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OUR VIEW

On transportation, reform before revenue

Oregon’s lawmakers are busily working on proposals to find more money to improve the state’s system of roads and other transportation infrastructure. Under consideration are funding mechanisms such as a new carbon tax, an increase in the gas tax and even a tax that motorists would pay for each mile driven.

Gov. Kate Brown and others want the Legislature to pass a comprehensive funding package in the 2016 session.

The need is there. Traffic congestion is growing in cities while roads and bridges are deteriorating in rural areas. The bill for years of neglect and incompetence has come due.

But before state leaders dig deeper into the pockets of citizens and businesses, we should ask ourselves whether the root problem is a lack of money or mismanagement.

David Bragdon, the former president of Metro, makes a compelling case that our transportation problems are the result of an antiquated governance structure and a lack of accountability by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Among the points Bragdon made at a recent conference in Portland:

- Oregon’s formula for distributing highway fund dollars directs half to the Oregon Department of Transportation when cities and counties own 80 percent of the state’s streets and highways. “It’s treated like an annuity; an entitlement.”
- The muddled layers of government defy accountability. Bragdon compared this inefficient transportation governance “mash-up” to the organization of the

state’s criminal justice system, where each level of government specializes and is accountable for results.

• Mismanagement at the transportation department has jeopardized the whole system of transportation funding. Bragdon points to the excessive use of debt by Oregon’s highway division. Because of this “35 percent of state transportation revenues go to debt service to bondholders rather than to projects.” In 2001, the figure was 2 percent.

Bragdon cited several states that have put transportation reform ahead of new taxes. Leaders in these states “recognized that urban and rural areas have fundamentally different transportation needs.” They also recognized that regional decision-making and funding “produced better value than sending tax money to the state capital and hoping it would come back to their area for something useful.”

As a result, states like California and Pennsylvania and cities like Denver and Los Angeles are setting the pace for improving transportation. In Oregon, Brandon says, “the debate now is not about improving things, but about whether we can keep things from getting worse.”

David Bragdon has done a great service by stating in stark terms the root problems of Oregon’s transportation crisis. His recipe for changing state funding allocations and management are spot on.

Before Sen. Bill Hansell, Rep. Greg Smith and Rep. Greg Barreto consider new transportation taxes, they should listen to Bragdon’s call for reform.

For video of Bragdon’s remarks, visit this story at www.eastoregonian.com.

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

Inmate weighs in on Measure 11

I am responding and adding to what both Cynthia Edwards and Barbara Dickerson have written regarding overcrowding mainly due to Measure 11.

I am currently doing time at the Two Rivers Correctional Facility for a non-Measure 11 crime but still a maxed-out day-for-day sentence. My previous sentence was a Measure 11 crime and I wasn’t aware of its meaning until being sent away for 5 years, 10 months. It was my first robbery, if you could justify it. I was roped into being called a getaway driver and didn’t even know it until I was arrested. I had six Measure 11 offenses thrown at me, while my lawyer said “they are hoping to scare you into taking a deal and getting just one to stick.” The DAs have abused their power and handed out harsh punishment to some who don’t deserve it.

As the law explains, our past is and always will be held against us. And we’re not the only ones being punished. Everybody should take a long, hard look at Measure 11 or mandatory minimums and set hard lines as to who gets it or not, and people shouldn’t just get locked up and the key thrown away when they should have a chance to earn time off. Everybody should be granted at least 20 percent good time unless sentenced to life or death row, or if the crime that you’re in prison for is your second offense of the same crime.

Nobody could understand the struggle or pain prison brings to a family until they’re the one involved. All the prison guards I speak with or my family speaks with believe Measure 11 or day-for-day offenses don’t help anybody, they just clog up the system and overcrowd our prison system. What would it hurt to allow everybody good time that have a release date? They are gonna be released, so does it hurt allowing them to earn up to 20 or 30 percent time off their sentence so they can return to their family and be a contributing member of society? It’s just a thought.

If Oregon taxpayers want to continue to foot the bill to keep inmates behind bars and not invest more money into our youth and schools, soon all we will have is prisons.

Black, Bronson did Pendleton proud

As the President of Happy Canyon I would like to publicly thank Rusty Black and Bryson Bronson for all of their efforts and unparalleled success on representing Happy Canyon, The Pendleton Round-Up, and the City of Pendleton in the national anthem ceremony at the Dec. 5 performance of the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas. Many of you are probably aware that 2016 will be the centennial year for Happy Canyon, and this was an exemplary way for our night show to kick 2016 off. All of those involved at Happy Canon and Round-Up couldn’t be happier with their success at the national anthem ceremony.

