

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Chamber president out of step

**P**endleton Chamber of Commerce President Velda Arnaud is as entitled to her own opinion as any individual, but some of her statements in a recent letter to chamber members should give area residents pause.

Arnaud wrote she was not going to use certain pronouns — such as “they” — because she had “worked too hard to learn English grammar to just willy-nilly make changes.”

She also stated using “it” as a pronoun for a person “is not something that I am going to do.”

“It simply feels wrong to call someone an ‘it’ as though that person is some type of thing.”

Arnaud clearly has a First Amendment right to express her personal views. However, these views are out of step with the mission of the Pendleton Chamber of Commerce, which aims to create a welcoming environment and promote business and tourism.

Is the chamber of commerce as an organization — and the community of Pendleton at large — comfortable with someone at the helm whose words clearly exclude representation of nonbinary and transgender people who wish to be referred to as “they” rather than “he” or “she?”

We believe it is wrong to deny an individual the freedom to choose their own gender identity and preferred pronouns. Refusing to use a person’s preferred pronouns can be seen as denying their human essence and experience.

Nonbinary pronouns have been on the rise for years. In 2015, the American Dialect Society designated singular “they” as the “Word of the Year.”

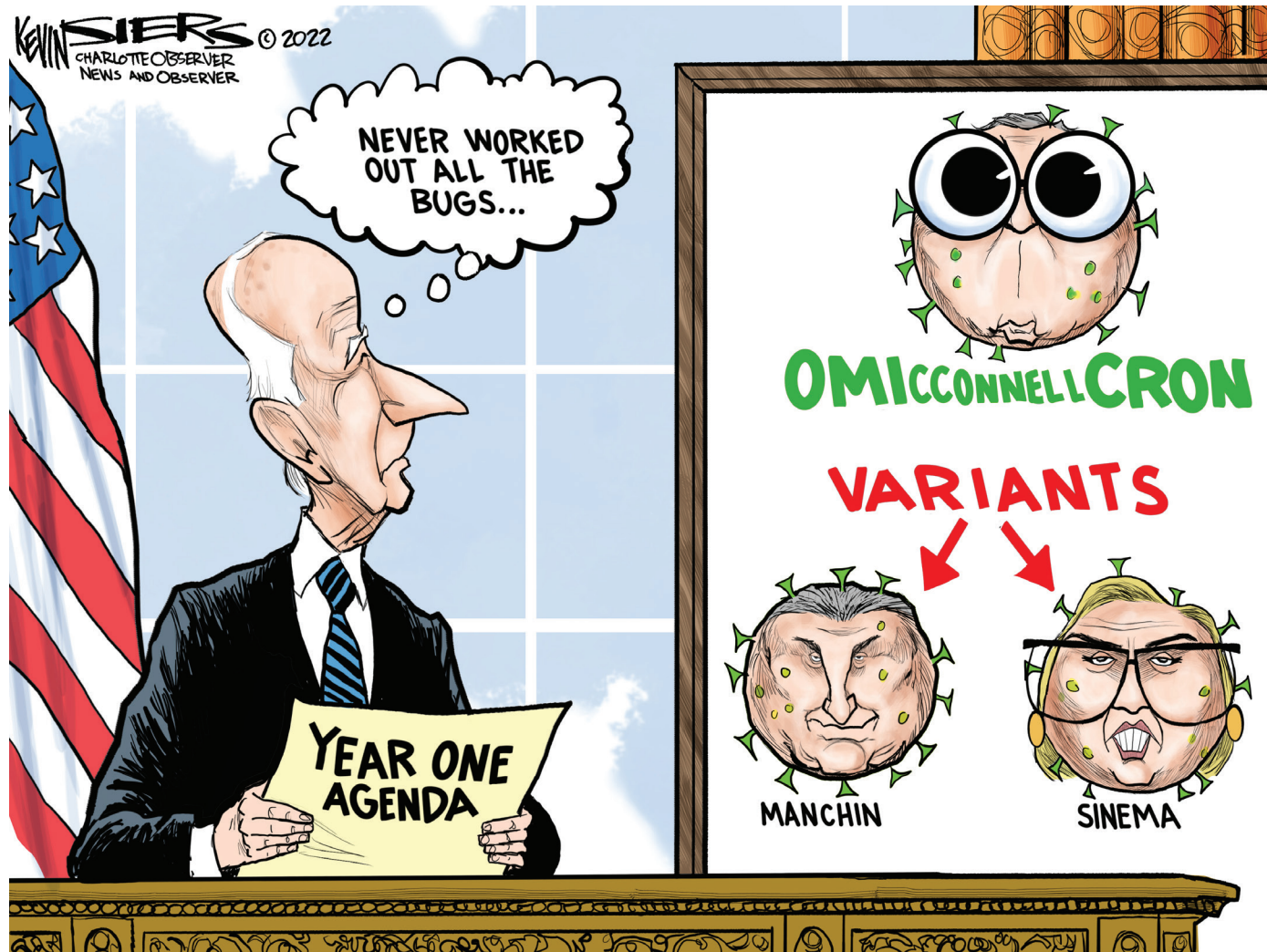
For many, pronouns are more than just words. They are clear depictions of how some view the world and how they view themselves inside of it. Roberta Lavadour, executive director of the Pendleton Center for the Arts, sent a message Sunday, Jan. 16, to the center’s email list on the very issue of how we use pronouns to refer to people.

