

OUR VIEW

Should grocery stores be free to sell liquor?

If you are a newcomer to Oregon and yearn for booze, you learn quickly that you can only buy hard liquor in state liquor stores.

If you are a newcomer to Oregon, you also learn quickly that Oregonians can't pump their own gas in many parts of the state. (It's a wonder the state lets people plug in their own electric cars!)

Surveys from the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center seem to indicate Oregonians are ready for change — where they can buy liquor and in pumping gas. Polls done in January showed more than 50% of Oregonians support both policy changes.

The restrictions on pumping your own gas already have begun eroding. It's OK to pump your own in much of Eastern Oregon. Oregonians could do it this week because of the heat — until Tuesday evening, June 29. We think Oregonians can handle it full time. If you don't want to pump your own gas, we understand. In other states, full-service stations often cater to that desire.

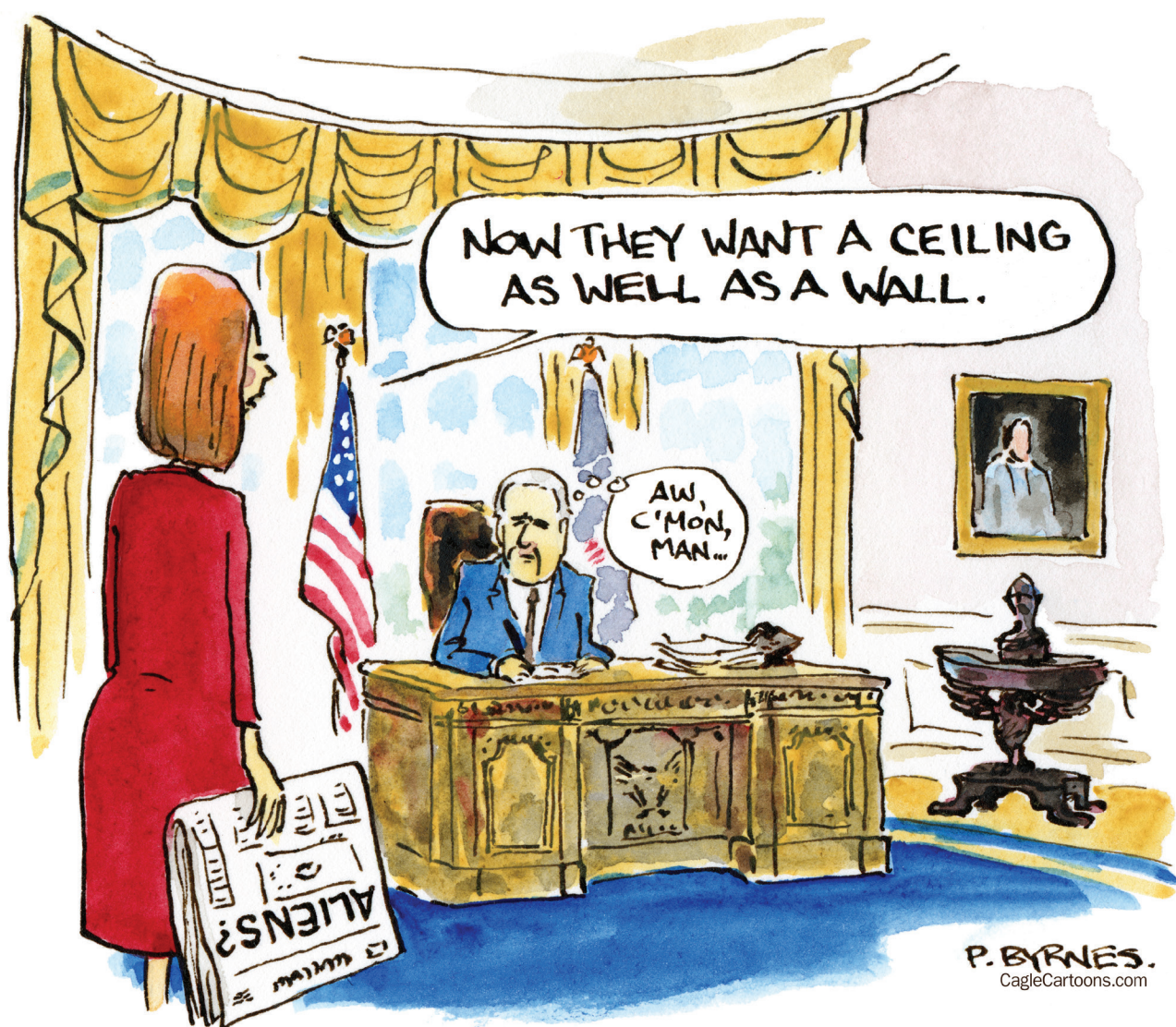
A permanent shift in the rules for booze may soon be coming to a ballot near you. Two possible ballot measures led in part by Lauren Johnson of Newport Market in Bend aim for change. In one, grocers could sell local spirits. In the second, hard liquor just would be for sale at the grocer. It's not clear if the Northwest Grocery Association, which is backing both efforts, will actually focus on one or the other for the 2022 ballot.

A private system with state oversight works OK for pot sales. Grocery stores manage to sell beer and wine just fine. We are sure they could do the same with hard liquor.

There are many questions, though. What happens to the people who have invested in state-controlled liquor stores? Their business model would be in big trouble. And will small producers of craft liquors be better off in this new system or worse?

