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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat, kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to Hermiston councilman John Kirwan for raising his voice to allow democracy to guide the city’s decision on whether or not to ban marijuana dispensaries.

It’s not a stance we’ve seen from many local elected officials, but are glad to see Kirwan lead the way.

Cities and counties in rural Oregon where a majority of voters were against legalized marijuana in November 2014 have been lining up to keep businesses from selling the drug for either medical or recreational purposes. Each entity has the choice of putting it to a vote or enacting a ban without input.

Many local elected leaders have taken the shortcut built into Measure 91 — banning the businesses outright without asking for the public’s support. While written into the law, opt-out democracy isn’t a good path to go down.

At very least we prefer the other route, giving voters the benefit of the doubt and the ability to respond to a new situation.

In November of 2014 about 63 percent of voters in the county said marijuana should remain illegal. That’s about the same percentage of U.S. citizens who believed the drug should be illegal in a 2000 poll by Pew Research. The same Pew poll shows that only 44 percent of Americans now think the drug should be banned.

By the time the November 2016 ballot comes around, marijuana will have been legal in Oregon for nearly 18 months and in neighboring Washington for three years. And as time moves on, people are changing their minds about the dangers of pot and the effectiveness of a sales ban. We think asking them for input is worth the effort.

We’ve tipped our hat to the firefighters on the burning front lines of the northwest fires. Now we’ll extend a tip of the hat to everyone else supporting the residents of the fire-threatened communities.

When tragedy strikes, neighbors often are at their best. That’s been the case in Grant County, where donations have poured into a makeshift relief center at the county fairgrounds. Stories have emerged of people in Umatilla and Morrow counties donating money, supplies, even animal feed to those who are in danger of losing everything. Or have already lost everything.

We can’t kick a wildfire — it’s just not practical. It’s a force of nature and science and will only singe the boot. But in the face of such a hellish reality, it’s good to see people taking care of one another.

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

Everyone should be able to live out faith

Years ago a carpet cleaner who was a Jehovah’s Witness refused to clean the carpets of our church in Oregon City because of his beliefs. Although I disagreed with him, I support his right to live and conduct his business by his conscience. One of our basic human rights is the right to live our lives, including our business practices, according to the dictates of our conscience.

We are now being denied that right. Whether a baker in Oregon, a florist in Washington, or a photographer in New Mexico, a businessperson who cannot in good conscience participate in a homosexual event is maligned, prosecuted, and severely punished.

How much hate must some people have toward their fellow human beings to bring down the police power of the state to destroy them economically over a cake, and be richly rewarded for doing so. Where is the common courtesy of saying, “We respect your beliefs; we’ll go to another bakery.” If a white supremacist ordered a cake with racist words on it, the bakers would be honored for refusing.

Using a false premise to establish laws and penalties that require good people to violate their conscience and then criminalize them for maintaining their moral integrity is tyranny. Forcing them into violating their conscience is

nothing less than the rape of their souls. The current radical sexual revolution is viciously intolerant. It is a judgmental juggernaut that assaults the First Amendment and crushes all who stand in its way.

America has lost its way. Only a genuine spiritual and moral awakening will save us.

Dr. J. W. Jepson
The Dalles

Gas prices still a head scratcher

I wrote one other time asking a simple question and was hoping that one, or more, fuel distributors would respond with an honest reply. But again I was wrong. My question, using yesterday’s prices: I observed what is an unbelievable difference in the price of unleaded fuel between Pendleton, Stanfield and Hermiston. Pendleton fuel was \$2.63, Stanfield (Pilot Truck Stop) was \$2.79, and the real shocker was in Hermiston it was \$2.99.

Fuel distributors used to claim the reason Pendleton was the highest was “transportation costs” getting the fuel there. To my knowledge Pendleton hasn’t moved, but fuel there is \$0.16 less than Stanfield, and a whopping \$0.36 cents cheaper than Hermiston. Apparently it costs more to deliver a shorter distance.

John Harvey
Stanfield



"THERE'S BEEN ANOTHER GENSELESS SHOOTING. STAY WITH US AS WE SPEND HOURS AND HOURS AND HOURS DISCUSSING THE KILLER AND HIS QUEST FOR NOTORIETY."



OTHER VIEWS

With eyes on Trump, Cruz rises in GOP race

Ted Cruz got a big boost in Iowa recently when the influential social conservative activist and radio host Steve Deace endorsed him. To call it a sought-after endorsement would be an understatement. Deace says prospective 2016 GOP campaigns began contacting him well before the 2012 election. (All just assumed that Mitt Romney was going to lose.) The recruitment efforts picked up in 2013 and 2014.

