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OPINION

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OUR VIEW

New metric may be key to OSP's staffing

Providing the right number of law enforcement officers can be as important and difficult a decision as providing the right kind of law enforcement services.

How do you get the number of police right? Is there some sort of objective standard?

A number that comes up repeatedly is patrol officers per capita. For instance in 2020, the Oregon State Police Officers Association proposed a bill that would have required the state police to have at least 15 patrol troopers per 100,000 Oregonians. At the time there were just eight troopers per 100,000 residents. Boosting it to 15 would have put Oregon about in the middle of the pack nationally and helped ensure better statewide coverage.

The bill died in committee.

Oregon State Police no longer provides 24-hour coverage across Oregon. Wildfires, protests and the pandemic have stretched its coverage even further. OSP doesn't just patrol state highways. It investigates crimes, assists local police, regulates gaming and enforces fire codes, fish and game regulations and more. Oregon's population also has grown while the number of troopers has shrunk. When Oregon had 2.6 million people in 1980, it had 665 troopers. Now Oregon's population is more than 4 million and the number of authorized troopers is 459.

Oregon State Police traditionally have used that kind of troopers-per-capita analysis to determine its staffing needs. A new Oregon Secretary of State audit recommends the OSP adopt a new more comprehensive analysis to determine its staffing levels than per capita.

OSP does look at issues beyond per capita levels of troopers. It is concerned about workload. It is concerned about officer safety. But when it presents arguments to the Legislature about staffing levels, it emphasizes per capita and comparisons to other states.

The audit recommends, in part, an approach based on workload analysis.

OSP generally agreed with that recommendation. It did point out the weakness of a time-based workload analysis is assuming calls for service are equal. OSP may try to supplement workload analysis with more qualitative approaches, such as patrol area size, proactive enforcement time and more.

The Oregon State Police's budget and staff challenges have long been a concern of the OSP and legislators. If a workload analysis gets the state closer to better answers, we are all for it.

Many challenges with winter weather

LARRY
NIERENBERG
EYE TO THE SKY

When it comes to precipitation in the winter, the most common and familiar type is snow. However, many may have experienced sleet or freezing rain. What exactly is the difference between all the different types of wintry precipitation and how are they formed?

It is much easier to forecast precipitation in the spring and fall, as the precipitation type usually will be rain, and in the summer, of course, the biggest challenge is rain versus thunderstorms. In the winter, there can be varied precipitation types, sometimes occurring within the same storm system. The precipitation type also can vary by location and elevation.

Many people do not realize that even on the hottest summer day, precipitation, when it begins falling, is frozen. That is because of the cold temperatures of the atmosphere at the level of the cloud. Nonetheless, the falling precipitation quickly encounters warm air and turns to liquid, falling as rain. In the winter, the colder temperatures are lower in the atmosphere, but for the sake of this article, if the temperature from the base of the cloud to the ground is above 32 degrees Fahrenheit, the precipitation will fall as rain. If the temperature from the base of the cloud to the ground is below freezing, the precipitation will fall as snow.

These definitions are fairly straightforward to understand. However, when discussing sleet and freezing rain, the definitions (as well as the meteorology) are a bit more muddled.

If the temperature within the cloud, or between the cloud and the ground is above freezing, a water droplet will start off as liquid. Assuming the temperature very close to the surface is below freezing, say 28 degrees, that liquid water droplet will freeze on contact with the ground, your car or whatever it hits. This is exactly what freezing rain is … liquid rain that freezes on contact and becomes ice. Freezing rain often is the worst possible precipitation type to get around in, as there is very little, if any, traction for tires or human feet on ice. If there is enough ice, significant damage to trees and power lines can occur, but even a little can be disruptive. Just a little ice is enough to cause problems on roads and sidewalks and make driving more difficult, for example.

Freezing rain is not as common, but can occur, especially during night time hours and in the lower elevation locations of southeastern Washington and Northeastern Oregon, such as the Columbia Basin, Yakima Valley, Kittitas Valley and Blue Mountain foothills. This puts some of our more populated areas, including Pendleton, Hermiston, the Tri-Cities, Walla Walla and Yakima in at least some threat for freezing rain events. If temperatures warm enough during the day, freezing rain changes to liquid rain.

Sleet starts off the same way as freezing rain. The same water drop falls as above, but it encounters a deeper, sub-freezing layer, so the water droplet freezes and forms an ice pellet above the ground and then hits the ground. Sleet often can look like snow because the ice pellet is white. However, unlike snow, sleet makes noise when it hits something.

Across Northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington, due to the elevation changes, it is possible to get snow or sleet further north and at higher elevations and rain or freezing rain south or in the valleys … within the same system, depending on the individual storm. Freezing rain in the mountains is not as common, though it does happen from time to time. Of course, if conditions are cold enough, everyone will get snow no matter the location or elevation.

There are many challenges with winter weather and determining precipitation type is one of them, whereas in the warm season, we know it always will be rain. No matter the type of wintry precipitation we receive, be it snow, sleet, or freezing rain, there are usually some impacts, even if the amounts are light.

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Larry Nierenberg is a senior forecaster for the National Weather Service in Pendleton. Nierenberg leads National Weather Service community outreach and hazardous weather preparedness and resiliency programs.

YOUR VIEWS

Facts don't back Bentz's claim that 2020 election was 'bought'

Oregon's District 2 Rep. Clifford Bentz, who represents a grand slice of Oregon, is telling us, according to EO Media Group, that the 2020 election was fraudulent. He cites information written in the Federalist that a group of people who had the money to do so, donated funds to the Center for Tech and Civic Life.

First, The Center for Tech and Civic Life is an organization of and for election workers across the country. It offers courses for how to conduct safe and secure elections. Anyone can go into their website and check out the courses they offer for election workers, including the content of the courses. I suggest everyone do so before accepting Mr. Bentz's word that the Center for Tech and Civic Life acted to influence people to vote a certain way or for election workers to swing the election one way or another.

Next, I found an article from another organization that calls itself 2022 Influence Watch that has much information about what the Center for Tech and Civic Life has done. If the information is correct, it is specific as to where funding went to electoral offices around the country. I did not see any proof in their article that proves the CTCL is in any way partisan. My problem with this article is that it starts out by naming the Center for Tech and Civic Life as a "left-wing" group.

There are several reasons I disagree with Mr. Bentz. One, the Federalist is, and always has been, a mouthpiece for the Republican Party. Two, I find it illogical to infer that the Center for Tech and Civic Life turned the election in favor of President Joe Biden. The Center provided information to election workers about doing their job fairly and effectively. One would expect the influence of the CTCL would cause the election to be conducted fairly and effectively. It is not logical to say President Donald Trump lost just because of the training given. Anyone can check the content of the training to discern whether it favored any candidate.

My conclusions are: Giving a person or group a name, such as "left-wing" or "right-wing" does not provide the validity or non-validity of that person or group. "Correlation does not equal causation" is still the case in any logical argument. I would also infer that Mr. Bentz believes that any election is fraudulent in which his candidate is not the victor.

Evelyn Swart
Joseph