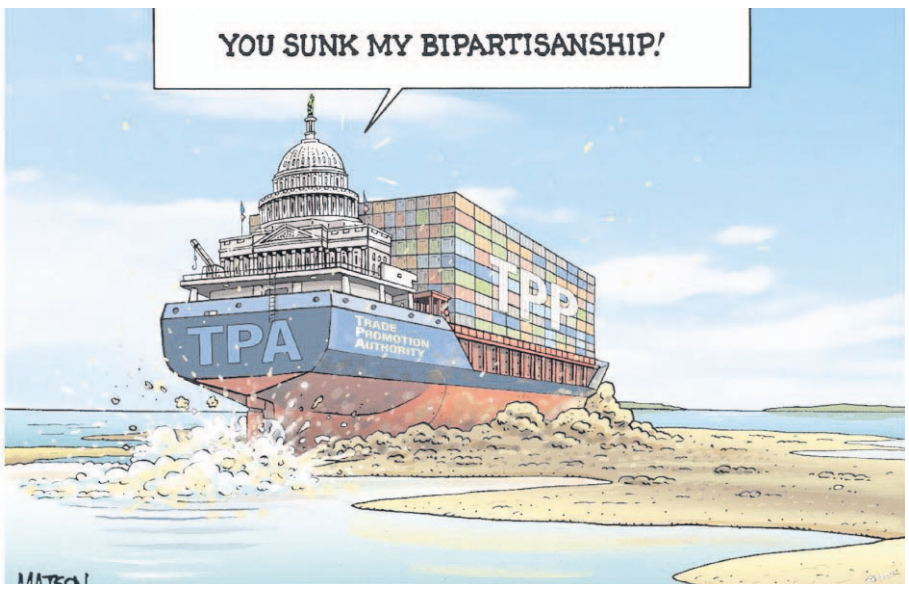
Marijuana is still legal here on July 1. On that day, adult Oregonians can own four marijuana plants and give the drug away to their of-age friends.

The county bans against marijuana shops will not reduce usage, but it will reduce the number of jobs and tax dollars we get from that usage.

Could you imagine the uproar if Oregon instituted a sales tax and Portland declined to participate? Picture the metro area spending taxes we raised out here in cowboy country without adding their own dollars to the pot. There would be an outright revolt in Eastern Oregon, and rightfully so.

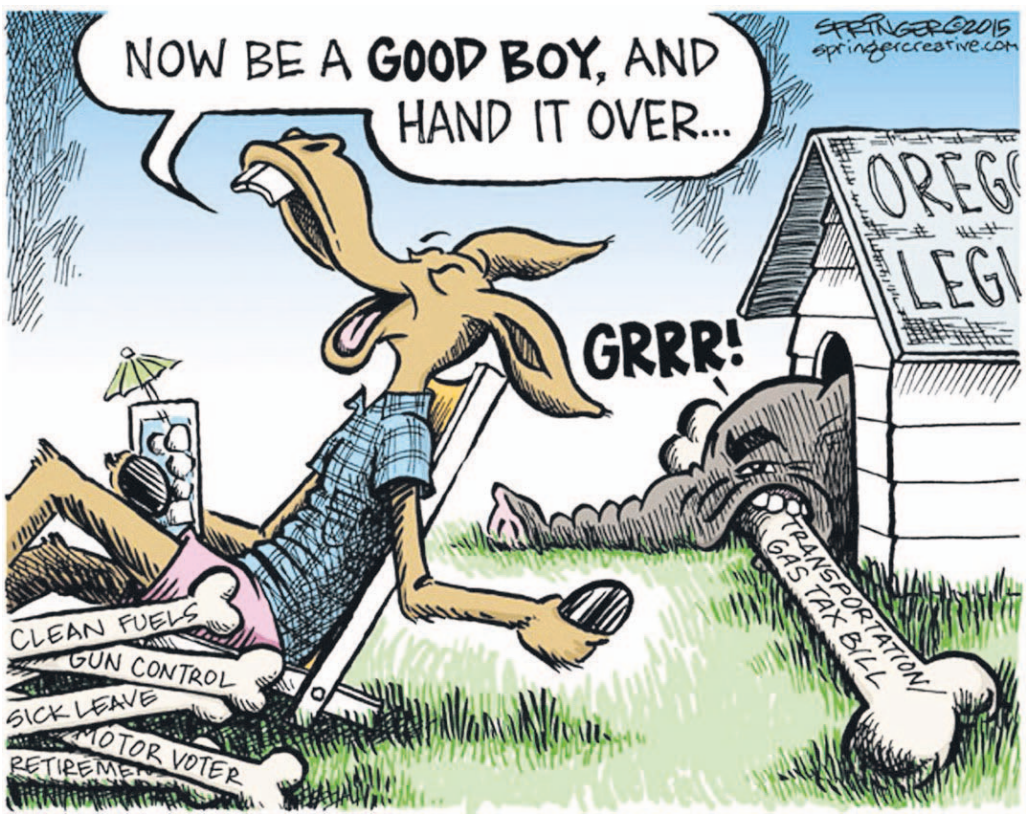
What's the difference with marijuana? A county that bans it will have to accept its title as a welfare queen — willing to collect and spend taxpayer dollars without putting their share into the pot.

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.



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.



OTHER VIEWS

Hearts broken open

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

In a recent column, I asked readers if they had discovered a purpose in life and, if so, how they had discovered it. A few thousand wrote essays. I was struck by how elemental life is. Most people found their purpose either through raising children or confronting illness or death.

