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OUR VIEW

What do we take away from gas tax defeat?

Predictably, the Pendleton gas tax failed.

A hurried, disjointed campaign came up well short in the Sisyphean task of convincing tax-burdened Pendleton voters to voluntarily saddle themselves with another one.

It is unknown how city council will choose to move forward from the defeat.

Councilor Al Plute, who was most vocal in support of the measure, said he still feels a gas tax is the best way to dig out of a gargantuan and growing hole of deferred maintenance. And he is right about that. A local gas tax would go mostly unnoticed by consumers who are already used

to wild fluctuations in the price of petroleum. And part of the money would be paid by travelers, who surely would be unaware of their noble addition to the Pendleton street fund.

The reason that nearly two out of every three voters were against is not quite clear. Perhaps voters don't believe that city council would accomplish enough with the gas tax dollars. Perhaps voters took the opportunity to voice their displeasure about a number of recent council decisions, including trying mightily to banish marijuana business and tax dollars from Pendleton, investing heavily in our long-forgotten airport and a heretofore quixotic quest to attract UAV manufacturers, as well as substantial outlays on questionable public works projects like the Eighth Street Bridge and bringing utilities to the empty field that is the airport industrial park. Add in a recent agreement with a shady development company, and you can

imagine voters deciding that giving this council more money can only do more damage.

Yet people can change their minds. A gas tax is not always destined to fail. Sisyphus can get to the top of that hill.

We see it already with marijuana. Just months ago, 55 percent of Pendletonians voted against its legality. Yet now that it's the law of the land, and the apocalyptic warnings of police chief Stuart Roberts and mayor Phillip Houk have been unsubstantiated, the tide has turned. Would city councilors do the simplest and most democratic thing and put a marijuana

business ban on the ballot in 2016, it would be all but guaranteed to fail. Still, council is doing its best to bury that opportunity and forcing residents to outright defy them in order have their wishes respected on the matter.

Politically, the city council has backed themselves into a corner on this issue. Houk told the larger than normal crowd that turned out for Tuesday's meeting that he hoped they would come to more city council meetings. Immediately after, city council decided to ignore the majority of residents who spoke in favor of allowing marijuana businesses. Who, then, would actually go to a city council meeting when councilors don't listen to them?

And that may be the only concrete takeaway from this failure of the gas tax: Pendleton voters distrust their city council even more than they dislike their roads.

Judging by recent decisions, how could we blame them?

Perhaps voters took the opportunity to voice their displeasure about a number of recent council decisions.

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

Expense of monitoring our schools

(Medford) Mail Tribune

It's hard to imagine, given recent events, a sheriff dropping what's purported to be a safeguard for schoolchildren. But Jackson County Sheriff Corey Falls has done just that — and he was right to do so.

Falls decided earlier this year that his department would no longer maintain an elaborate video monitoring and security system installed at Shady Cove School and the sheriff's office by his predecessor at a cost of nearly \$280,000. His reasoning was that having trained officers in the immediate vicinity made more sense than having a system that's monitored from the sheriff's office some 18 miles away.

The funds used to purchase the system came from drug forfeiture money, which couldn't have been used to hire officers. But there were ongoing costs associated with keeping the system and the bigger question of whether it made sense to have such a system in one relatively small school out of the more than 50 schools that exist in the county.

School shootings are so random that you might as well try to predict where the first raindrop will fall from a passing cloud. That is one of the infuriating aspects of these shootings — they come without warning and with no apparent rhyme or reason as to the location. The pattern is distressingly familiar in only one regard — the murderers are typically young men with some mental health issues and access to guns.

It would be wonderful to have

guaranteed safeguards in all our schools against the violence we've seen perpetrated too many times, most recently at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg. But there's no guarantee that even an expensive system like the Nexar platform installed at Shady Cove would prevent a tragedy. In the minutes it would take an officer to respond to a call, even if they are close by, unspeakable tragedy can occur.

Efforts to expand the Nexar program to Crater and Eagle Point high schools stalled when a federal grant was not received. In denying the request, the grant reviewer noted the "significant cost" — \$3 million for the equipment and a program to work with at-risk youth — and said it would not be feasible for other school districts to adopt it. If schools and sheriffs' departments had unlimited funding ... but they don't.

The loss of the video monitoring doesn't mean Shady Cove School has given up all security. In fact the school probably has better than many, with emergency call buttons and remote-controlled door locks. Medford schools and others have similar security systems. Those sorts of common-sense security systems, combined with police officers close at hand, provide the best security available, short of fortifying our schools at a financial and cultural cost that few would want to take on.

Want to help ensure school kids are kept safe? Support your school district and support your local police so they can do just that.

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 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

The Catholic Church's sins are ours

It's fashionable among some conservatives to rail that there's insufficient respect for religion in America and that religious people are marginalized, even vilified.

That's bunk. In more places and instances than not, they get special accommodation and the benefit of the doubt. Because they talk of God, they're assumed to be good. There's a reluctance to besmirch them, an unwillingness to cross them.

The new movie "Spotlight," based on real events, illuminates this brilliantly. "Spotlight" — which opens in New York, Los Angeles and Boston on Friday and nationwide later this month — chronicles the painstaking manner in which editors and writers at *The Boston Globe* documented a pattern of child sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests and the concealment of these crimes by Catholic leaders.

