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KATHRYN B. BROWN
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OUR VIEW

Early results in city's cannabis experiment

Marijuana has been legal for adults to ingest and possess in Oregon for two years, and in Pendleton it has been legal to sell — pending a state and city permit — for six months. Some things have changed in that time while others have not.

In some ways, the lack of change is a good thing. Legalizing a harmful substance has not caused our society to crumble, and capitalism and humanity have continued to move forward unabated in Round-Up City and the Beaver State. The hospital hasn't seen a rise in children accidentally ingesting edibles, and motor vehicle crashes attributed to THC impairment haven't spiked.

Long-term cultural effects are still unknown, but early indications are promising.

A positive change is the local public safety budget. More tax dollars are going into public coffers — \$25,000 directly to the city, based on budget predictions — and fewer tax dollars are being spent in law enforcement and the courts to chase down a marginally harmful substance and punish those who choose to use it. None of that will fix all that ails the city, but it's cold cash for a city with bills to pay.

But in other, more harmful ways, things remain the same.

The black market has yet to be eliminated in Pendleton, costing city and state taxpayers money, as well as local above-board business owners. It's the black market folks who are much more likely to sell to minors, or have harder drugs to offer alongside their marijuana. They're drug dealers after all.

After a local bust last month that took a substantial amount of

marijuana off the street and put an alleged dealer behind bars, the local legal shops reported a boost in sales. That would seem to indicate many users were only willing to turn to a dispensary when an illicit source went out of commission.

That's economics, of course. A shop with overhead like rent and bills and a 20 percent tax taken off

the top will have to charge more for the product.

But in the long term, we think legalizing marijuana will have a debilitating effect on the black market. There is no car parked outside your local liquor

store offering knock-off hooch at a discounted price out of the trunk, and by and large restaurants follow the OLCC licensing process before serving wine and beer.

The comparison between the two intoxicants isn't perfect. Growing marijuana is certainly easier than brewing or distilling from home, and the law is generous in how much an individual can harvest. An enthusiast with a green thumb could legally cultivate more than enough cannabis to cover his needs and those of his friends year-round, as long as he's not selling what he's growing.

But eventually, if legal dispensaries offer a safe place to shop with good customer service and a good product, more users will migrate that way and be willing to pay more to know what they're getting and having the satisfaction of not breaking the law while doing it.

Marijuana isn't working perfectly yet, but big change takes time. It's worth watching, and we remain of the opinion that youth access to the drug should be serious concern — as it is with alcohol and tobacco.

Long-term cultural effects are still unknown, but early indications are promising.

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

Legislature should support rural public transit

By **JEANINE GORDON**
Kayak Public Transit

KAYAK Public Transit, operated by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, is a rural, regional transit system serving Eastern Oregon and Southeastern Washington.

The brand KAYAK was inspired by a Cayuse/Nez Perce word, "K'ay'ak," which means "to be free of obstructions." Riders overcome the obstacles of both cost and distance because KAYAK Public Transit provides fare-free transit service with the help of tribal, local, state, and federal funding sources.

But state support for rural transit has never been a priority despite the economic benefit to our communities. Until now. The Legislature now has an opportunity to improve our region's transit system with HB 2017.

It's a landmark bill that would provide dedicated state funding for transportation across Oregon, specifically including earmarked funds for transit. These critical investments will carry us strongly into the next decade. Kayak Public Transit is open to everyone. Our buses transport tribal and non-tribal community members with a fixed-route system connecting people in two states, four counties, and 17 communities creating a vital lifeline for residents in rural Oregon.

Kayak Public Transit riders are workers, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and families. Transit allows our neighbors and friends to safely get to work, college, health care appointments and more. Rural transit is unique because the primary systems across Oregon are in metropolitan areas.

