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OUR VIEW

Allow EOCI prisoners to work in Pendleton

In the 1980s, when Oregon changed a state facility in the heart of Pendleton from a hospital to a prison, it came with stipulations.

One was that prisoners would not leave the grounds. Pendletonians were rightfully nervous about thousands of felons taking up residence in city limits, and they wanted to be sure the prison's walls were high and its barbed wire was sharp.

Residents were also nervous about becoming a "prison town," where the high walls and barbed wire and shackled work crews could make Pendleton look less safe, lively and free.

And that's the way it has been for decades. In 1987, the city of Pendleton put what had been a verbal understanding into writing. The council and EOCI agreed that no inmates from the prison would work within city limits, and that ban has remained for almost 30 years.

But desire for change has arrived. EOCI superintendent Jeri Taylor told city council that allowing their prisoners to work in the city — like Two Rivers Correctional Institution and Umatilla County already can — will be good for both the prison and for Pendleton.

"We have a lot to offer the city and the surrounding area," Taylor told the council last month. "We think that our inmates are pretty well received around the state."

We agree, and are supportive of lifting the ban.

The city and its residents, businesses and nonprofits have much to benefit from EOCI prison crews. Especially in a town like Pendleton, the heart of which pumps with the power of volunteers, an infusion of labor could reinvigorate the city.

It's also important for the prisoners themselves — the vast majority of whom will some day be released back onto the streets. They need to feel a sense of ownership and

goodwill for the civilization they will soon rejoin.

And yes, there is some danger.

But the responsibility for safety and security rests solely with the prison and its administration — a mantle they are willing to assume. It is up to them to chose inmates who do not have a history of violence and attempted escape, who are respectful and hard workers. People who can be counted on to treat time outside of prison walls as a grateful break — and be on their best behavior in order to earn future breaks.

Anyone who has stepped inside EOCI for a day is shocked by the demographics of the people they see. This is not prison as it appears in television and movies, with yards and cells filled with the tattooed and over-muscled and angry.

Those kinds of prisoners exist at EOCI, of course. But a large percentage of those incarcerated there have gray hair, shuffle slowly in sweats, and work small jobs to keep the place clean and pass the time. Those are people we can use to pick up litter, keep Pendleton parks and streets clean, fill potholes, reduce government budgets, provide skilled labor, etc. The possibilities are numerous.

Rules and regulations must be clear. The work must have community benefit, and it cannot harm existing and operating businesses. It has to be done aboveboard and with transparency. There can be little tolerance for prisoners who don't obey the rules.

But if the city and the prison work to set those rules, there is no reason to think that 30 years is enough time for people to change their minds. Clearly, city council will get some pushback from this decision — and they take on a risk if something does go wrong — but oversight and high expectations can make it a success and net benefit.

"We have a lot to offer the city and the surrounding area."

— **Jeri Taylor**, EOCI superintendent, on inmates working in the city of Pendleton

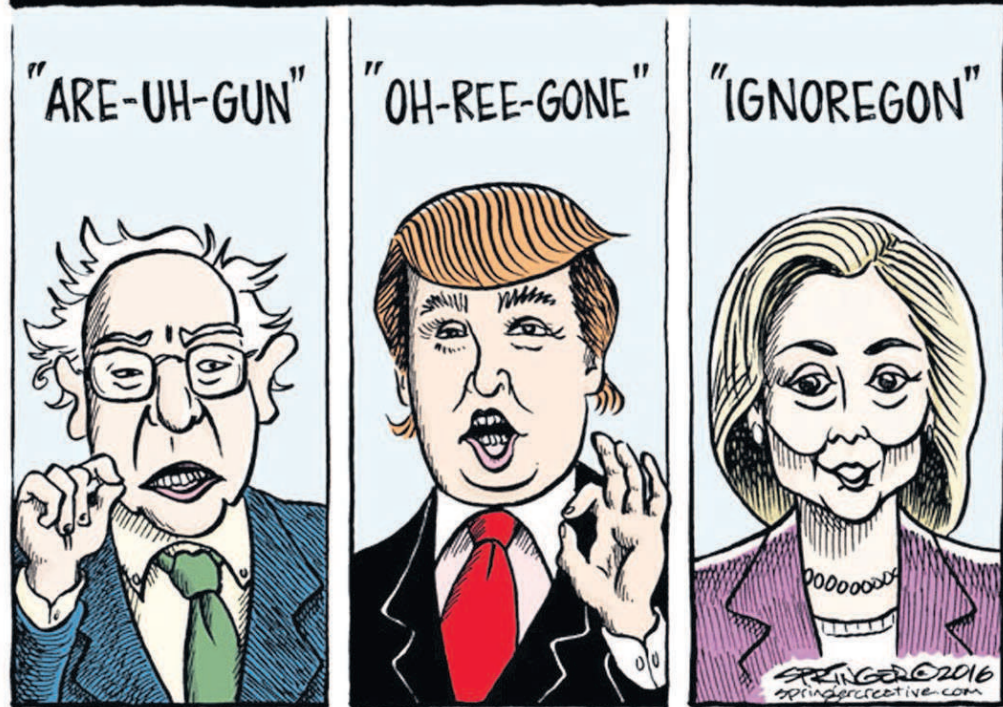
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LETTERS POLICY

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

HOW THE CANDIDATES PRONOUNCE "OREGON"...



OTHER VIEWS

Hillary and Bernie together

Bernie Sanders is not going away. And why should he? The weather is nice, the crowds are enormous and he keeps winning primaries. Hillary Clinton has what appears to be an insurmountable lead in delegates, but hope springs eternal.

