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OUR VIEW



In governor's race, Pierce has the edge

Democrat Kate Brown and Republican Bud Pierce are squaring off to become the next governor of Oregon.

Brown has filled the chair since John Kitzhaber stepped down less than two years ago. The winner of the November election will only serve for the remainder of Kitzhaber's original term, and will be back up for election in 2018.

Brown has done some good work in her short stint at the top post — shepherding a 9 percent bump to state education funding, pushing through a tiered minimum wage hike and increasing the number of registered voters thanks to her previous work as Oregon Secretary of State. It's clear that she has a soft spot for Eastern Oregon and Pendleton in particular, which is where she made her first out-of-Salem visit as governor and has often been at the top of her mind at debates all around the state.

But last session Brown failed to wrangle the legislature into passing a much-needed transportation package, her leadership was lacking during the creation and initial explanation of Measure 97, and she has been unable to make satisfactorily clear statements regarding her position on important but controversial issues such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and a possible national monument in the Owyhees.

The only real legislative compromise she reached with Republicans at the capitol was signing House Bill 4040, which ratified the decision of ODFW to remove the gray wolf from the state list of endangered species. It was tossing a proverbial bone at the end of a session where the Democratic agenda was steamrolled through both chambers and into law.

Pierce has long stood out to us, having made a visit to our editorial

board one of the first official stops of his primary campaign. Although he has never held public office, he is the intelligent, private-sector focused Republican that Eastern Oregon has been crying out for. And Pierce steers clear of social issues that have tripped up previous

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GOP candidates. He has no harsh views on issues that aren't significant to the health of our state, which should make him a viable candidate for Willamette Valley voters who realize change is needed.

Pierce's worst moment in the campaign came in enemy territory — the City Club of Portland — where he clearly

misspoke about domestic violence. He was jeered and booed when he said "A woman that has great education, great training, a great job, is not susceptible to this kind of abuse by men, women or anyone."

It was wrong and he deserved to be chided. But unlike the Republican candidate for president (who Pierce thankfully disowned, although it is unlikely he will be able to run far enough from) Pierce made a straightforward and meaningful apology, listened to women and domestic violence professionals, and emerged from the scandal a more enlightened and complete candidate.

His ardent desire for improving Eastern Oregon is clear, his stance against Measure 97 is in the best interest of the state, and his tax plans and budget show the fiscal responsibility that Oregon needs to have when the economy is humming along.

We're constantly looking for ways to break the single-party rule that currently exists in Salem. A Republican at the top of it all would certainly do that, and Pierce is a smart, capable candidate who would handle the job and bring some balance to the tilted capitol.

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



A new reefer republic

PORTLAND — The budtenders of the Rose City are relentlessly helpful with tips pairing a marijuana strain that is "equal parts fruity and musky" with a stimulating Sichuan dish. As Oregon, the place where empires once clashed over the global trade of beaver furs, glides into a second year of legalized recreational pot, the state is determined to show the world that a certain kind of drug prohibition belongs in history's dumpster.

Soon, with the likely passage of legal pot in California next month, all of the West Coast — from the tundra of Alaska to the sun-washed suburbs of San Diego — will be a confederacy of state-regulated marijuana use.

Across the Pacific, a completely different view of drug use is playing out in the horror of the Philippines. That country is ruled by Rodrigo Duterte, a crude and brutal strongman known as the Donald Trump of the Philippines. Under his watch, more than 3,500 suspected drug users and dealers have been killed. Many of those murders are "extrajudicial," as the State Department calls them.

Comparing his vigilante campaign to Hitler's Holocaust, the Philippine president recently said "I'd be happy to slaughter" 3 million drug users. By killing that many of his own people, Duterte said he would "finish the problem of my country and save the next generation from perdition." This is a Category 5 human rights disaster in the making, and should be universally condemned.

The world has always been bipolar when it comes to our fellow humans prone to addiction and chemical diversion. One impulse is hysterical — the sweeping, lock-'em-up tragedy of the United States after the crack epidemic, the numerous executions in places like Iran and the Philippines. The other is historical, at least by modern standards: the attempt by states in the American West (and a ballot measure in Maine this year) to call out the drug war for the farce that it is.

Throughout these swings, little has changed among a vulnerable cohort of humanity. And until a way is found to permanently balance dopamine levels, we will always have small but significant portion of the population prone to addiction. Benjamin Franklin abused laudanum, an opium and alcohol mixture, for his bodily pains. And Sigmund Freud was more than a casual user of cocaine.

