

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

## A fine recipe for disaster

Not many will admit it, but the fact is a lot of us text while we are behind the wheel. And many more talk on the phone while driving.

Both of those by now ingrained habits for most of us will be under the spotlight, thanks to a Distracted Driving Enforcement Grant the Hermiston Police Department recently received through Oregon Impact, a nonprofit that advocates against impaired and distracted driving.

The \$4,000 grant is the first of its kind received by the HPD, which also pursues grants supporting high visibility and DUII enforcement.

And, according to the numbers, it's a grant that can be put to good use.

According to the Oregon Department of Transportation, there are four types of distracted driving — visual, auditory, manual, and cognitive. One of the most prominent behaviors, which can involve all four types of distracted driving, is cellphone use.

Between 2013 and 2017, 20 people in Oregon died and more than 1,500 have been injured due to crashes involving cellphone use behind the wheel. This



EO Media Group File Photo

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includes 158 people who were injured while in the car with a driver between the ages of 16 and 18, who was using a cellphone at the time of an accident.

Those numbers are up from a similar ODOT report from 2011 and 2015 where drivers using cellphones caused 917 crashes that killed 14 people and

inflicted 1,330 injuries.

The number of crashes in the city of Hermiston has increased 10% the past five years as the city's population has expanded from over 17,340 to 18,200 people.

Those are eye-opening numbers. Especially when the event that triggered

the crashes — cellphone use — could be easily avoided.

The fact is even one crash that injures or kills an Oregonian is one crash too many.

"There's a significant difference between talking on a cellphone and texting on a cellphone," said Hermiston Police Department Chief Jason Edmiston. "There may be some sort of justification for someone talking on a cellphone. Texting on a cellphone, there's no rhyme or reason. Pull over if it's that important."

Cellphones have changed our culture. And they are a useful, handy tool most of us count on. Yet their very usefulness has lulled drivers into a sense of apathy regarding just how dangerous it is to utilize them behind the wheel. For a car accident to occur, it takes only a few seconds, usually far too fast for the driver to react to avoid a collision. Add that fact to the distraction of talking on the phone — or worse, texting — and a fine recipe for disaster is in play.

Let's face it, we all have spent time talking on the phone and texting while driving, and for the most part we get away with it. Usually. But not always.



## YOUR VIEWS

### Robocall legislation overlooked in town hall coverage

A recent news article in the *East Oregonian* about Congressman Walden's town hall in Athena made it appear that it was full of disagreement and strife. In reality, the town hall was friendly and welcoming just like the people of Umatilla County. The town hall focused on support for Walden's efforts toward forest management reform done in a way that can reduce the chances of wildfires and thereby also reducing carbon emissions. Rather, the news article fixated on one man's question about the Green New Deal, which is a piece of extreme and costly legislation that will only hurt people in Umatilla County. Congressman Walden has been both a great friend and supporter of people living in rural Oregon and it is a shame that this article did not reflect that point.

I attended Congressman Walden's town hall event on June 30 and wanted to highlight an important topic to me that your recent news article conveniently glossed over.

It seems like every day I get an automated call requesting my personal or financial information. Not only do these calls annoy me by interrupting my day, but their access to my personal phone number feels invasive.

I was pleased to hear that Walden has taken action on this issue in Washington. He is currently championing legislation to stop these robocalls from scamming Oregonians and pestering us constantly.

I appreciate his addressing issues like this that affect Oregonians like myself every day. It's how he's earned my support.

Suni Danforth  
Milton-Freewater

### Balance needed when reporting on Walden

When I read your recent article on Congressman Greg Walden's town hall in Athena, I wondered at such a different experience that reporter had from mine.

I was so impressed with Congressman Walden's thorough knowledge of every subject that came up, whether the border crisis (which he has personally visited) to the opioid crisis, to the forests.

He advocates for improved forest management for reduction of wildfires and the tons of carbon and pollution they emit, when an actively managed forest is an agent to sequester carbon rather than emitting it like our current neglected forest lands. We should be getting good paying jobs for rural communities, whereas the Green New Deal the *East Oregonian* seems to support will do just the opposite.

I was very interested when he mentioned research developed at OSU in use in Idaho of advanced nuclear energy with modular reactors, no emissions, plus new developments in hydropower when you need it in the amount you need.

One commented on a desire for Congress to work together. Congressman Walden mentioned all the many bills passed with bipartisan support, but he said the media is not interested in that, they only report on any controversy. The *EO* fell right in line, ignoring a mostly supportive group for a rude dissenter.

Congressman Walden won Umatilla County by a 2:1 margin; it would be nice if the local paper would report on the many supportive comments and not refer to the meeting as "testy." Balance in reporting was missing.

Granelia Thompson  
Weston

## OTHER VIEWS

## District voters get final say on Boquist

Corvallis Gazette-Times

Perhaps the action taken by the Senate Special Committee on Conduct against state Sen. Brian Boquist is meant only as a placeholder until an investigation into his threats against Senate President Peter Courtney and Oregon State Police troopers is finished.

In an extraordinary session held on Monday, the four senators on the committee decided against barring Boquist from the state Capitol until the investigation is complete; that might take a couple of months. But the senators, two Democrats and two Republicans, eventually told Boquist that he can only report to the Capitol if he provides 12 hours' notice. The extra time allows officials to arrange for additional state troopers to ensure the safety of employees and the public.

When the full investigation is over, the Senate then can decide what sanctions, if any, should be taken against Boquist: It could vote to expel him, but that would require a two-thirds vote of the Senate, and no senator ever has been expelled. It could elect to censure him — essentially publicly condemning his actions — but that hasn't happened since 1971. In any event, judging by Monday's hearing, there doesn't seem to be much appetite among the committee members for taking strong action against Boquist.

So a final judgment on Boquist may well rest among the voters in his Senate District 12, a mid-valley district that includes rural portions of Benton County north and south of Corvallis. But even assuming he files for re-election in 2020, chance are he would be a heavy favorite: In his three races for the Senate, he has never drawn less than 60 percent of the vote in general elections.

As you know, Boquist is in trouble because of his reprehensible comments made just before Senate Republicans walked out of the Capitol for a second time in this year's session.

Their goal was to prevent the Senate from achieving a quorum, which requires 20 of its 30 members. Without a quorum, the second walkout, Gov. Kate Brown hinted that she would consider sending Oregon State Police troopers to round up Republicans if they walked out.

Boquist didn't care for that: On the floor of the Senate on June 19, he told Senate President Courtney that "if you send the state police to get me, hell is coming to visit you personally."

Later that day, Boquist told reporters for a Portland TV station that any troopers summoned to bring him back to the Capitol needed to be "bachelors" and should "come heavily armed." Boquist has not taken back the statements, although he has apologized to Courtney.

Some of Boquist's defenders have said that his statements were meant as hyperbole and were rashly made in the heat of the moment. That may be. But it doesn't matter: These are not statements that a responsible elected official should make. And consider this: If a student at a university or school campus or a worker in a private business made similar statements on social media, they'd prompt immediate attention from authorities. They are not the sort of statements that can be blithely ignored, especially in today's world.

In fact, Brenda Baumgart, an outside lawyer hired to investigate the matter, determined that Boquist's statements "constitute credible threats of violence directed at the senate president and Oregon state police." She also found that the threats violated the Legislature's rule against workplace harassment. She urged the committee to ban Boquist from the Capitol until her investigation was finished, advice that the committee did not follow.

The finished investigation may change some minds, but at this point we'd be surprised if Boquist faced tough sanctions from the Senate, although we think censure is warranted. But it may fall to the voters to issue a final verdict.