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OUR VIEW

Think differently about incarceration

Is incarceration meant for punishment or rehabilitation?

It's a simple question that garners all sorts of responses. Most people fall somewhere in the middle — time behind bars should both satisfy a civilization's need for justice while preparing the ex-con for a life back in it.

So the questions of how long it lasts, how it should be executed and what happens when the sentence ends are all pertinent.

In 2013 the Oregon legislature took a hard look at incarceration projections and realized hard times were coming. An analysis showed an increase from about 14,000 inmates statewide in 2013 to about 16,000 in 2023 — and with each of those the added housing, food and health care costs that come with sustaining a life.

In response, the legislature passed HB3194 that both changed sentencing practices and added funding for better crime prevention. According to a Pew study, those changes will save the state $326 million over the next decade. Money that can be used to decrease the number of repeat offenders in our communities.

Locally, we've been investing in new things — more than just locks and keys and steel bars. Take Umatilla County's drug court and day program, for example. You may have read some of our stories in May about drug court graduates and others who had overcome obstacles to live a life free and clear of substance abuse. And a life free and clear of substance abuse often translates into a life free and clear from law enforcement, incarceration and life in government custody.

Last week we featured the day program, a strict post-prison course that forces recently released parties to show up first thing each morning to learn how to meld the structure and accountability of prison life with the freedom of the outside world.

Many of those feature stories were difficult reads. They detailed lives of crime and addiction, depression and suicide attempts. But they were also tales of remarkable bravery and toughness, that showed human beings can overcome a lot if given a chance, if given some hope, and if given a structure in which they can succeed.

Breaking the cycle of self-destruction, addiction and criminal acts is really hard. And one thing we've learned is that county lockup just doesn't do it. But these programs are making a difference, and are crucial in turning costly inmates into productive citizens.

While throwing away the key may seem like a just response when a person hurts, steals from or otherwise damages the life of a fellow human being, we must remember not just the cost but also our societal obligations. Sometimes, providing a helping hand to an offender can do both.

And it's great — and rare — when fiscal and moral responsibilities combine.

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

Family pets can become killers in packs

Friday, June 12, about 5:30 p.m., dogs that had come from somewhere south of Alleluia Avenue swam the river onto the small island that is a deer refuge near my back yard, and tore to pieces a four-day-old fawn.

Your dogs may be benign and friendly and thought not to be destructive, but when they "pack" they become ferocious hunters and killers, hearkening back to their ancient ancestry. This isn't the first time they've crossed the river and hunted prey.

I understand the accidental escape your pets undertake at times, but please do not indiscriminately set them free for a little exercise, to dump and cause mayhem near and in our yards!

Janet Boyd
Hermiston

Don't blur lines on illegal immigration

Your copy editor displayed his bias when he titled the letter from David Olen Cross "Immigrants shouldn't have access to state scholarships."

Illegal aliens aren't the same as immigrants, and your staffer's attempt to blur the distinction between the two is intellectually dishonest. He ignores the fact Oregon continually shortchanges citizens to fund illegal immigrants. For instance, the Talented and Gifted Program has shrunk while we spend one and a half times as much on bi-lingual education as English education. Taxpayers must subsidize the college tuition of illegal aliens while citizens from other states have to pay full price.

As if the burden isn't enough, legislative Democrats want us to also give free scholarship money to illegally present students from a limited program that only awards help to 20 percent of citizens who apply, and who must now compete with illegal aliens.

Mexico doesn't undermine its population by awarding extravagant benefits to lawbreakers, and neither should we. Your headline writer is an example of the manipulation citizens undergo to tolerate mass illegal infiltration.

Lyneil Vandermolen
Tualatin

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

Fracking and the Franciscans

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Pope Francis is one of the world's most inspiring figures. There are passages in his new encyclical on the environment that beautifully place human beings within the seamless garment of life. And yet overall the encyclical is surprisingly disappointing.

Legitimate warnings about the perils of global warming morph into 1970s-style doom-mongering about technological civilization. There are too many overdrawn statements like "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."

Hardest to accept, though, is the moral premise implied throughout the encyclical: that the only legitimate human relationships are based on compassion, harmony and love, and that arrangements based on self-interest and competition are inherently destructive.

> He neglects the obvious truth that the qualities that do harm can often, when carefully directed, do enormous good.

The pope has a section on work in the encyclical. The section's heroes are St. Francis of Assisi and monks — emblems of selfless love who seek to return, the pope says, to a state of "original innocence."

He is relentlessly negative, on the other hand, when describing institutions in which people compete for political power or economic gain. At one point he links self-interest with violence. He comes out against technological advances that will improve productivity by replacing human work. He specifically condemns market-based mechanisms to solve environmental problems, even though these cap-and-trade programs are up and running in places like California.