The current opioid epidemic in places not usually associated with drug dens and dirty needles shows that addiction is not confined to ZIP codes of economic despair. On Staten Island, home to many a New York cop, there



TIMOTHY EGAN
Comment

have been 71 deaths attributed to heroin overdose this year.

Heroin is the drug of choice in small towns in New England and wide-open rural areas across the country. Blacks and Latinos use and sell drugs at roughly the same rate as whites, but 57 percent of the people locked up for a drug offense in 2014 were nonwhite.

Perhaps because so many addicts are white and suburban, or white and rural, there is now a rare bipartisan consensus emerging for wholesale reform of the drug laws.

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We can start, nationwide, with marijuana. Though legalization is not without its problems — a spike in emergency room visits attributed to edible pot, persistent black market dealers — it's mostly been no big deal. Across the legalized West, consumers

frequent their corner pot shop to talk varieties and buzz strength. Homegrown gardeners pass on suggestions to avoid bud rot as harvest nears. Tax revenue from sales — though not a panacea — flows to schools and roads and treatment programs.

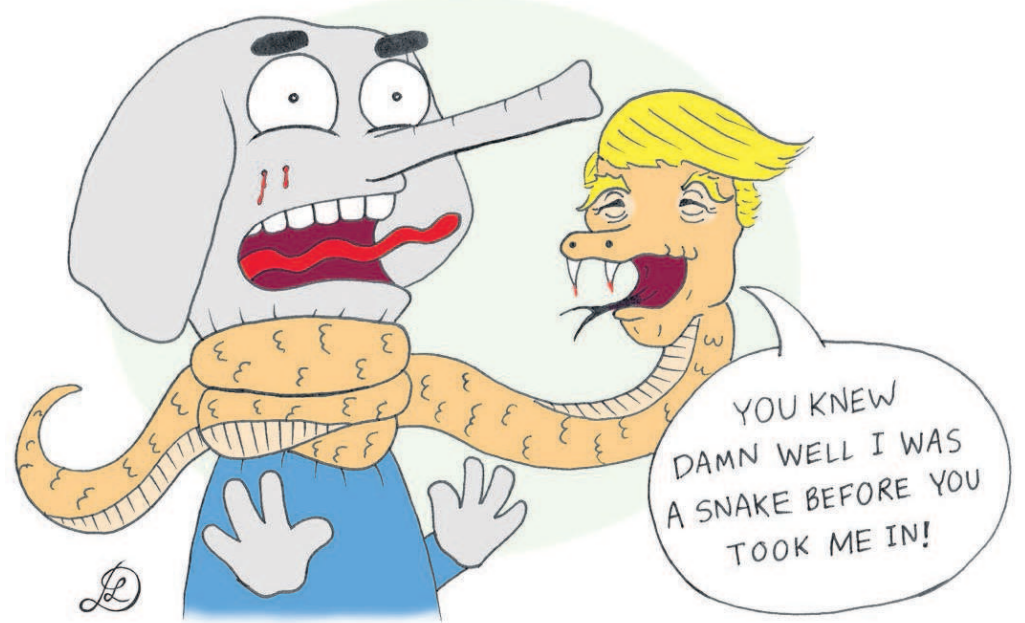
It all works, for the most part. And when California, now the world's sixth largest economy, passes its legal pot measure in November as expected, it will truly be game over for this absurd form of prohibition.

So why are nearly 600,000 people arrested in the United States for simple possession of marijuana every year? And why is pot still illegal on the federal level? People in the loop of this policing circle know it is an absurd and Sisyphean use of law enforcement.

The opioid crisis is a tougher problem. Some years ago, at the height of the crack scare, I was given an assignment to go to the worst drug dens in urban America. I ran into my share of scary and sketchy dudes, yes. But where I expected to see "super-predators" and lifetime addled "crack babies," I instead found a fascinating variety of people struggling with an ancient affliction. Many of them could not get into treatment.

A clear majority of Americans now favor pot legalization. The problem is the federal government, which still classifies marijuana as a Schedule 1 drug, alongside heroin and LSD. If pot was legalized nationwide, with a tax on every sale designated for treatment, it would free up the police to get at serious crimes, while ensuring that no addict would be denied treatment for lack of funds. As with most social reforms, it only seems impossible until it's obvious.

Timothy Egan worked for 18 years as a writer for The New York Times, first as the Pacific Northwest correspondent, then as a national enterprise reporter.



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