

## OUR VIEW

# Bill should not be used as political pawn

In the end, it is a shame that a few Oregon lawmakers were forced to resort to a little-known, and hardly used, rule to get a bill that addresses criminal sexual contact off the ice and moving in the Legislature.

The legislation, Senate Bill 649 — also known as Bailey's Bill — boosts penalties for criminal sexual contact with an underage victim if the offender is the victim's teacher. The existing law delivers harsher penalties to a coach caught in the same situation as a teacher. The bill, named after Weston-McEwen student Bailey Munck, received easy approval in the Oregon Senate before it traveled to the House where, for reasons not clear, it stalled at the House Judiciary Committee.

The chair of the committee, Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Clackamas, "indicated" she was not going to give the bill a hearing, which prompted nine members of the judicial committee to invoke House Rule 8.20. The rule stipulates that if a majority of committee members request a hearing in writing, the chair must set up a hearing within five days.

Now a hearing on the legislation is set for Tuesday, May 18.

Bynum's reluctance to move the bill may be connected to political brinkmanship, where it was going to be used as a bargaining chip regarding other legislation. Hopefully, that is incorrect. If it is not, then that should give readers — not to mention voters — pause.

A bill that addresses a subject as sensitive as criminal sexual contact should not be regulated to a mere chess piece on broader political chess board.

The lawmakers who pushed for the hearing should be lauded. Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Milwaukie, who navigated the bill through the Senate, also deserve praise.

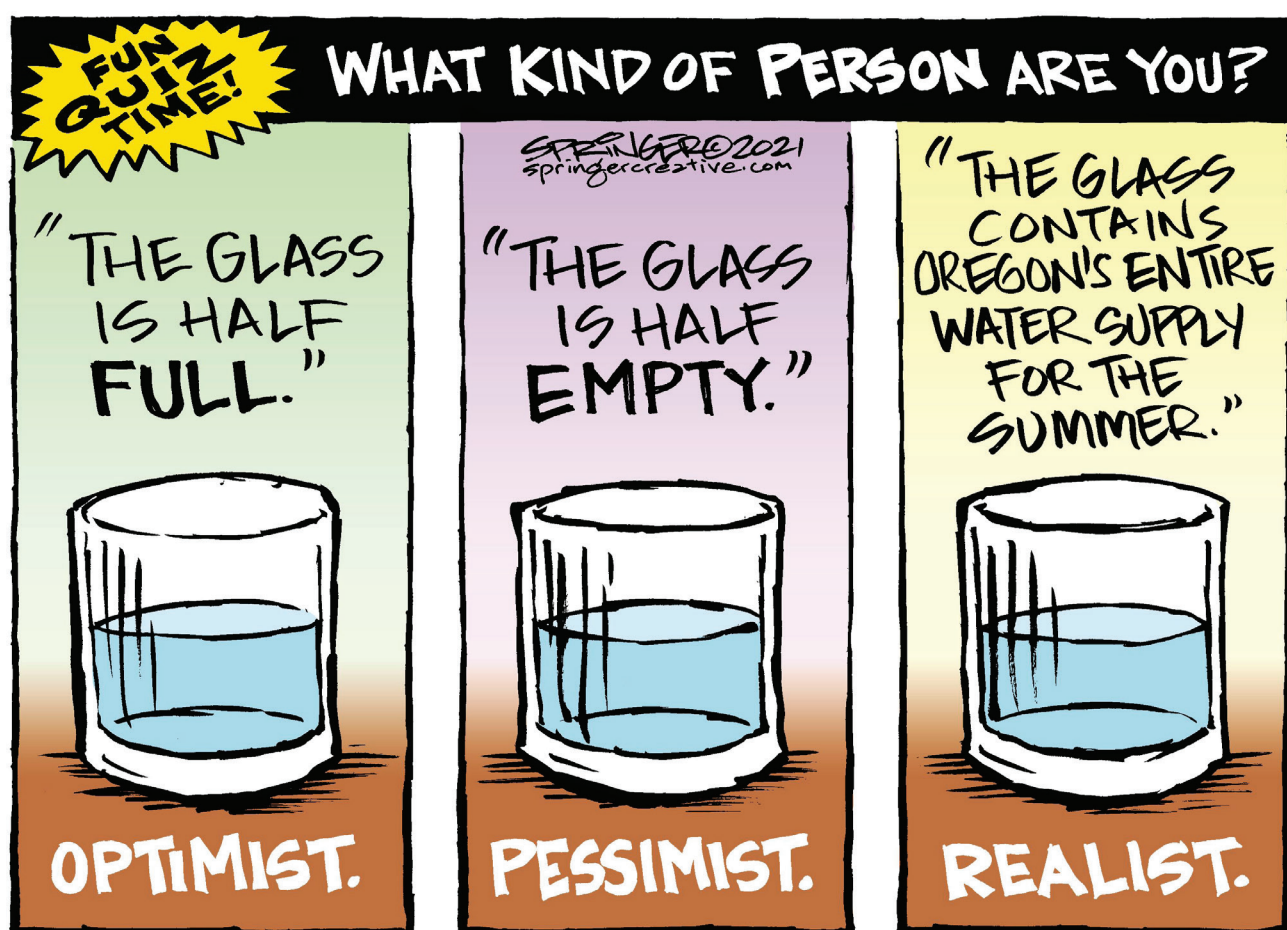
Bailey's Bill should not have ended up stuck in limbo in a committee of the House. The bill, once it reached the House, should have been acted on immediately.

