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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A kick in the pants to the group of four pre-teen boys who started a fire that burned Eugene’s historic Civic Stadium to the ground.

According to the Eugene *Register-Guard*, the three 12-year-olds and one ten-year-old face charges that include first-degree and second-degree arson, burglary, criminal mischief and reckless endangerment.

Eugene police said after the arrests that the boys had ignited debris with a lighter in the stadium’s press box and the fire quickly got out of hand. They may not have intended to burn down the stadium, and panicked and ran off when the fire started.

The inferno destroyed one of the few remaining wooden ballparks in America, resulting in a sad loss to the state’s athletic history. The future criminal case against the four boys will no doubt bring additional losses.

But on the flip side then, a tip of the hat to everyone who made the Fourth of July holiday a safe one in our area.

Exploding, flammable flames of fiery fire are not the best thing to shoot into our bone-dry fields and forests. So kudos to those who held off, skipped the fireworks this year, or took precautions that kept our residents and our region from going up in smoke on America’s birthday.

Yes, area fire departments and districts were plenty busy on the Fourth. That’s part of the gig. But they did a great job of getting small fires out quickly, and making sure the big shows went off without a hitch.

But local residents deserve plenty of credit too, for toning down their celebrations and also for being considerate and thoughtful for the dangerous drought that surrounds us.

Let’s hope next year is lush and green, the wheat and veggies are big and healthy, the streams are full and the fish are too. Then we’ll have the opportunity to make up for this year and show America how much we really care.

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

Different driving rules makes sense for rural Oregon

The (Albany) Democrat-Herald

Maybe you’ve noticed this as well, but it seems as if every time the Legislature meets, it spends more time than it should pondering the way that the rest of us drive.

This is likely a result of all the time legislators spend on the road between Salem and their homes, and we should emphasize before we continue that we’re sympathetic to these road warriors.

Since they’re racking up some serious mileage, it’s no wonder that legislators get to think long and hard about the bad habits of other drivers. (Just as we’re sure that our own driving behavior is beyond reproach every time we slide behind the wheel, we’re certain that every legislator is a model of driving purity, hands locked in the 10 and 2 positions on the steering wheel and never even being tempted to check why the cellphone is constantly ringing with new texts.)

The logical result is that every legislative session gets filled with proposals likely meant, in some way, to show these idiot drivers on the road how things should be done. Most of these proposals get shot down, as they should, in the course of the session.

This year’s session also has included a variety of measures meant to change the way we drive.

But the surprising thing is that some of these measures survived the cut and are headed to Gov. Kate Brown. And the real surprise is this: They’re worthy of support.

The Legislature recently backed a bill that would raise the speed limits from

55 to 65 mph outside the city limits in Central and Eastern Oregon. Interstate 84 from The Dalles to Idaho would rise to 70 mph, as would all of U.S. 95 in Oregon’s southeast corridor. These changes are overdue.