Moral realists, including Catholic ones, should be able to worship and emulate a God of perfect love and still appreciate systems, like democracy and capitalism, that harness self-interest. But Francis doesn't seem to have practical strategies for a fallen world. He neglects the obvious truth that the qualities that do harm can often, when carefully directed, do enormous good. Within marriage, lust can lead to childbearing. Within a regulated market, greed can lead to entrepreneurship and economic innovation. Within a constitution, the desire for fame can lead to political greatness.

You would never know from the encyclical that we are living through the greatest reduction in poverty in human history. A raw and rugged capitalism in Asia has led, ironically, to a great expansion of the middle class and great gains in human dignity.

You would never know that in many parts of the world, like the United States, the rivers and skies are getting cleaner. The race for riches, ironically, produces the wealth that can be used to clean the environment.

A few years ago, a team of researchers led by Daniel Esty of Yale looked at the environmental health of 150 countries. The nations with higher income per capita had better environmental ratings. As countries get richer they invest to tackle environmental problems that directly kill human beings (though they don't necessarily tackle problems that despoil the natural commons).

You would never suspect, from this encyclical, that over the last decade, one of the most castigated industries has, ironically, produced some of the most important economic and environmental gains. I'm talking of course about fracking.

There was recently a vogue for polemical antifracking documentaries like "Gasland" that purport to show that fracking is causing flammable tap water and other horrors.

But a recent Environmental Protection Agency study found that there was no evidence that fracking was causing widespread harm to the nation's water supply. On the contrary, there's some evidence that fracking is a net environmental plus.

That's because cheap natural gas from fracking displaces coal. A study by the Breakthrough Institute found coal-powered electricity declined to 37 percent from 50 percent of the generation mix between 2007 and 2012. Because natural gas has just half as much global-warming potential as coal, energy-related carbon emissions have declined more in the U.S. than in any other country over that time.

Fracking has also been an enormous boon to the nation's wealth and the well-being of its people. In a new report called "America's Unconventional Energy Opportunity," Michael E. Porter, David S. Gee and Gregory J. Pope conclude that gas and oil resources extracted through fracking have already added more than $430 billion to annual gross domestic product and supported more than 2.7 million jobs that pay, on average, twice the median U.S. salary.

Pope Francis is a wonderful example of how to be a truly good person. But if we had followed his line of analysis, neither the Asian economic miracle nor the technology-based American energy revolution would have happened. There'd be no awareness that though industrialization can lead to catastrophic pollution in the short term (China), over the long haul both people and nature are better off with technological progress, growth and regulated affluence.

The innocence of the dove has to be accompanied by the wisdom of the serpent — the awareness that programs based on the purity of the heart backfire; the irony that the best social programs harvest the low but steady motivations of people as they actually are.

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

GMO ban difficult to enforce

The (Albany) Democrat Herald, June 17

While we wait to see what the next front will be in the statewide battle over genetically modified organisms, it's worth watching how a similar ban plays out in Jackson County.

The ban in that southern Oregon county, approved by voters more than a year ago, finally went into effect on Saturday, June 6, after a federal judge rejected a claim by farmers that the ordinance violated their rights under state law.

So that Saturday was the first day when people could tip off county officials about potential violations of the ban.

Here's what happened on that red-letter day: Nothing.

And you can expect the same sort of action in Jackson County in the immediate future. According to a story in *The Oregonian*, Jackson County officials have no immediate plans to patrol the county searching for illegal GMO crops. And they may never get around to it.

Part of the reason is legal. Although the judge rejected the "right to farm" claim being pursued by lawyers for the farmers, an appeal remains a possibility.

And a separate legal issue still is pending: Whether the farmers should receive $4.2 million in compensation from the county. County officials agreed not to enforce the ban until that legal issue is settled.

It's not clear at all how officials should enforce the ban, or even if they should. The ordinance doesn't require the county to enforce it; it merely gives the county the authority to do so. And it seems relatively clear that the county isn't exactly eager to provide enforcement, in part because officials say the cost of enforcement could be as much as $200,000 each year.

Proponents of the ban say, in general, that's OK. What's really important, they say, is the message that the measure sends to farmers considering planting GMO crops. And, they say, the measure is important to help protect non-GMO crops.

Maybe. But that equanimity likely will be severely tested the first time someone files a complaint that someone else is planting GMO crops, and county officials need to figure out how to respond. You can't tell if a crop is GMO just by looking it at; such a determination requires sophisticated testing.

One of the most unfortunate side effects of the Benton County debate over the proposed GMO ban there was the way it pitted farmers — in some cases, lifelong friends — against each other. Depending on what happens next in Jackson County (and across the state), that nastiness might turn out to be just a taste of what could come next.