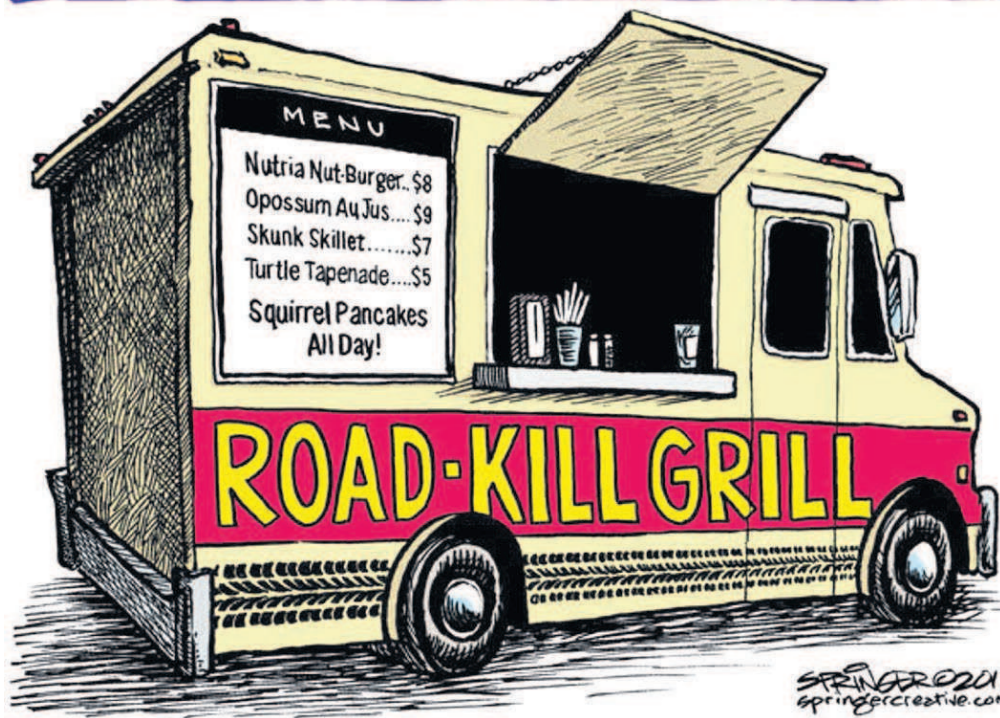
But regardless of address, sometimes people are unable to drive or don't have access to a vehicle. The money public transit riders save on fuel and vehicle wear and tear can be spent at places of business in our communities.

Likewise, transit reduces the number of vehicles on the road and allows for improved freight mobility. At the end of the day, public transportation boosts our local economies, elevates air quality and offers a range of choices for those who can't find housing in the city where they work. These are not the only benefits of public transportation, however.

Public transit is a safe transportation option for commuters and passengers who would normally travel by car on rural roads and highways, thereby decreasing vehicle congestion and the accident probability rate. What could dedicated funding mean to KAYAK and riders if HB 2017 passes? KAYAK's turn-around times on major routes could drop by half from the current 2-4 hours to 1-2 hours; service between Umatilla and Tri-Cities could be re-established; service with other transit providers in the Columbia Gorge could allow riders to travel from Ontario to Portland; and transportation for employees to and from the Port of Morrow could be a possibility, and that's only the beginning. HB 2017 would deliver a much needed shot in the arm to grow the transportation system that our Eastern Oregon communities rely on to thrive. If you want the Legislature to invest in Eastern Oregon, contact your legislators to say HB 2017 is the answer.

Jeanine Gordon is the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's program manager for Kayak Public Transit.

COMING SOON TO OREGON...



OTHER VIEWS

Opioids, a mass killer we're meeting with a shrug

About as many Americans are expected to die this year of drug overdoses as died in the Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined.

For more than 100 years, death rates have been dropping for Americans — but now, because of opioids, death rates are rising again. We as a nation are going backward, and drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death for Americans under 50.

"There's no question that there's an epidemic and that this is a national public health emergency," Dr. Leana Wen, the health commissioner of Baltimore, told me. "The number of people overdosing is skyrocketing, and we have no indication that we've reached the peak."

Yet our efforts to address this scourge are pathetic.

We responded to World War II with the storming of Normandy, and to Sputnik with our moon shot. Yet we answer this current national menace with ... a Republican plan for health care that would deprive millions of insurance and lead to even more deaths!

More on President Donald Trump's fumbling of this problem in a moment. But it's bizarre that Republicans should be complacent about opioids, because the toll is disproportionately in red states — and it affects everyone.