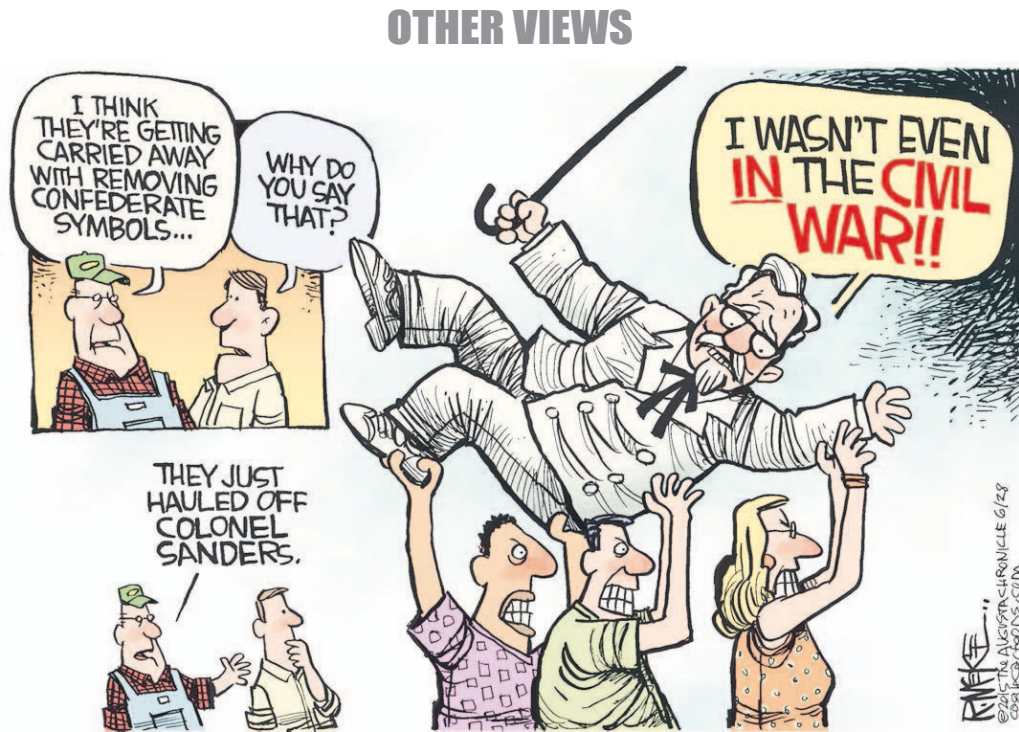
Anyone who’s spent any time driving on the eastern reaches of Interstate 84 knows the experience of counting the minutes until you leave Oregon so that you can speed up just a bit. These are wide-open stretches; raising the speed limit so that it’s more in sync with the speed limits in Washington state and Idaho simply makes sense.

The Legislature also backed a bill that allows self-service gasoline late at night in counties with no more than 40,000 residents. The idea is to allow motorists low on fuel in lightly populated areas the chance to get gas without waiting for a station to open.

It’s a small crack in the state’s ban on self-service gasoline, and, truthfully, it’s a crack that’s not likely to get any bigger any time soon.

But the measure did generate some light-hearted soul searching, including this Twitter message from mid-valley Sen. Sara Gelser: “Today I voted for limited self-service gas in extremely rural areas late at night. Am I still a real Oregonian?”

But legislators wisely shot down a bill that would have designated the left lane on four-lane highways as a passing lane and allowed police to ticket motorists who failed to move over for faster traffic. These slowpokes in the left lane are annoying, to be sure, but it still seems extreme to label their behavior illegal.



Will slippery slope follow Confederate flag battle?

Some conservatives have seen efforts to remove the Confederate battle flag from the statehouse in Columbia, South Carolina, and also from other public places around the South, as the beginning of a slippery slope in which roads and landmarks named after Confederate figures are changed, monuments are removed, and a significant part of American history is obscured from view.

“The Left’s 21st century agenda: expunging every trace of respect, recognition or acknowledgment of Americans who fought for the Confederacy,” tweeted *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol on June 23. “It’s our own mini-French revolution, expunging history in a frenzy of self-righteousness.”

There are clearly some who would like to do just that. David Brooks, the *New York Times* columnist, recently advocated removing Robert E. Lee’s name “from most schools, roads and other institutions, where the name could be seen as acceptance of what he did and stood for during the war.”

“This is not about rewriting history,” Brooks argued. “It’s about shaping the culture going forward.”

That’s the talk in elite circles. But a new poll suggests that most Americans, white and black, view the flag differently from other memories of the Confederacy and are not on board for the wholesale removal of names and monuments commemorating those who fought for the South in the Civil War.

First, the flag. A new poll, by CNN and ORC International, asked 1,017 adults whether they favor or oppose “removing Confederate flags from government property that is not part of a museum.” A majority, although not an overwhelmingly one — 55 percent — favors removal. Inside those numbers, 50 percent of whites and 73 percent of blacks support removal.

Majorities in all the nation’s regions except the South favor removal, and the South itself is split almost evenly, with 49 percent in support and 50 percent in opposition.

