

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Guestworker impasse shows need for reform

For the second year in a row, a computer failure has caused a farmworker shortage in the West. This renews legitimate complaints that the government’s system for approving guestworker visas is unnecessarily complex.

A hardware glitch prevented the State Department from processing visas for H-2A guestworkers on the Mexican border for nine days, preventing workers already hired by fruit and vegetable growers from entering the United States and delaying the picking of perishable crops.

According to the State Department, a hardware failure in its Consular Consolidated Database left it unable to process visas or passports at embassies and consulates worldwide.

The problem left thousands of foreign workers with jobs waiting in the United States, but who had not yet had their visas issued, stuck in Mexico. And it left growers in the U.S. scrambling to try, largely unsuccessfully, to arrange their legal crossing.

“We cannot bypass the legal requirements necessary to screen visa applicants before we issue visas for travel,” the State Department said. “Security measures prevent consular officers from printing a passport, report of birth abroad or visa until the case completes the required national security checks.”

While many employers offered to pay worker expenses as they waited in Mexico, many workers could not afford to wait and returned home.

Dan Fazio, director of the Washington Farm Labor Association in Olympia, is more than a little frustrated. A similar glitch last year caused delays in getting legal

workers into the fields and orchards of the West.

Though the hardware glitches are unfortunate, Fazio says the problem does not lie with the State Department or its computers. The problem is that the system depends on the seamless coordination of six separate government agencies.

Five years ago the Obama Administration made the H-2A program less user friendly.

The program requires employers to first advertise jobs to U.S. citizens, and to give preference to any local applications that may come thereafter. Even when unemployment is high, local workers seldom take to the fields. Growers have to provide transportation and housing, and a guaranteed wage.

And even if a grower meets all the requirements, any number of glitches can keep workers on the wrong side of the border.

The answer is meaningful immigration reform, passed by Congress and not by administrative fiat.

We continue to believe the answer is to offer illegal immigrants temporary legal status and a path to permanent residency after 10 years if they meet strict requirements — no prior felony convictions, no violations while awaiting residency, learning to speak English and pay a fine and back taxes. We think the border should be secured. Employers must verify the work status of their employees.

And of course, a viable guestworker program must be established without the politics and the nonsensical requirements.

Whether taken piecemeal or in a comprehensive measure, it’s time Congress moved forward.



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

Court has no right to overrule the people

I cannot believe how fast this country has become so immoral and unethical; five people can dictate to the majority what is right.

The majority voted no to same sex marriage. If you don’t want to believe in God it is your choice, but do not tell us that it is OK. The majority vote in Oregon was no same sex marriage, and yet the attorney general would not stand behind the people.

If they want to destroy themselves then let it be on them — they have that God-given right, but the government does not have the right tell us to accept it. Do not give us cow pie and say it’s an apple.

William Douglas
Echo

Pot must be handled justly

The controversy over marijuana seems to get more complicated daily. In a recent article in *The New Yorker*, May

8, 2015, a well-known surgeon, Dr. Atul Gawande, commented that a Colorado study found that the percentage of fatal motor vehicle accidents involving marijuana had doubled since its commercial distribution became legal.

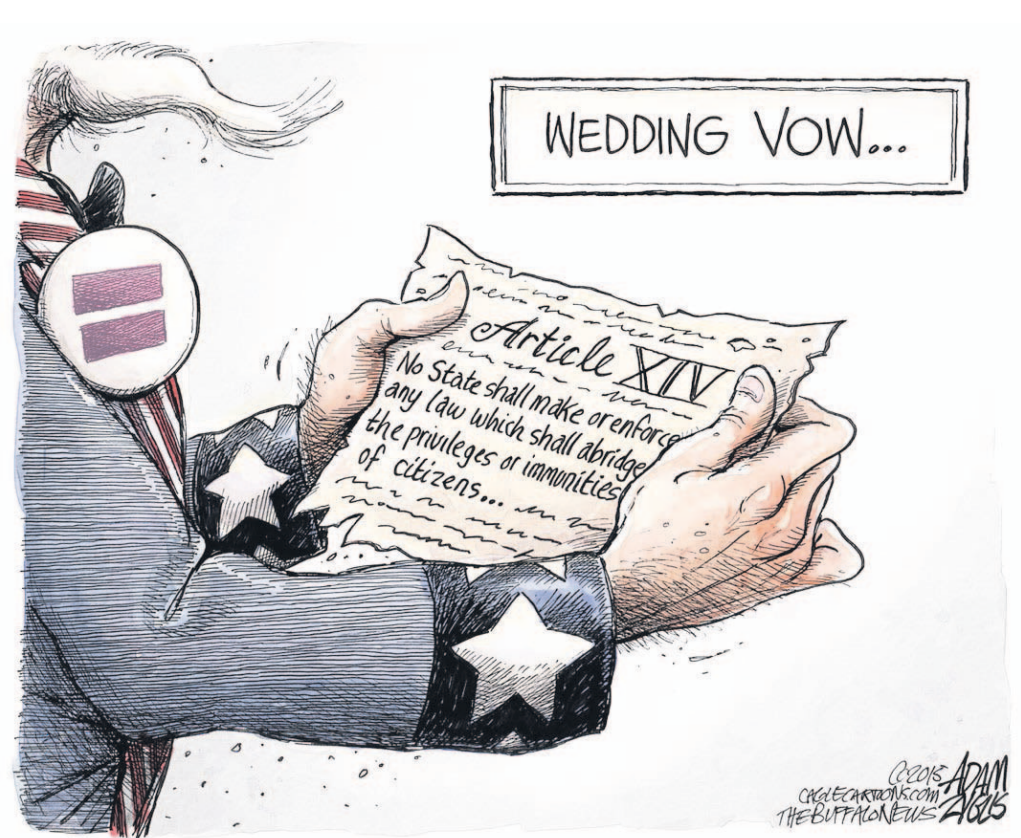
In reading your Public Safety Log, I note that daily there are many citations for persons using or having marijuana in their possession. It is probably true, some marijuana is obtained by black market, but if Colorado’s statistics are correct, we must seriously decide how we plan to handle the use of marijuana in Oregon.

