

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Drawing the line for developers

There is no question that increasing Pendleton’s stock of affordable housing is good for the city’s economy. But there are questions about how much money the city should give a private developer to make it happen.

On Tuesday the Pendleton city council will consider a request from Pendleton Heights developer Sal Jivanjee to delay payment on \$200,000 in infrastructure debt the city is holding for him. According to a news release from the city, Jivanjee will ask to wait until after the first phase in his planned 100-unit complex is complete, rather than when the permits are pulled. He will also ask to pay only in proportion to the completed units — initially, 20 percent for a planned first phase of 20 units.

The request should not be considered in a vacuum. Jivanjee has made multiple such requests for help since the city donated the land for Pendleton Heights six years ago. In June he asked, among other things, that the city pay the entire \$394,000 cost of the road to

the apartment complex.

At the time councilor Dale Primmer said the continued requests seemed like “an inchworm effect where we’re eventually going to get to this spot where we’re going to say, ‘No, we’re done.’”

The time to say “we’re done” may be now.

Cities where affordable housing is difficult to find should be looking for ways to foster more development. Clearing regulatory hurdles, adjusting zoning, beefing up infrastructure and other policy decisions can help make development more feasible for any potential developer on the playing field. To its credit, the city of Pendleton has already streamlined most of those issues. But giving financial assistance directly to a specific developer needs to come with a hard look at return on investment.

When the city donated the land for Pendleton Heights in 2012, housing development was more or less at a standstill and the city understandably wanted to jumpstart a promising



EO file photo

The Pendleton Heights housing development after phase one in March 2016.

project.

Not all projects live up to their promise, however. Six years has delivered a subdivision of only 32 town houses at Pendleton Heights. Meanwhile, other projects are taking off. Pendleton saw a 10-year high of 55 housing permits issued in 2017 and is on pace to surpass that number this year. I & E Construction is hoping to add a 204-unit apartment project to Pendleton within the next two years.

It is worth noting that I&E is also asking for help from the city to get its project started, including land donation and property tax deferrals.

Housing is rightfully a top priority

for the city, and thanks to the council’s willingness to offer incentives, we’ve seen substantial and much-needed improvement on that front.

But now that ball is rolling, and the city should carefully consider how much it’s willing to give up to placate developers. Most importantly, once the city reaches an incentive agreement, it must be willing to stand firm. Further negotiations — which have been ongoing since the Pendleton Heights project started — send the wrong message to other interested developers.

The city should be open for business, but not pushed into a cascading field of concessions once a deal is made.