That it was not is troubling.

The broader issue, though, is appropriate punishment for those who prey on our children. This bill will fix a glaring hole that seemingly gives instructors a lighter punishment when they, in fact, should receive the same penalty as coaches. It will close a dangerous loophole.

The other key piece of the bill is it has wide, bipartisan support. Currently, such unity among lawmakers is rare and when it occurs should be advanced as quickly as possible.

This time lawmakers did the right thing and voters should be pleased.



## More peace, more love, more pupusas



ALEX HOBBS  
PASTURES OF PLENTY

Driving along Interstate 84, the haze clung to the horizon like flies to carrion. A roil of various hues of brown blown across a desolate landscape. The child sitting shotgun asked if something was on fire. It was a fair question for a boy who glimpsed a red sun through smoke each and every summer.

I shook my head. It was dust. Dust so thick that it had choked out the rolling hills across the Columbia. Topsoil, most likely. It's spring harvest, after all. Dust, high visibility survey flags, tumbleweeds, concrete bunkers. A certain entity along the river looming over all of North Morrow County like Barad-dûr. I cannot help but cringe in reaction to it all. To the relentless pursuit of progress.

However, nestled among this woebegone landscape, a spark of magic has taken hold. A tiny flame nurtured by women so skilled you wonder if they've unlocked some sort of ancient alchemy. These women are the true purveyors of culture in North Morrow County. The vanguard. Savants of their craft. I am, of course, talking about the women of El Salvadoreño Taco Truck in Boardman.

If you have never had a pupusa, I'm not sure I can adequately describe its rhapsody of flavors and textures. The pupusa itself is savory, its insides a caudron of cheese and lard. Often the cheese will burst from its masa home as it cooks to crisp on the griddle. You'll do well to save that bit for last.

Atop a pupusa perches a delightfully tangy salsa roja and, of course, the curtido — a slaw made of cabbage, onion, carrot, jalapeño and vinegar. Its bitterness helps edge the umami of the pupusa. If a pupusa were a piece of music it would be Chopin nocturne: deceptively complex, heartbreakingly beautiful, full of gastronomical trills.

It is not lost on me how many miles this meal has traveled to find a home in Northeast Oregon. According to Google Maps, El Salvador is well over 3,000 miles from Boardman — a simple gesture of love that has traversed thousands of miles. It is astonishing to think of all the events that had to occur for me and these women to live in the same place at the same time.

Recently, the women of El Salvadoreño gifted me an El Salvador blue shirt that reads "More Peace, More Love, More Pupusas." Yes, I think to myself as I shovel another bite into my mouth, more to all of the above.

North Morrow County is an astounding amalgam of people and cultures. I am not sure there are many places in

the Pacific Northwest quite like it. The aforementioned women are just one example of those quietly toiling out here, doing their part to enrich, amplify, and love. Whether they are flattening pupusas, milking cows, manejando camiones (driving trucks), making antojitos, grilling hash browns, grinding espresso, bagging groceries, teaching math or coaching soccer, these working people are dedicated to their families and community. It's a place not unlike a pupusa. A concert of flavors coming together to make something sabroso. Something simple and beautiful.