The bigger worry for some is what happens if it becomes more convenient to get hard liquor. Would problems with addiction and substance abuse rise? Maybe. But if people want booze now, they will manage to get it. And we don't see a tidal wave of people in states with more freedom to buy liquor calling to add more restrictions to where liquor can be sold.

There's going to be interest in figuring out what it might do to prices, as well. But until we know for certain what will be on the ballot, it's hard to know what it might do. It's also hard to know if this just will be another in a series of similar measures that never became law.



Managing natural resources is not for the weak



BILL ANEY

THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

Throughout my Forest Service career, my coworkers and I took very seriously the responsibility of managing the public's natural resources. Caring for our forests and grasslands, water, and wildlife populations is a sacred trust that the American people place in the hands of public employees.

With this honor comes challenges. Every action a public resource manager takes is open for critique in the public forum. It is often said, tongue-in-cheek, that the only problem with a democracy is that everyone gets a vote. The public can weigh in on every action affecting public resources, using an agency review and comment process, the news media, the courts, or social media. Sometimes the comments are deceitful, mean-spirited and self-serving, but public employees by the nature of their employment have limited ability to respond.

I was reminded of this recently when reading about the controversy directed at the Oregon Department of Transportation while it removes trees killed or heavily damaged by fires last summer in Western Oregon. Three state agencies teamed up to remove trees along state highways to prevent them from falling on the roadways. Large trees falling on high-speed highways can spell disaster, and the public has a right to expect that highways are safe to travel.

The problem is, it can take several years for trees heavily damaged by fire to die and fall, but danger tree removal needs to happen now. It is not cost effective to return year after year to remove

trees as they die. Forest managers use predictive models to help determine the likelihood that an individual tree has sustained enough damage to kill it, and while these models have been verified with research, they still are models and as such are not perfect. If a model is 98% accurate in predicting which trees will die and eventually fall, this still means that on average two out of 100 predictions will be wrong. ODOT estimates that 140,000 fire-damaged trees will be removed from the sides of the west Cascade highways this spring and summer; if 2% of these trees would have survived had they not been cut down, this is 2,800 trees. No wonder it is easy for critics to point out examples of trees that they believe shouldn't have been cut.

As a result, ODOT has had to defend its work in the media and in legislative hearings this year, and the foresters they hired have had their motives, credentials and expertise challenged publicly. Such is the world of public resource management.

Another example is the use of what could be called ballot box biology to make decisions about wildlife management. In the North American conservation model, state wildlife agencies manage most wildlife populations, taking their direction from wildlife commissions. The agencies have professional, educated, trained biologists to collect information and make recommendations to the state wildlife commission, which in turn takes public testimony alongside the professional recommendations and makes decisions about management of these populations.

Where it goes awry is when legislatures or the public initiative process is used to dictate how wildlife is managed without full understanding of the underlying biology. Several tools that wildlife agencies have used to manage wildlife

populations are off the table in Oregon due to successful ballot initiatives; the use of leghold traps for furbearers and the sport hunting of cougars and bears with dogs, for example. Citizens of Colorado recently passed a ballot measure directing the state wildlife agency to develop a plan to reintroduce wolves into the state even though wolf populations in neighboring states were inevitably going to expand into Colorado without any help.

The problem with ballot box biology is, quite simply, the majority rules. What would happen, for example, if the citizens of the state were presented with a ballot measure to ban all hunting? We might be surprised at how much support such a measure would receive from non-hunters and animal welfare groups, and if it were to pass the consequences would affect not only hunters but also farmers and ranchers, foresters and all sorts of non-game wildlife species.

Again, such is the world of public resource management, something that anyone choosing to enter this profession needs to understand.

I am not suggesting the public shouldn't have a say in the way public resources are managed. Gifford Pinchot, the father of American forestry, counseled public land foresters to remember who they work for and that public support of management of public resources is absolutely required. What I am suggesting is this public involvement be done with civility and humility, recognizing that professionally trained foresters, biologists and other specialists are working hard to do a quality job, and nearly always do it very well under sometimes very trying circumstances.

Hug a forester today.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

YOUR VIEWS

COVID-19 vaccination doesn't mean danger is over

As the state drops COVID-19 restrictions, we are all thinking about getting back to normal. So what is normal? It will be different for each of us.

Vaccines are great and I was eager to get mine. The science strongly supports the effectiveness of vaccines, but a vaccinated person can still be infected and spread the disease without even knowing it. Those of us with compromised immune systems are still at varying degrees of risk. Others may not be able to be vaccinated due to medical reasons.

This county has had a disturbingly low rate of vaccinations for a variety of reasons, and our case numbers continue to be in the top per capita in the state.

We have consistently been in the high-risk category. The new variants are highly transmissible and COVID will not go away soon.

So for me, the new normal will be continuing to wear a mask and keeping my distance out of self-protection and respect for others. I applaud those businesses and organizations who will continue to take precautions to help protect their patrons and our communities.

We are so prone these days to being rugged individuals and in it for our personal rights. This is one reason we remain in our current high-risk state. I only hope we continue to respect others and retain our sense of community as we return to our individual sense of normalcy.

Jeff Blackwood
Pendleton

Dream Team coverage deserves kudos

This is a very belated letter written to express my appreciation for the wonderful job Jade McDowell did covering the Dream Team last spring. She was so kind and supportive and did a great job interacting with our special athletes.

I was saddened to read that she is leaving our area and wish her the best of luck in her new endeavor!

I also want to commend Ben Lonergan for taking pictures of the Dream Team athletes that truly captured their joy and enthusiasm for the sport.

Kristi Smalley
Hermiston

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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