YOUR VIEWS

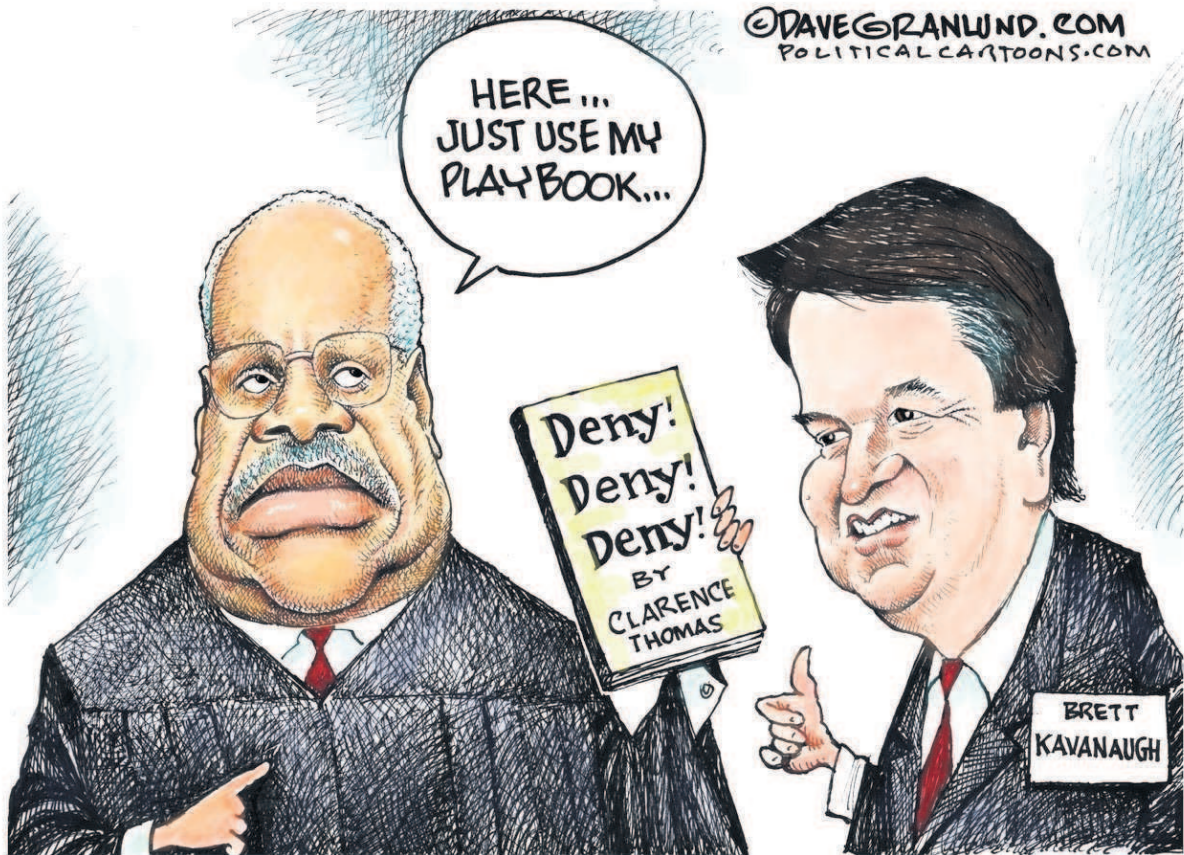
Rodeo winner a true champion

During Saturday’s championship performance of the steer tripping I observed an incredible act of placing others’ safety over self-interest when Trevor Brazile roped his steer near the race track on the south side of the arena. Instead of placing his trip to possibly win the contest, he waited for his horse and steer to clear several cameramen, then completed his run. His act of protecting others at a time when his self-interest could have taken control was the demonstration of a real champion in the contest of rodeo!

Trevor, you are more than deserving of the title you own as a competitor, but your demeanor during the heat of competition wins you the real title of King of the Cowboys.

Thank you and all rodeo for making the Pendleton Round-Up something we all are proud of.

Mike Thorne
Pendleton



OTHER VIEWS

‘Trump Derangement Syndrome’ isn’t real

Conventional wisdom says that the middle is disappearing from American politics: The Republicans have moved far to the right, the Democrats far to the left, and woe to any moderate voters looking for politicians to represent their views.

Well, the conventional wisdom is wrong. The Democrats have not actually become radical leftists, or anything close to it.

You keep hearing this story partly because Republicans have an obvious interest in promoting it and partly because large parts of the news media find it irresistible. It’s a “both side do it” angle that allows us journalists to appear tough, knowing and above the partisan scrum. We love that image. But the facts don’t support the story in this case.

For starters, look at this year’s primaries, which finished last week. Across the country, a grand total of two Democratic incumbents in the House lost a primary. Zero Senate candidates did. In conservative states with moderate Democratic senators — like Indiana, North Dakota, and West Virginia — not one of those moderates



DAVID
LEONARDT
Comment

even faced a serious primary challenge.

The situation was very different in 2010 with the Tea Party, which pushed the Republican Party to the right. Multiple incumbents lost that year, as Amy Walter of the Cook Political Report noted last week. “Please stop with the ‘revolution’ in the Democratic Party narrative,” she said. This year’s real story is the one that the political scholars

Lara Putnam and Theda Skocpol have tried to tell: Anti-Trump activists have taken a strategic approach, backing either moderate or more progressive candidates, depending on the district.

It’s true that a few proudly left-leaning Democrats won gubernatorial primaries, like Stacey Abrams in Georgia and Andrew Gillum in Florida. But I encourage you to watch a few of their speeches. For one thing, both are strong candidates. For another, they are hardly socialists. And the list of progressive insurgents who got thumped is much longer. In New York, Cynthia Nixon didn’t crack 35 percent.

Meanwhile, in Congress, the party’s reaction to President Donald Trump tells a

similar story. Political pundits sometimes talk about “Trump derangement syndrome” — a condition, supposedly, in which his presidency has made Democrats go crazy. Except that it hasn’t.

To take just one example: There is strong evidence that Trump has broken the law, both by obstructing justice and by using the presidency to enrich himself. Still, Democratic leaders refuse to push for impeachment. They say the country should wait for Robert Mueller’s investigation to finish. I think that’s wise. Either way, it’s certainly not deranged.

Finally, there is policy. Democrats have indeed moved somewhat to the left over the past few decades, on both social and economic issues. As Lawrence Summers, the former Treasury secretary (and no leftist revolutionary), likes to say, the last 15 years should have nudged open-minded people to the political left: The free market isn’t delivering healthy increases in living standards for most Americans. In response, Democrats are focusing less on Bill Clinton’s old themes, like personal and fiscal responsibility, and more on using the government to help people.

But think about what a truly left-wing

agenda would look like: Top tax rates of 70 percent (which we had as recently as 1980) or higher. A generous “universal basic income.” The elimination of employer-provided health insurance, with a system more like Britain’s. These ideas remain limited to the margins. None is likely to happen even if Democrats sweep the elections of 2020.

I’m not suggesting that the party has completely avoided Trump overreaction. In our polarized era, Democrats do sometimes confuse its progressive base with the country as a whole. They are to the left of the American public on immigration policy, for instance.

For the most part, though, the Democratic agenda remains decidedly center-left: Raise taxes on the rich, and use the money to help the middle class and poor. Protect civil rights. Expand educational access. Regulate Wall Street, and fight climate change. Expand health insurance using the current system. And compromise with Republicans when necessary.

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David Leonardt is a columnist for the New York Times.

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