When few people were paying any attention to the still-forming Republican race, Deace was hard at work.

“For me, this vetting process has been going on for a couple of years,” he says. “In our world, as activists on the ground, it’s actually kind of late in the game. You want to be winning the activist caucus now so you can win the actual caucus later.”

Now Cruz has won the Deace Caucus. Deace explains that he was looking for a candidate who can win the support of social conservatives like himself, and also of business-oriented establishment conservatives as well.

“We need a candidate who can walk through the front door of the American Family Association and Americans for Prosperity and, while not changing who they are, or pandering, win a standing ovation from both,” says Deace. “I don’t know of another candidate besides Cruz that we can say that about.”

Other campaigns would disagree, of course, but the endorsement comes on top of a good run by Cruz lately. The Texas senator really connected with conservatives during the earliest days of his campaign; for a while in April, Cruz was in third place in the GOP race, according to the RealClearPolitics average of national polls. By July, he had fallen to eighth. Now, Cruz has moved up a couple of spots and seems headed higher.

Part of it was a well-received performance at the Aug. 6 Republican debate. The interesting thing about that is that Cruz spoke for less time, and uttered fewer words, than any of the other candidates except Rand Paul. “Man of few words” is not a phrase normally associated with Ted Cruz. But when he opened his mouth, people listened.



BYRON YORK
Comment

“You can credit much of his steady gain in the polls to his strong performance in the debate, where many of the 24 million Americans watching got their first extended look at him,” says a Cruz campaign aide. Team Cruz saw a significant increase in support after the showdown. Cruz did a 21-stop post-debate bus tour in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee and Oklahoma, and saw growing audiences in each. “He was drawing crowds of up to 2,500,” says another aide. “We saw our RSVPs at every event go up by no less than 50 percent after the debate.”

But Cruz aides believe his recent uptick is about more than the debate. Cruz seems to be the Republican most benefiting from taking on other Republicans — not so much his GOP rivals in the presidential race but the party leadership in Washington. At the recent RedState Gathering of conservatives in Atlanta, Cruz won a huge ovation when he was asked what it means to lead from behind. “Well, sure,” Cruz replied. “Republican congressional leadership does it every day.”

All the things that have made many Republicans in Washington dislike Cruz just make a certain type of GOP voter like him even more. In much the way that primary voters admire Scott Walker for standing up and taking on the unions, they admire Cruz for standing up and taking on Mitch McConnell and John Boehner.

“He should make a commercial that is a montage of people hating him — McConnell, Boehner, the surrender caucus,” says Deace. “He would close with, ‘The same people you hate, hate me. See you in February.’” For a significant part of the GOP base, Cruz has the right enemies.

In a recent Fox News poll — the one in which Cruz jumped up to third place after the debate, ahead of Jeb Bush — Cruz did better with voters under 45 years of age than any Republican candidate except Donald Trump. He’s got room to grow. No one knows how long his recent rise will last, but it appears that Cruz’s work is finally making a difference.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

Testing opt-out will ultimately hurt taxpayers

The Bend Bulletin, Aug. 18

Oregonians who allowed or encouraged their children to skip the Smarter Balanced assessments in the school year that just ended did their kids no favor. Moreover, if their numbers grow, they could cause problems for all school-age children in Oregon.

Smarter Balanced is the new exam that Oregon chose to replace its old Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills exam when it adopted the Common Core curriculum. It was one of 17 states to use the new test last school year.

The U.S. Department of Education requires the annual assessments as part of the No Child Left Behind law. At least 95 percent of students must take the tests, and at least 95 percent of individual groups — students in poverty, students with disabilities and others — must also complete the exam.

While Oregon hit the overall goal, there were problems. African-American and disabled student participation both fell below 95 percent statewide, and two dozen of the state’s 197 school districts also fell below the mark. More than 100 districts came up short for at least one group of students.

Those numbers matter because there’s money at stake. If participation rates drop too far, Oregon could lose some \$344 million in federal education funds. That money largely goes to special education and to schools with a higher-than-average number of low-income students, arguably the very kids who most need help getting through school.

Neither Common Core nor Smarter Balanced will end education as we know it nor damage our children in the process. Rather, the former is aimed at getting kids to meet higher standards than before and to learn to think critically. The latter simply allows parents, educators and others to compare Oregon student achievement with student achievement elsewhere in the United States.

Yet state lawmakers bought into the negative buzz this spring and passed a bill making opting out of exams arguably easier than opting out of immunizations — pretty much for any reason a parent can come up with.

They apparently did so without thinking seriously about the matter, and while they will be the ones asked to replace missing federal funds if they’re lost, it is we taxpayers who will supply them.

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. 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.