So as its surroundings morph and change, this little taco truck remains a steadfast beacon and a gentle reminder to proceed with caution. The pupusa isn't a golf course, it's not a giant, illuminated concrete bunker that collects all our data to tell us more stuff we don't need, nor is it an electrical substation. It's a simple dish from a Central American country thousands of miles away. They feed us, nourish us.

It does these things far from their origin by women who dish them up with power those who we traditionally think of as "being in power" could only dream of. Viva la pupusa.

Alex Hobbs lives in Irrigon and is a former educator turned full-time homeschooling mom. She has a degree in political science from Oregon State University.

## The hard reality of Greater Idaho



CHARLES JONES  
OTHER VIEWS

The devil is in the details. The devil is also in hard realities. Veteran Mike McCarter, president of Move Oregon's Border, wrote an opinion piece in local papers supporting MOB, which wants to force 850,000 Oregonians to become Idahoans and force 75% of the land in Oregon into Idaho.

This fellow veteran looks at just eight of a thousand devilish details and realities that would result from MOB's plan.

### Snowplows

Those plows that keep our highways and freeways open are owned by Oregon. Will Oregon donate millions of dollars of plows to another state? Is Idaho going to spend millions to buy plows and pay drivers to service nearly all the snow country of Oregon, which is now largely paid for by western Oregon gas taxes? Who will keep our highways clear? MOB volunteers?

### Prisons and criminals

Several state prisons are in MOB's targeted counties. Snake River Correctional Institution, near Ontario, was first built in 1991. The 1994 addition alone cost \$175 million (not corrected for inflation), the largest Oregon general fund expenditure ever, even to this day.

You think Idaho is going to buy? What happens when they don't? Also, there are nearly 3,000 prisoners in that one prison. They are charged with Oregon crimes. They are not guilty of Idaho crimes. Will people volunteer to move the prison structures and infrastructure to Western Oregon?

### Ontario and Malheur counties

In 2020, Ontario recreational marijuana dispensaries did over \$91 million in sales. Ontario received over \$1.85 million in marijuana taxes in fiscal year 2019-20. Most sales were to people coming from Idaho. Additionally, a huge part of Ontario's retail and most of business growth has been along the border, where Idahoans shop to avoid sales tax on furniture, lawn mowers, clothing and many durable goods. Does MOB hope Ontario (most of the population of Malheur County) will kill their golden-egg goose by becoming Idaho? Not a surprise that almost no one attended the recent MOB rally in Ontario.

### Buildings

Oregon owns hundreds of million dollars of buildings throughout the MOB-targeted counties. As a tiny example, in La Grande alone the building values are staggering. Tens of millions of dollars just at Eastern Oregon University. Then there are Oregon Department of Transportation facilities, Oregon State Police, state forestry, and on and on. MOB leaders may be spending too much time at the Ontario dispensaries if they think Oregon will give that all away.

### Land

Besides the aforementioned real estate, consider the thousands of acres of state forest in the targeted counties. All the thousands of miles of state highways. All the state parks. Consider the tiniest fraction of these holdings — Wallowa Lake State Park. How many millions is that incredible chunk of land worth? If you owned it, would you just give it to your neighbor?

Bonds Oregon owns hundreds of million dollars in bonds issued to service debt on construction in targeted counties. Will Idaho happily take over those bond payments? And who will be paying the accountants and lawyers for incredibly complex transfers?

### Retirement accounts

Oregon holds retirement accounts for not just state employees, but also for nearly all police officers, firefighters, teachers ... the list goes on. Courts have consistently ruled those retirement contracts are legal and binding. So Idaho will merrily pick up a few billion of debt?

And this is only the tip of that devilish iceberg — that devilish reality of our complicated lives, economy and citizenship in the year 2021.

Charles Jones, a retired navy commander and science teacher, is a fourth generation Eastern Oregonian living in La Grande. His grandfather, as 1920 Ontario's mayor, paved the town's first streets.

### EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

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