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**OUR VIEW**

# Drug court closure hurts entire county

The shuttering of the Umatilla County Drug Court is a major hit for the health and well-being of this county.

The program is operated by the Community Justice Department but funded by a state grant. Those dollars have been cut by more than a third since 2010 and the county said it can't keep backfilling to make up the difference. According to Dale Primmer, the department's director, the Umatilla County would have to pay \$516,000 in the next biennium to keep the court open.

Rather than axing elsewhere, like the day treatment program or the county jail, commissioners opted to cut their losses and end the court. That's a shame, though we can't say we have a better solution.

The decade-old program is an intense drug and alcohol treatment program for those who have landed on the wrong side of the law. It replaces incarceration with group sessions and individual counseling, requiring regular drug tests and community service. If those terms are met, graduates of the program are eligible to have criminal charges dismissed.

The outcry about the program's termination said a lot. People shared testimonials about the court saving their life, teaching them how to move past the burden of addiction and poor decisions and give back to the community.

The alternative — sitting in a jail

cell and thinking about what you've done — is not nearly as effective. As we learned at last year's drug court graduation, the recidivism rate at the county jail was 20.35 percent, a decrease of about 10 percent since the drug court program started. That's significant, as a vast majority of jail inmates at any given time

are behind bars for offenses stemming from drug and alcohol abuse.

The program isn't perfect. There are some who don't complete it because they are unwilling or unmotivated. There are others who graduate, celebrate with friends and

family, then later return to their addictions and habits and land on the wrong side of the law.

There are times criminal offenders need to be behind bars, and those unwilling to making changes in their lives for the safety of those around them should serve the full sentence prescribed by the law. But a better investment is to work on the root problem that leads to crime, and in many cases that's found in addiction.

The next step is unclear. There is still state money available for such a program and the county could regroup and find a way to put it to use in a responsible way.

Oregon voters have said they would rather see spending cuts than tax increases, and this is what that looks like. Unfortunately, it will likely lead to the higher costs for jails and prisons while diminishing the quality of life for many families.

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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**

## The unifying American story

One of the things we've lost in this country is our story. It is the narrative that unites us around a common multigenerational project, that gives an overarching sense of meaning and purpose to our history.

For most of the past 400 years, Americans did have an overarching story. It was the Exodus story. The Puritans came to this continent and felt they were escaping the bondage of their Egypt and building a new Jerusalem.

The Exodus story has six acts: first, a life of slavery and oppression, then the revolt against tyranny, then the difficult flight through the howling wilderness, then the infighting and misbehavior amid the stresses of that ordeal, then the handing down of a new covenant, a new law, and then finally the arrival into a new promised land and the project of building a new Jerusalem.

The Puritans could survive hardship because they knew what kind of cosmic drama they were involved in. Being a chosen people with a sacred mission didn't make them arrogant, it gave their task dignity and consequence. It made them self-critical.

When John Winthrop used the phrase "shining city on a hill" he didn't mean it as self-congratulation. He meant that the whole world was watching and by their selfishness and failings the colonists were screwing it up.

As Philip Gorski writes in his new book, "American Covenant," which is essential reading for this moment, the Puritans understood they were part of one covenant and had ferocious debates about what that covenant meant.

During the revolution, the founding fathers had that fierce urgency too and drew just as heavily on the Exodus story. Some wanted to depict Moses on the Great Seal of the United States. Like Moses, America too was rebinding itself with a new covenant and a new law.

Frederick Douglass embraced the Exodus too. African-Americans, he pointed out, have been part of this journey too. "We came when it was a wilderness.... We leveled your forests; our hands removed the stumps from the field.... We have been with you... in adversity, and by the help of God will be with you in prosperity."

The successive immigrant groups saw themselves performing an exodus to a promised land. The waves of mobility — from east to west, from south to north — were also seen as Exodus journeys. These people could endure every hardship because they were serving in a spiritual drama and not just a financial one.

In the 20th century, Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders drew on Exodus more than any other source. Our 20th-century presidents made the story global. America would lead a global exodus toward democracy — God was a God of all peoples. Reinhold



DAVID BROOKS  
Comment

Niebuhr applied Puritan thinking to America's mission and warned of the taint of national pride.

The Exodus story has many virtues as an organizing national myth. It welcomes in each new group and gives it a template for how it fits into the common move from oppression to dignity. The book of Exodus is full of social justice — care for the vulnerable, the equality of all souls. It emphasizes that the moral and material journeys are intertwined and that for a nation to succeed materially, there has to be an invisible moral constitution and a fervent effort toward character education.

It suggests that history is in the shape of an upward spiral. People who see their lives defined by Exodus move, innovate and

**American history is taught less as a progressively realized grand narrative and more as a series of power conflicts between oppressor and oppressed.**

organize their lives around a common eschatological destiny. As Langston Hughes famously put it, "America never was America to me / And yet I swear this oath — / America will be!"