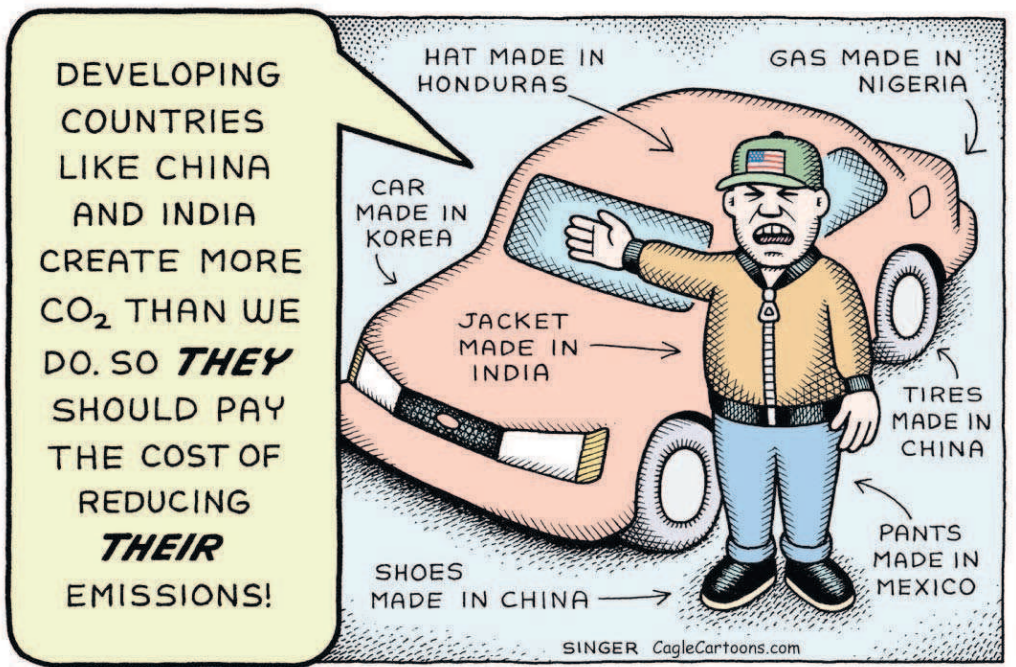
All of this was accomplished because of the deep devotion that Rusty and Bryson have for Happy Canyon. Although Chinook and Bryson are the signature symbol of the Happy Canyon Night Show, they also have now become a symbol of the Round-Up and the city of Pendleton.

The citizens of Pendleton and surrounding areas should be very proud of this. Presenting Chinook and Bryson to a national television audience was a combined effort of the Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon and couldn’t have been accomplished any other way. The NFR is the pinnacle of rodeo events, and the fact that Bryson and Chinook carried the flag during the National Anthem, exposed Pendleton to an extraordinary amount of people worldwide. This is something that I am very proud of and so should any resident of Pendleton or the surrounding area. I’m proud of the fact that we have volunteers like Bryson and Rusty, who are willing to devote as much time as they do to make efforts like this one such a huge a success.

Happy Canyon is very lucky to have Rusty, Bryson, and Chinook on our roster, and I know that I am speaking for our entire board, and the rest of Happy Canyon volunteers, when I say how proud we are of them. We are looking forward to this iconic duo representing our combined events and area for many years to come.

Thank you,

Jason Hill
Happy Canyon President
Pendleton



OTHER VIEWS

First time to a gun show

I was in San Antonio on Saturday for the college graduation of a nephew when one of my brothers, the one who’s a gun collector, invited me to a local gun show. As he put it, “If you’re gonna write about it, you need to see it.” I jumped at the chance.

As we drove to the Austin Highway Gun Show, we dove headfirst into our gun debate.

He seemed determined to convince me of the futility of many of the national gun control measures now being debated and how they would do little to block criminals from acquiring weapons or mass killers from using weapons.

I was determined to convince him that some new measures were needed to at least put a dent in this country’s abominable gun death numbers.

Indeed, as the *Los Angeles Times* has noted:

“Of 33,636 deaths from firearms counted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2013, some 62 percent, or 21,175, were suicides, and about 11 percent of those were of people ages 5 to 24. Accidental shootings accounted for 505 deaths, including 69 victims ranging in age from less than 1 year to 14 years.”

My brother and I could both agree that those numbers were too high; we simply disagreed on how best to address it.

One area of agreement was to stop the opposition to smart guns — those that can only be fired by their owners or those that are authorized. I framed my argument this way: Don’t focus on criminals first; focus on responsible gun owners first.

Shouldn’t those owners, who may simply want a gun for an extra layer of protection, also have the option of buying a gun that they could be sure a small child couldn’t find and use to accidentally shoot a sibling, a friend or themselves? Shouldn’t those parents have the option of owning a gun that a depressed teen couldn’t use to commit suicide? Shouldn’t they also have the option of owning a gun that a burglar couldn’t steal and use on the rightful owner or take and use in another crime?