The poll was taken from June 26 to June 28, after an intense national discussion about the place of the flag in public life in the aftermath of the Charleston shootings.

Then there is the question of roads, landmarks, monuments and institutions. First, the pollsters asked whether the public supports “renaming streets and highways named after Confederate leaders.” Nationally, the result

was just 29 percent support, while 68 percent oppose.

Broken down by race, 26 percent of whites approve of renaming streets, while 71 percent oppose. Among blacks, 33 percent approve renaming streets, while 63 percent oppose.

Then the pollsters asked whether the public supports “removing tributes to those who fought for the Confederacy from public places.” Whites strongly oppose the idea, with just 21 percent supporting removal and 75 opposing. Blacks are evenly divided, with 49 percent in support and 50 percent in opposition.

There’s no region in the country in which a majority supports removing those tributes. Support is just 28 percent in the Northeast, 29 percent in the Midwest, 24 percent in the South, and 24 percent in the West, with majorities around 70 percent opposed in every region.

Solid majorities of both political parties oppose removing tributes, as well. Sixty-three percent of Democrats, 69 percent of independents, and 85 percent of Republicans oppose. Opposition is also fairly even among age and income groups.

The numbers suggest that when it comes to the debate over the place of the Civil War in contemporary life, there is the Confederate battle flag and then there is everything else. In response to the question, “Do you, yourself, see the Confederate flag more as a symbol of Southern pride or more as a symbol of racism?” 57 percent of respondents say Southern pride, 33 percent say racism, and five percent say both equally.

Inside those numbers, 66 percent of whites say the flag is a symbol of Southern pride, while 25 percent say it represents racism. For blacks, the numbers are completely different: 17 percent say the flag is a symbol of Southern pride, while 72 percent say it is a symbol of racism. No other Confederate reminder — no Lee Highway, no Fort Hood, no war memorial — produces the kind of lopsided reaction that the flag does.

That could change, of course. The public conversation has been nearly all about the flag in the days since the murders in Charleston, and might at some point turn to the broader issue of Confederate memory. But for now, if the new opinion numbers are accurate, there’s no public consensus for a mini-French Revolution.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

BYRON YORK

Comment

YOUR VIEWS

USFS should hold forest plan meetings in more locations

Circumvent: I came across this word recently, and now it sticks in my already cluttered head (the definition: around, to get the better of, or prevent by craft or ingenuity).

I feel the workshops being facilitated by High Desert Partnerships are a platform to circumvent the overwhelming negative response to the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision. Over 1,300 comments were received with 95 percent disapproval of the plan. I find it alarming no workshops are scheduled for Union or Baker County.

Repeatedly, Forest Access For All (FAFA) has requested public meetings with the Forest Service and voiced our dislike of the workshop scenario. Once again this agency appears to suffer hearing loss. Baker County commission chair Bill Harvey is working to arrange a public meeting.

Last year FAFA spent thousands of dollars presenting meetings and encouraging people to speak and write concerns on the proposed Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision. FAFA members traveled across Eastern Oregon throughout the summer months. The efforts of dedicated members combined with others generated over 1,300 comments. Finally,

late in the fall, 11 counties made the right move and rejected the proposed forest plan. Something worked.

Be aware when you attend these workshops. It is imperative you stick to your message. A piece of information came out of the John Day meeting that to me was very alarming. The forest supervisor responded to the crowd with the insinuation that, when push comes to shove, the Forest Service doesn’t need to respond to any of our concerns. Once again, engagement with the Forest Service would indicate we are dickering over a preconceived conclusion with the illusion public concerns have been addressed.

At the very least we need language in the Blue Mountain Forest Plan that preserves and protects our present level of access. That would be a fair beginning for dialogue. Road closures through the back door of projects needs to stop.

To date 14 workshops have been scheduled, none in Union or Baker counties. I want endless meetings and comments to end, but request two more, one in Union and one in Baker County, preferably at a time and date working people can attempt to attend the meetings.

Wanda Ballard
Baker City

LETTERS POLICY

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