The Exodus narrative has pretty much been dropped from our civic culture. Schools cast off the Puritans as a bunch of religious fundamentalists. Gorski shows how a social-science, technocratic mindset has triumphed, treating politics as just a competition of self-interested utilitarians.

Today's students get steeped in American tales of genocide, slavery, oppression and segregation. American history is taught less as a progressively realized grand narrative and more as a series of power conflicts between oppressor and oppressed.

The academic left pushed this reinterpretation, but as usual the extreme right ended up claiming the spoils. The people Gorski calls radical secularists expunged biblical categories and patriotic celebrations from schools. The voters deplored and elected the people Gorski calls the religious nationalists to the White House — the jingoistic chauvinists who measure Americanness by blood and want to create a Fortress America keeping the enemy out.

We have a lot of crises in this country, but maybe the foundational one is the Telos Crisis, a crisis of purpose. Many people don't know what this country is here for, and what we are here for. If you don't know what your goal is, then every setback sends you into cynicism and selfishness.

It should be possible to revive the Exodus template, to see Americans as a single people trekking through a landscape of broken institutions. What's needed is an act of imagination, somebody who can tell us what our goal is, and offer an ideal vision of what the country and the world should be.

David Brooks has been a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*, a contributing editor at *Newsweek* and *The Atlantic Monthly*, and he is currently a commentator on "The Newshour with Jim Lehrer."

**YOUR VIEWS**

### State needs to focus on the big problems first

At what point do we require more from our elected representatives? Oregon is in a dire fix financially with serious issues at hand including the budget deficit, out-of-control spending and an education model that everyone has an excuse for and no one can accept any of the blame.

Maybe the statewide leadership could consider a policy that no new bills will make it to the floor for a vote until the obvious big problems above have been addressed. For instance, it would be nice if the Senate and House leadership along with the governor would mandate that any new bill proposed would have to accomplish a verifiable spending reduction and be presented for a vote before any of the "feel good" laws can even be presented.

To illustrate my point, you need look no further than Sen. Bill Hansell. He has been actively championing bills that involve driving in the left lane of the freeway, keeping roadkill, warning posters at rest areas, and naming state symbols. What a productive use of state time and resources! He is reminding me of the band director in the movie "Titanic." He will make sure the band plays on so the passengers are sufficiently distracted from the fact they will shortly be residing at the bottom of

the ocean.  
Is this really the best we can do? What a disappointment!

Russ Henslee  
Pendleton

### School district should better manage its budget

Who wants more taxes? Only the ones who can afford it.  
What about the ones trying to live on their Social Security money? We don't get a raise to help pay for things. My taxes raise about \$200 each year. Because of these kinds of bonds that pass, if this continues we will need to sell our homes, because we can't afford these things.

Let the school districts live on their budget like we are forced to do. They need to take money out of their sports program. Can you imagine what is spent on this?  
Wait and see — they will be asking for more next year.

Jerry Hoffman  
Hermiston

### 'People Power' really just anti-Trump

I have attended both, so far, town hall meetings sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union. These two meetings are part

of a newly birthed ACLU program called "People Power." (How could we, people of the Sixties, not like that naming?) The subject on the floor was the cause of the illegal aliens who had come to the attention of law enforcement. A nine-paragraph handout speaks to ACLU's interpretation of the handling of those persons.

A major thrust speaks to the separation of funded agencies: city, county and state, and how they must not be allowed to co-mingle information or actions. ACLU's People Power advocates agencies not spend even the cost of a phone call of their budget to inform another agency of the situation. This is the creation of the "sanctuary city," the shutting down of "intel" one agency might share with another. I thought this was part of the criticism of 9/11, the failure of one intel-gathering body to share with another.

In this budget challenging time I guess it's nice to have someone watching the cash register. But that's not what "people power" is about. It is about obstruction of

the Trump administration. Believe it is part of an orchestrated plan by the losing party to obstruct our government — their tantrum is scripted and long-reaching.

Our current administration doesn't like "sanctuary cities?" So, strengthen the support of and increase the number of "sanctuary cities!" Can you believe a judge in Portland directed, or led, an illegal alien to a service-only side door so he could avoid immigration officers waiting for him at the public doorway?

On my personal note: Our attention should be on the criminal illegal alien, those persons who do us harm and are a safety concern to our citizens. We have bigger fish to fry than the hard-working, family-oriented immigrant. I want them to get legal and join our village — to make the realizing of the American dream commonplace. I want people's well being and comfort to be as common as horse turds at Round-Up.

Ron Linn  
Stanfield

**LETTERS POLICY**

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