EAST OREGONIAN
Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

State must clarify tax rules on recreational pot

Oregon's rules on disclosure of tax collections on recreational marijuana sales are blurry and need refining.

As they are now, the disclosure rules put cities, including those in Eastern Oregon and others in rural areas, in an awkward position because the state's rules on what can and can't be disclosed create a conflict with local budget requirements to publicly account for all incoming money.

EO file photo

Most cities that passed marijuana taxes signed agreements with the state Department of Revenue for collection. Pendleton, the only municipality in Umatilla and Morrow counties that allows marijuana businesses, signed that agreement. Usually when the state reports on tax collections and other economic data there are regional and city-by-city breakdowns. As a result, the state required confidentiality agreements with the cities to ensure information about tax returns from individual businesses is protected so the data couldn't be used by anyone to gain a competitive edge.

In regions where there are only a few pot shops, individual business information could be discerned from public documents if a city accurately accounts for that money in its financial statements or annual budget. To stay within the rules, cities have taken different approaches. Pendleton included a $25,000 revenue projection for marijuana dollars this fiscal year, but many municipalities chose not to. City finance director Linda Carter said that so far tax revenue has been "minimal." But as a matter of public record, she said the revenue figures will eventually be transparent and included in the city's upcoming audit for the 2016-2017 fiscal year. She also said the finance department plans to eventually release quarterly finance reports to the city council, which will include marijuana tax revenue information.

> Taxpayers deserve transparency on marijuana tax revenue — even in rural municipalities.

Is that in line with the nondisclosure agreement, as well as transparent operation of the public budgeting process? Is it legal?

Developing clear rules for the budding growth of marijuana sales has been a work in progress since voters approved recreational sales. The state Department of Justice is expected to issue a legal opinion on the tax collections and disclosure rules, and it must clear up the conflicts.

The type of secrecy and nondisclosure caused by the confidentiality agreements and their interpretation isn't in the public interest. Taxpayers should know when viewing a city's financial statement or budget that all the money is accounted for, and right now the rules prevent that.

Those rules must change.

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

Debate over protesting and the American flag is foolish

The big flag debate is stupid.

Far-right imbeciles that fly Confederate flags and have the gall to use the Stars and Stripes as a curtain, display it at night without properly lighting it, display it with the field of blue facing the wrong direction, fly it after it has become tattered (if there isn't a battle going on in front of your house then you have no excuse for your flag being tattered) and then to top it all off, when they finally do spend their money on a new banner they throw the old flag in a common trash receptacle instead of burning it with the dignity that it deserves. These are the people who are complaining about entertainers kneeling.

If the resident at the White House can hug our sacred symbol instead of treating it with the utmost dignity and respect then I think entertainers taking a knee should be the least of everyone's worries. Leaders set an example, and if Donald J. Trump is permitted to treat Old Glory like a contestant in the Miss Universe pageant by the same people that are whining about some entertainers who knelt then I think that any reasonable person can see that the real reason for this debate is hypocrisy: "You may disrespect my flag, but only in the manner that I permit."

Everyone needs to work on their flag etiquette. Refer to the Flag Code to learn more.

Spoiler Alert: You're not being a patriot when you wear U.S. flag T-shirts, you're turning Old Glory into a common adornment.

James Tibbets
Pendleton

EOCI prisoner was more than his rap sheet

I'd just like to say a few kind words about the gentleman that passed away on Sept. 24 at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution here in Pendleton.

I didn't know David Kirby well but our time spent here at EOCI was unlike time spent on the "outs." In here you get to know someone without all the distractions of a busy life. The David I knew was unselfish and considerate. He had a couple of children that he loved very much. So much that, though he had no artistic talent, he had taken up drawing as a way to share a part of himself with those kids. In a place where bravado is the basis for self-esteem, "Kirby," as his friends here on the unit referred to him, was humble.

As for the crimes he had committed in his past, I felt it was wrong to let that be the way he was remembered. Yes, he was here serving an appropriate sentence as punishment for those crimes and as far as I'm concerned that should have been the end of that chapter of his life. Too often people are labeled after a bad episode in their life instead of for the majority of their life spent trying to improve themselves.

So instead of allowing your previous article to serve as Kirby's final chapter here in Pendleton, I pray that you'll use this letter as a sort of obituary. To serve as a reminder that even inside these fences, entire lives matter.