Mary Taylor, the Republican lieutenant governor of Ohio and now a candidate for governor, has acknowledged that both her sons, Joe and Michael, have struggled with opioid addiction, resulting in two overdoses at home, urgent calls for ambulances and failed drug rehab efforts. Good for her for speaking up.

It should be a national scandal that only 10 percent of Americans with opioid problems get treatment. This reflects our failed insistence on treating opioids as a criminal justice problem rather than as a public health crisis.

A Times investigation published this month estimated that more than 59,000 Americans died in 2016 of drug overdoses, in the largest annual jump in such deaths ever recorded in the U.S. One reason is the spread of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that is cheap and potent, leading to overdoses.

Another bad omen: As a nation, we're still hooked on prescription painkillers. Last year, there were more than 236 million prescriptions written for opioids in the United States — that's about one bottle of opioids for every American adult.

Even with all that's at stake, there are three reasons to doubt that Trump will confront the problem.

First, Trump and Republicans in Congress seem determined to repeal Obamacare, which provides for addiction treatment, and slash Medicaid. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the GOP House plan would



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

result in an additional 23 million Americans being uninsured in a decade — and thus less able to get drug treatment. Other, more technical elements of the GOP plan would also result in less treatment.

Second, Tom Price, the secretary of health and human services, last month seemed to belittle the medication treatments for opioid addiction that have the best record, and Attorney General Jeff Sessions still seems to think we can jail our way out of the

problem.

Third, Trump's main step has been to appoint Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey to lead a task force to investigate opioid addiction. But we needn't waste more time

investigating, for we know what to do — and in any case Christie talks a good game but bungled the issue in his home state.

Among experts, there's overwhelming evidence of what works best: medication in conjunction with counseling. This doesn't succeed in every case, but

it does reduce deaths and improve lives. It also saves public money, because a result is fewer emergency room visits and inpatient hospital stays. So the question isn't whether we can afford treatment for all people fighting addiction, but whether we can afford not to provide it.

The bottom line is that we need a major national public health initiative to treat as many Americans abusing drugs as possible, with treatment based on science and evidence. We also need to understand that drug overdoses are symptoms of deeper malaise — "deaths of despair," in the words of Anne Case and Angus Deaton of Princeton University, stemming from economic woes — and seek to address the underlying issues.

Above all, let's show compassion. Addiction is a disease, like diabetes and high blood pressure. We would never tell diabetics to forget medication and watch their diets and exercise more — and we would be aghast if only 10 percent of diabetics were getting lifesaving treatment.

Innumerable people with addictions whom I've interviewed haunt me. One was a nurse who became dependent on prescription painkillers and was fired when she was caught stealing painkillers from a hospital. She became homeless and survived by providing sex to strangers in exchange for money or drugs.

She wept as she told me her story, for she was disgusted with what she had become — but we as a society should be disgusted by our own collective complacency, by our refusal to help hundreds of thousands of neighbors who are sick and desperate for help.

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. A columnist for The New York Times since 2001, he won the Pulitzer Prize two times, in 1990 and 2006.

YOUR VIEWS

Fire bond rate as advertised

The letter "Fire tax bond higher than advertised by city" is just not true.

You can verify this by reading the voters pamphlet for yourself. It states that "The bonds are estimated to cost approximately 62 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value."

The speaking points that I was asked to provide involved the county bond being paid off in 2016 along with a city of Pendleton bond being paid in the same year. The two bonds equaled 48 cents per \$1,000, creating a net cost to the taxpayer of 14 cents.

This was strictly talking points and to my knowledge never advertised as the rate to be charged. The information was also placed in the voters' pamphlet as talking points.

It is unfortunate that embittered perceptions

choose to never see any good or the efforts to improve our community. Please take the time to learn the facts for yourself and don't let the misguided information portray the reality.

Paul Chalmers
Pendleton

Criticism comes with territory

I would suggest that Mayor John Turner check with his city attorney before he rebukes a citizen at a public hearing. As a public servant, your rights concerning libel and other items are much different. If this person wants to call you a disgusting thief, he can. Just ask the politicians in the big city.

You owe him an apology, Mr. Mayor.

JL Humphrey
Pendleton

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