Scott Addington writes, "As is often the case, my purpose became clearly evident after I had stopped looking for it. On October 11, 1995, my daughter was born. Beginning with that moment, there has never been the slightest doubt regarding the purpose and source of meaning in my life. Being a father is the most meaningful and rewarding pursuit a man could ever hope to experience."

Not only in parenting, but also in teaching. The essays from teachers ring with special clarity and force. Many of them see clearly how their day-to-day activities are in line with their ultimate end. This has its downside after people leave teaching.

Carolyn from Michigan writes, "Before class, I sometimes would sit in the chair of a student who was having a lot of trouble and pray that I might be a blessing to him that day. Yes, for 37 years I was a teacher, the last 25 as a high school special education teacher. That was my purpose; that was my calling. But now I am retired, and I am adrift. What is my purpose now? I struggle with it every day. When I was teaching, I would bound out of bed at 6:15 every morning. Now I wake early, but stay under the covers, filled with a world's worth of anxiety. It might have been better had I died while trying to teach students with learning disabilities the basics of geometry."

Quite frequently purpose emerges from loss. Greg Sunter from Brisbane, Australia, writes: "Four years ago, my wife of 21 years passed away as the result of a brain tumor. Her passage from diagnosis to death was less than six months. As shocking as that time was, almost as shocking was the sense of personal growth and awakened understanding that has come from the experience for me through reflection and inner work — to a point that I feel almost guilty about how significant my own growth has been as a result of my wife's death.

"In his book 'A Hidden Wholeness,' Parker Palmer writes about the two ways in which our hearts can be broken: the first imagining the heart as shattered and scattered; the second imagining the heart broken open into new capacity, holding more of both our own and the world's suffering and joy, despair and hope. The image of the heart broken open has become the driving force of my life in the years since my wife's death. It has become the purpose to my life."

Some people's lives organize around a certain role or calling. "My moniker could be 'formidable advocate,'" writes Georgian Lussier. After her brother suffered a brain injury, she learned to help people work through the maze of the health care system. Now she helps older women find work.

But, for many people, the purpose of life is simply to live it fully. Many people don't necessarily see their lives as pointing toward God or as defined by some mission statement. They seek to drink in life at full volume, to experience and help others richly.

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Jae Brown was driving after smoking weed and drinking when he was pulled over. He confessed everything to the cop, who saw that Brown was in college and whispered, "Don't let your friends get you in trouble you can't get yourself out of," and let him go. "My purpose in life," Brown writes, "is to mentor, provide that whisper in someone's ear that changes their life."

The great struggle in essay after essay is to remain emotionally vital and intellectually alive.

Zachary Krowitz, 21, read the essays written in response to the column and concluded that "this desire for something that is surely true is present in all of us, and reflects an attempt to know what we really want. ... Unfortunately, based both on the essays written in response to your column and common experience, such meaning is often lost as one travels through life, emotions become duller and less clear."

Alayne Crossman, 42, is able to keep her emotion flowing at full pitch. "Without the love of my family I wouldn't be who I am today. It means I cry during 'Frozen,' every single time. It means I cry when I listen to Van Morrison's 'Ancient Highway.' I am ridiculously sentimental because I choose to remain open to this vast, messy thing we call life."

For many people, the purpose of life is to have more life. That may not have defined people's purpose in past eras, when it might have had more to do with the next life, or obedience to a creed. But many today seek to live with hearts wide open.

■

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

YOUR VIEWS

Immigrants shouldn't have access to state scholarships

Sponsors of Senate Bill 932, legislation that would grant access to Oregon Opportunity Grants to illegal immigrants, seem tone deaf to the will of nearly one million Oregon voters who less than eight months ago rejected Measure 88, legislation that would have granted state issued driver cards to illegal immigrants.

By a 2-to-1 margin, voters defeated Measure 88 indicating that Oregon voters are very opposed to the idea of providing illegal immigrants any form of state benefit, like a state issued identity that would validate their presence in the state.

Senate Bill 932 in a very clear way validates the presence of illegal immigrants in the state by granting them the benefit of equal access to Oregon Opportunity Grants.

This school year, only 30 percent of the 120 thousand Oregon students eligible obtained a taxpayer funded Oregon Opportunity Grant. Currently there are not enough state monies available to fund Oregon Opportunity Grants for all American citizen Oregon students, let alone for persons illegally in the state.

The legislation could require the state to write a check of up to $2,100 for the 2015-2016 school years to each illegal immigrant who applies and is accepted to receive a grant. Over the time that it takes to complete a traditional four-year college education, an individual illegal immigrant could receive as much as $8,400 in state opportunity grants.

Earlier this year, Rep. Jessica Vega Peterson estimated that 76 illegal immigrants living in the state could be eligible to receive opportunity grants.

Doing the math on 76 illegal immigrants receiving Oregon Opportunity Grants for a period of from one to four years could cost the state's taxpayers between $159,600 and $638,400.

The state government administrative costs for giving illegal immigrants opportunity grants are estimated to be, over the next four years, $144,499.

A final troubling fact about SB 932 is that sponsors of the legislation have placed an emergency clause on the Senate Bill, which means Oregonians' opposing this legislation would be prevented from using the state's referendum process to put this issue of whether or not illegal immigrants should get access opportunity grants before the state's voters.

Oregon voters who reject the idea of granting the benefit of Oregon Opportunity Grants to illegal immigrants, a legislative action that validates their presence in the state, should contact their state senator and representative and tell them to vote no on SB 932.

David Olen Cross
Salem