These guns, which rely on fingerprint-access technology or radio waves to allow the gun to be fired, could put a huge dent in the number of suicides and accidental deaths.

This seems to me one possible step among many. He also didn’t oppose universal background checks.

My brother’s agreement on this point was a reasonable concession by a reasonable man. Indeed, when we arrived at the gun show — held in a rather nondescript event center with harsh overhead lighting — the one thing my brother wanted to impress upon me was just



CHARLES BLOW
Comment

how “normal” most people were, not the “gun nuts” people accuse them of being.

He had a point, but the somewhat festive environment felt a bit at odds with all the firearms. I was also surprised at how little security there seemed to be. It occurred to me that I had gone through more security at the airport than I had at the gun show.

Inside, there were elderly couples and whole families. I paid particular attention to the children I saw, like the adorable little girl who rode her father’s shoulder as he inspected the wares and the little boy, slumped in this mother’s arms, seemingly slipping off to sleep.

Overall, the word that kept popping into my head was how “pedestrian” it all seemed, especially as I watched my brother — a gregarious man who has never met a person to whom he wouldn’t speak and with whom he wouldn’t laugh — chat up and chuckle with other collectors he recognized from the gun show circuit.

I thought of how productive it would be if more people with discordant views on gun regulations could have as civil a discussion as I had with my brother — full of mutual respect, adults disagreeing but not attempting to demonize, honestly searching for solutions.

The gun lobby poisons these conversations. It pumps out and promotes a never-ending stream of

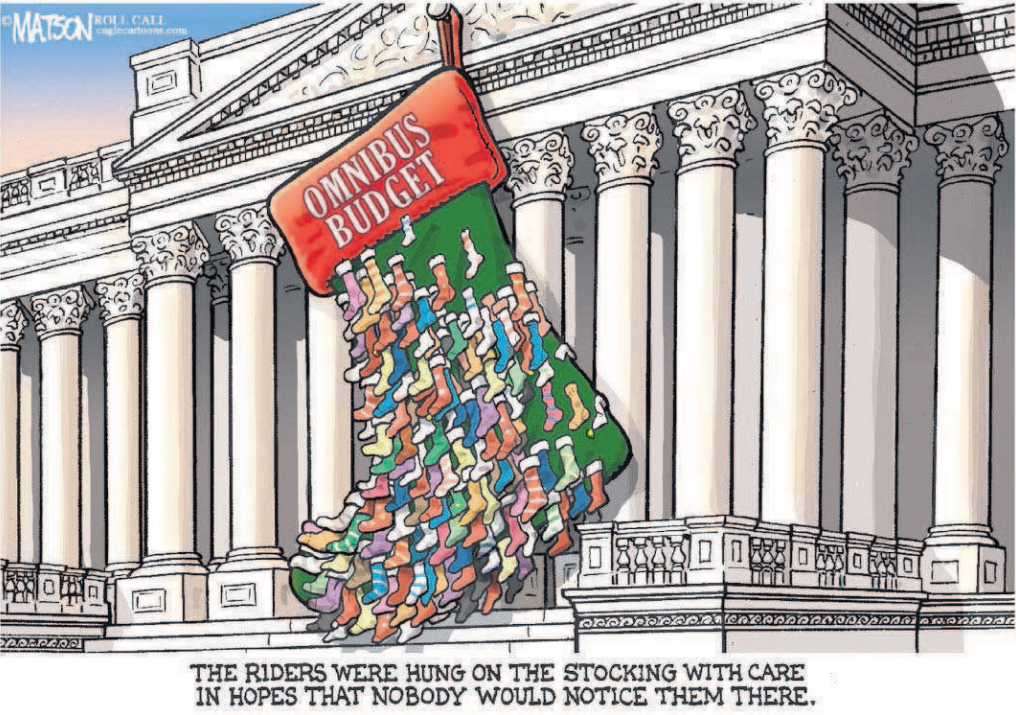
worst-case scenarios until it builds a level of fear and paranoia that only profits gun makers and grinds all progress to a halt.

Indeed, the Austin Highway Gun Show itself published on its Facebook page on Dec. 9 an image of a gun and a Bible with the caption: “History has shown that these are the first two things banned by totalitarian governments.”

But, I must also say that, to a lesser degree, some proponents of better regulations also do damage by painting with too broad a brush and labeling the millions of gun hunters, collectors and people simply seeking to provide an extra layer of protections for their families — people like my brother and his gun show buddies — as deranged and deficient. Most are not. Many are simply enthusiasts like my brother and the elderly man who climbed out of an SUV as we were about to leave.

My brother bellowed, as is his wont, “How you doing today?” The man responded with a smile, “Any day I can go to a gun show is a good day.”

■
Charles M. Blow is The New York Times’s visual Op-Ed columnist. His column appears in The Times on Saturday.



LETTERS POLICY

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