One only has to look north to Washington to learn how much marijuana is brought across the border. It causes a lot of problems for the police and courts, problems that cost taxpayers money. Most of those arrested are repeaters. Finding a way to deal with this important issue is not an easy task, but dealing with it justly is important. I wish I had a solution, or even a suggestion. I do not.

Dorys C. Grover
Pendleton

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

Gay conservatism and straight liberation

Before there was a national debate about same-sex marriage, there was a debate within the gay community about whether it was a worthwhile goal to chase at all.

This debate was tactical (since the cause once seemed quixotic) but also philosophical.

One current of thought saw the institution of marriage as inherently oppressive, patriarchal or heteronormative, better rejected or radically transformed than simply joined.



ROSS DOUTHAT
Comment

In this sense, the gay rights movement has won twice over. Its conservative wing won the right to normalcy for gay couples, while rapid cultural change has made the definition of normalcy less binding than the gay left once feared.

In vain social conservatives have argued that this combination isn’t a coincidence, that support for same-sex marriage and the decline of straight marital norms exist in a kind of feedback loop, that an idea can have conservative consequences for one community and revolutionary implications overall.

This argument was ruled out, irrationally, as irrational, but it probably wouldn’t have mattered if the courts were willing to consider it. Too many Americans clearly just like the more relaxed view of marriage’s importance, and the fact that this relaxation makes room for our gay friends and neighbors is only part of its appeal. Straight America has its own reasons for seeking liberation from the old rules, its own hopes of joy and happiness to chase.

Unfortunately I see little evidence that people are actually happier in the emerging dispensation, or that their children are better off, or that the cause of social justice is well-served, or that declining marriage rates and thinning family trees (plus legal pressure on religious communities that are exceptions to this rule) promise anything save greater loneliness for the majority, and stagnation overall.

The case for same-sex marriage has been pressed in the name of the Future. But the vision of marriage and family that made its victory possible is deeply present-oriented, rejecting not only lessons of a long human past but also many of the moral claims that inspire adults to privilege the interests of their children, or indeed to bring children into existence at all.

Perhaps, with same-sex marriage an accomplished fact, there will be cultural space to consider these lessons and claims anew. Perhaps.

Ross Douthat joined *The New York Times* as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009. His column appears every Sunday.

If the paw doesn’t fit, the state must acquit

The (Bend) Bulletin, June 28

Naturalists couldn’t be happier about the growing number of wolves in Oregon. For them, the return of wolves restores a missing piece of the ecosystem. But almost in inverse proportion, ranchers are not so pleased.

We don’t want to make light of the serious issues that divide naturalists and ranchers, but there are great mystery stories in the state’s wolf kill investigations.

The reports are how the state determines if a wolf is guilty of killing livestock. They help measure the impact of wolves in Oregon and can earn ranchers compensation for losses.

The reports aren’t great literature. But for a bureaucratic report, there is fascinating intrigue in the evidence, sleuthing and suspects.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife tries to get an investigator on site within 24 hours of a report of a possible wolf kill. There is measurement of bite marks and location. Determinations are made about what wounds were killing strikes and what was postmortem feeding. There’s analysis of tracks. There’s comparison of tracking

locations of collared wolves. The final reports are published online at www.dfw.state.or.us/Wolves/depredation—investigations.asp.

Sometimes, wolves are blamed. Sometimes, it’s a mountain lion. Sometimes, ODFW investigators are just not sure.

Ranchers complain about these investigations. Todd Nash, a Wallowa County rancher and chairman of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association wolf committee, doesn’t feel ODFW is willing enough to confirm a wolf kill. He told the *East Oregonian* it would be easier to find O.J. Simpson guilty than a wolf.

He pointed to an incident in Wallowa County this year of the death of a calf. There was evidence the calf had been attacked by a wolf and a coyote. The investigation decision was “probable wolf” instead of “confirmed wolf.”

Nash’s frustration is understandable. But ODFW’s decision in that case seemed reasonable given the evidence presented in the report.

The state does have a responsibility to get rid of wolves that are chronically preying on livestock. But if the paw doesn’t fit, the state must acquit.