Because of the movie's focus on the digging and dot-connecting that go into investigative reporting, it has invited comparisons to "All the President's Men."

But it isn't about journalism. Or, for that matter, Catholicism.

It's about the damage done when we genuflect too readily before society's temples, be they religious or governmental. It's about the danger of faith that's truly blind.

It takes place in 2001 and 2002, and that time frame itself is a remarkable reflection of how steadfastly most Americans resist any intrusion into religious groups, any indictment of religious officials.

Eight years earlier, James Porter was convicted of sexually abusing 28 children in the 1960s, when he was in the Catholic priesthood. He was believed to have abused about 100 boys and girls in all, most of them in Massachusetts.

Major newspapers and television networks covered the Porter story, noting a growing number of cases of abuse by priests. Porter's sentencing in December 1993 was preceded by two books that traced the staggering dimensions of such behavior. The first was "Lead Us Not Into Temptation," by Jason Berry. The second was "A Gospel of Shame," with which I'm even more familiar. I'm one of its two authors.

But despite all of that attention, Americans kept being shocked whenever a fresh tally of abusive priests was done or new predators were exposed. They clung to disbelief.

"Spotlight" is admirably blunt on this point, suggesting that the *Globe* staff — which, in the end, did the definitive reporting on church leaders' complicity in the abuse — long ignored an epidemic right before their eyes.

Why? For some of the same reasons that others did. Many journalists, parents, police officers and lawyers didn't want to think ill



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

of men of the cloth, or they weren't eager to get on the bad side of the church, with its fearsome authority and supposed pipeline to God. (After the coverage of the Porter case, Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston announced, "We call down God's power on the media, particularly the *Globe*.")

"Spotlight" lays out the many ways in which deference to religion protected abusers and their abettors. At one point in the movie, a man who was molested as a boy tells a *Globe* reporter about a visit his mother got from the bishop, who was asking her not to press charges.

"What did your mother do?" the reporter asks.

"She put out freakin' cookies," the man says. When the cookies finally went away, many Catholic leaders insisted that the church was being persecuted, and the crimes of priests exaggerated, by spiteful secularists.

But if anything, the church had been coddled, benefiting from the American way of giving religion a free pass and excusing religious institutions not just from taxes but from rules that apply to other organizations.

A 2006 series in *The Times*, "In God's Name," noted that since 1989, "more than 200 special arrangements, protections or exemptions for religious groups or their adherents were tucked into congressional legislation, covering topics ranging from pensions to immigration to land use."

That was before the Supreme Court, in its Hobby Lobby decision, allowed some employers to claim religion as grounds to disobey certain health insurance mandates.

A story in *The Times* this week described how various religions are permitted to use internal arbitration procedures to settle disputes that belong in civil court. It cited a federal judge's ruling that a former Scientologist had to take his claim that Scientology had defrauded him of tens of thousands of dollars before a panel of current Scientologists.

To cloak sexual abuse and shield abusive priests, Catholic leaders and their lawyers routinely leaned on the church's privileged status, invoking freedom of religion, the separation of church and state, and the secrecy of the confessional. They thus delayed a reckoning.

"If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one," says a character in "Spotlight." Indeed it does: a village too cowed, and a village too credulous.

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since June 2011, joined the *New York Times* in 1995.

YOUR VIEWS

City expenditures at airport putting cart before the horse

How many people are tired of hearing about Barnhart Road, or better known as "the road to nowhere." I assume everyone thinks the gas tax, utility hike, not to mention the master plan hikes are going to just ruin our residential part of our city. Think again!

After several talks with our city manager, the city of Pendleton is going full bore with putting in new infrastructure to business that don't exist "yet" or may never exist on Barnhart Road.

I argued that even with the incentive of putting in new sewer, water and gas lines at no cost to attract industries, we should only add those things when we have solidified a contract with a company. The city of Pendleton doesn't agree and will continue to build on the road to nowhere until it is finished, millions of dollars away.

How can we fund Barnhart Road and the city of Pendleton's infrastructure at the same time? How can we afford both? We cannot.

It seems awfully convenient to me that we will have a gas tax, a utility tax for roads, and then they will be implementing the so-called master plan, which is several other taxes to fix water and sewer lines and a special tax just for storm drains that has "never" been implemented before.

I am still advocating for seniors, the disabled, vets and anyone on a fixed income that these taxes will terrorize them and do harm. The sad thing is the city knows this and yet they continue to spend our money

on Barnhart Road with no guarantee of any return. How many industrial businesses have we obtained since the road was built? Zero.

Chris Hallos
Pendleton

State employees need vigilance to stop child trafficking

As an act of goodwill towards our area's disadvantaged children, many kind-hearted people open their homes to youths in state custody. However, I challenge each of you to a higher calling.

How many people work with state agencies on a regular basis without actively participating in our government? How many of us even question the way it works?

The truth is that some courts ignore statutes. Some attorneys don't adequately represent their clients. Some radically liberal state-paid social workers and doctors abuse psychiatry to suppress political dissent and reinforce socially disastrous phenomena such as gender oppression, religious discrimination and social control.

I challenge you to go above and beyond the state's calling for you. I challenge you to go beyond your designated role in this bureaucracy, and to fight for watchdog commissions that may strive to actually check unchecked powers.

I challenge you to ask yourself this question: Am I ignorant to my participation in child trafficking?

Carlin Sacco
Pendleton