"It is a steep hill to climb," he admits.

Actually, probably harder to surmount than Gangkhar Puensum. (Which is the world's highest unclimbed mountain. I am telling you this to distract you from the subject of delegate counts.)

But about Sanders: Democrats, what do you think he should do?

A) Convention floor fight. "Game of Thrones"! Jon Snow is alive!

B) Go away. When Clinton lost, did she torture Barack Obama over who was going to be on the platform committee? No, she sucked it up and gave an extremely nice endorsement speech.

C) Why can't we all just get along?

Personally, I think that last one is possible. Although it would probably be a good idea to avoid saying a Clinton nomination could be a "disaster simply to protect the status quo," as Sanders' campaign manager did in an email Wednesday.

In an ideal world the Democrats would nominate a presidential candidate who's got an inspiring vision of change and the competence to run the country from Day 1. This person is not going to be on the ballot this year. So let Hillary Clinton have the nomination and give Bernie Sanders the party platform.

He deserves a role. Sanders has spent the past year speaking about narrowing the gulf between the rich and the bottom 99 percent, fighting climate change and keeping special interests out of government. He's inspired millions. It's pretty much always the same speech, but he's the one who can bring the music.

(Question: Will the Republicans have a fight about their platform? Nah — Donald Trump will let his opponents put in anything they want. Look, the man has convention entertainment to plan. Given the option of choosing the party position on health care or the dance numbers, you know which way he's going to go.)

The Democrats could just make the Sanders speech into a platform, then join hands and march into the future. There actually aren't a lot of areas of disagreement. Clinton thinks his call for free public college tuition is ... well, let's not say dumb.

Dumb is not going to get you a united convention. Let's just say too much of a good thing. But she does want free community college tuition. Did you know that? She announced it on the very first official stop of her campaign. Since then not, um, frequently.



GAIL COLLINS
Comment

Feel free to remind her. They both believe in universal health care coverage. Sanders wants "Medicare for all." Clinton's campaign says she does, too, in theory, but just doesn't believe anything like that could get through Congress. This week she proposed a new option for 50-somethings that *The Times'* Alan Rappeport and Margot Sanger-Katz called "Medicare for more."

And you know, if Clinton could actually deliver on those two promises, it would be stupendous. This is an excellent example of the Democratic bottom line: On many, many issues, her platform is what the Sanders platform would look like if it actually got through the congressional wringer.

In an ideal world, Democrats would nominate a presidential candidate who's got an inspiring vision of change, and the competence to run the country from Day 1.

On other matters, the Democrats' current policy divisions are just about doubting Clinton's intentions. Sanders wants to bring back the Glass-Steagall Act, which bars commercial banks from going into the investment banking business. Clinton says she can crack down on Wall Street better with more recent legislation. Sanders followers don't believe she means it.

I say, be impressed that there's a party full of young voters for whom "Glass-Steagall" is a big applause line. You can't not want to encourage that.

Put Glass-Steagall in the platform. Even if Clinton is right, all you'd have is duplication of effort, and it would be an excellent gesture of solidarity.

Finally, there's the influence of big-money donors on American politics. In theory, Sanders and Clinton are pretty much in the same place. But in practice, he's built his entire campaign around the concept of throwing out special interest money, while Clinton's barely provided lip service.

"One of the four pillars of her campaign was going to be democracy issues," said Fred Wertheimer, president of the reform group Democracy 21. "Well, the pillars haven't been around too much."

Wertheimer had his heart broken by Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, who both promised to make campaign finance a top priority, then didn't. Hillary Clinton, he thinks, ought to promise something more specific that she could implement right away.

"Set up a task force in the White House whose job it is to pursue this reform. Of top staff people," he suggested.

Or a blue-ribbon committee featuring Bernie Sanders. Who would certainly never let her hear the end of it if she failed to deliver. Put that in the platform and smoke it.

Gail Collins joined *The New York Times* in 1995 as a member of the editorial board and later as an Op-Ed columnist. In 2001 she became the first woman ever appointed editor of the *Times's* editorial page.

YOUR VIEWS

Transportation meeting not subject to open meetings law

I am writing to correct misconceptions created by reporting in your paper on a management review of the Oregon Department of Transportation.

As chair of the ODOT management review committee, we are a small working group that was selected to help engage an independent third party to examine the management practices at the Oregon Department of Transportation.

While this group is serving in an advisory capacity to the governor, it is not a decision-making body. Our meetings are, therefore, not subject to the notice and access requirements under the Oregon Public Meetings Law nor has the governor told this group, publicly or privately, to close or conduct our meetings in secret. Nevertheless, we have worked diligently in the spirit of openness to share this group's work publicly and will continue to do so.

Our primary task has been to develop a proposed scope of work that will be used to hire an independent contractor to review ODOT. This proposed scope of work has been developed with input from legislators and key

stakeholders. This input, along with minutes from our meeting, is publicly available

Additionally, we will offer a recommendation to the Department of Administrative Services on a contractor, but it is DAS and not this working group that will decide who will be hired. It should also be noted that the final report developed by this contractor for the governor will also be made publicly available.

It is unfortunate that your news story created an illusion of secrecy where it does not exist. This work group has endeavored to exceed disclosure requirements because we believe both in sharing our work product with policymakers and Oregonians, and because we believe this review will ultimately be a tool the governor can use to further strengthen the work and confidence in our state's transportation agency.

Susan Morgan
chair, ODOT Management Review Committee
Roseburg

Editor's Note: The *East Oregonian* stands by our reporting. We are unaware of any instance in which the review committee has exceeded the minimum disclosure requirements required by state law.