He might not be remembered by most but he will be remembered by the ones that mattered.

God take care of you, Kirby.

William Sellers
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

What Americans think about NFL protests — and Trump

BYRON YORK
Comment

Whenever President Trump sets off a new controversy, there's always a period of hair-on-fire commentary, usually conducted in the absence of polls or other evidence of public opinion. It's happened again and again, the latest example being the president, the NFL and the national anthem.

Trump set things off Sept. 22 during a speech in Alabama. Now, after some time has passed, there are new polls with information on the underlying issue — NFL players protesting during the national anthem -- and Trump's treatment of it.

On the protests, the short version is, the public, which disapproved when Colin Kaepernick first refused to stand for the anthem last year, still disapproves.

A new CBS poll asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of football players protesting by kneeling during the national anthem?" Fifty-two percent said they strongly or somewhat disapprove, while 38 percent said they strongly or somewhat approve, and nine percent said they haven't heard enough to say.

> Most Americans disapprove of the protests, but don't want the president inserting himself in the issue.

The disapprove-approve numbers were 51-39 in a new ESPN poll.

Fox News asked, "In general, do you think kneeling during the national anthem is an appropriate — or inappropriate — form of protest?" Fifty-five percent said inappropriate, while 41 percent said appropriate, and five percent didn't know.

CNN asked the question in a slightly roundabout way, asking, "Do you think athletes who protest by kneeling during the national anthem are doing the right thing or the wrong thing to express their political opinion? Forty-nine percent said the wrong thing, 43 percent said the right thing, and eight percent didn't know.

A USA Today/Suffolk poll got a different result — 51 percent said the protests are appropriate, while 42 percent said they aren't — but did so by writing a question that specifically framed the protest as a stand against racial injustice. The question: "Some NFL players have dropped to one knee during the playing of the national anthem, as a protest bringing attention to police brutality and racial injustice. In your opinion, is it appropriate for players to engage in this sort of protest before an NFL game — yes or no?"

In a more general sense, the CBS poll shed additional light on the public's attitude toward the demonstrations when it asked, "Do you think professional athletes should or should not use their position and fame to talk politics or raise issues, if they want to?" The poll gave respondents three choices: "Yes, whenever they want to," "Yes, but only on their own time," and "No, they should not."

A decisive 68 percent said athletes either should get political on their own time or not at all. (The breakdown of that was 41 percent said athletes should do it on their own time, and 27 percent said they shouldn't do it at all. Just 32 percent said athletes could get political whenever they want to.)

Given the racial dimension of the controversy, the poll broke things down further by race. Forty-six percent of blacks said athletes should get political on their own time or not at all; 64 percent of Hispanics said the same; 58 percent of other races/ethnicities agreed; and 75 percent of whites agreed. Blacks were the only group that said, by a 54 percent majority, that athletes should get political whenever they want.

The bottom line is that in most polls, other than the USA Today/Suffolk survey, small majorities oppose the national anthem protests. But in a broader sense, a much larger majority opposes athletes using the field of competition to play politics.

Why is the majority generally opposing political activity on the field larger than the majority specifically opposing the anthem protests? Just a theory here — it could be that the former is a true measure of opinion on sports protests, while the latter is associated with Trump, which means measures of opinion about the anthem protests are commingled with respondents' opinions about the president.

Which leads to the polls' findings about Trump. CBS asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of Donald Trump's recent comments about football players who protest during the national anthem?" Forty-eight percent strongly or somewhat disapproved, while 38 percent strongly or somewhat approved, and 14 percent did not know.

CNN asked, "Do you think Donald Trump did the right thing or the wrong thing by criticizing athletes from the National Football League who have protested by kneeling during the national anthem?" Sixty percent said Trump did the wrong thing, while 34 percent said he did the right thing and six percent didn't know. Other polls showed similarly strong disapproval of the president's action.

What does it all mean? First, most Americans disapprove of the protests. But at the same time, most don't want the president inserting himself into the issue. Even those Americans who support the president would still like to see him concentrate his public statements on issues like taxes, economic growth, healthcare, immigration, North Korea, and other critical matters.

But Trump does what he does. And on the NFL protest question, if the new polls are correct, he's on the same side as most Americans — even if most also wish he would stay out of it.

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Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

LETTERS POLICY

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