“Gender identity is sometimes static and may have been clear to someone since their first consciousness,” Lavadour wrote. “Gender identity is sometimes fluid, and our own preconceived notions of someone else’s gender identity can be totally off base. By offering up how we’d best like to be referred to and welcoming that information from others, we make people feel valued. We make them feel seen.”

Arnaud’s missive may have been tongue-in-cheek, but the subject she touched on — a refusal to use nonbinary pronouns — is troubling because Arnaud, as chamber president, is in the vanguard of our little piece of Oregon. Arnaud’s role as the head of the board of directors of the chamber of commerce is important. She is an ambassador for our town, our county and our region.

The respectful use of an individual’s preferred pronouns is important to many in our city, county, state and nation. If we do not try to accept individuals and communities within our own nation, how can we prosper?

Arnaud can state her own opinion anytime, anywhere. Yet when an individual is writing on behalf of an official organization, the risk is that personal views will be seen as the sentiments of that organization.



## YOUR VIEWS

### Proposed legislation should wind up in garbage can

There are two items of proposed legislation, one federal and one state, which are bad and should find their way to the nearest trash can, not into law.

First, the bad proposed federal item is the River Democracy Act, sadly initiated by our Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. Thankfully, it is opposed by U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz and state Sen. Lynn Findley and Rep. Mark Owens. The Oregon Cattlemen’s Association also opposes it, along with industry groups and several Eastern Oregon county commissions.

The proposed bill would add some 4,700 miles of streams for protection like those already under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and would change buffers from a quarter mile to half a mile wide along each bank. The process for adding this additional stream mileage was that anyone could recommend their favorite stream or part thereof.

Some of these could be very small waterways with only seasonal or ephemeral flow or even dry gulches. With the buffers, some 3 million acres of land would be added for protection but what that protection level means is questionable. This appears to be another means of land grab/control and I question where it will end.

Second, the bad proposed state item is Initiative Petition (IP)-13, Abuse, Neglect, and Assault Exception Modification and Improvement Act. It’s basically a vegan measure to put stock growers (ranchers and farmers) out of business and end hunting, fishing and similar activities that are significant in our Eastern Oregon lifestyles and livelihoods.

Under this measure a person could only kill an animal in self-defense. An animal could only be butchered and used for food if it died of old age. Wouldn’t that make for a nice, tender steak? Animals could not be used in rodeos or similar exhibitions. Control of vermin and pests would not be allowed.

This initiative petition failed to get on the ballot in 2021 from lack of petition signatures, but no one thinks it will go away, and it is not unique to Oregon.

Colorado faced a similar measure in 2021. One would think this proposal is so crazy it would never be on the ballot or passed, but we need to be on our guard.

These proposed measures are available online, and I strongly encourage everyone to become knowledgeable of their details, oppose them, and tell our elected politicians to oppose them.

**Jim Carnahan**  
Baker City

### Oregon needs an independent State Housing Ombudsman

If the Philadelphia Housing Authority operates anything like its Northeastern Oregon counterpart, the recent horrific roadhouse inferno was a tragedy waiting to happen.

Given the HUD demographic’s predilection for numbing substances; and given the non-existence of designated smoking stations; and given our inclement winters; and given the ease of disabling a smoke alarm — you get the picture.

Here at our frozen outpost of the HUD gulag, we’ve been begging since before Christmas to get our ice field of a parking lot plowed. Alas, our repeated entreaties have fallen on deaf ears, resulting in numerous near-accidents and stranded vehicles.

I realize in this heyday of housing inequity, anything more than a tent beneath a freeway underpass is considered a luxury. One would hope, however, that kinder, gentler Oregon could rise above the lowest common denominator.

Appointing a nonpartisan, independent state housing ombudsman and a statewide network of tenants’ unions would be a good place to start.

In the words of Robert Frost: “Some say the world will end in fire/Some say in ice/From what I’ve tasted of desire/I hold with those who favor fire/But if I had to perish twice/I think I know enough of hate/To say that for destruction/Ice is also great and would suffice.”

**Ester Bentz**  
Enterprise

### Comfortable conservatives are bending reality

It’s pathetic how comfortable conservatives are bending reality. Our region’s U.S. representative, Cliff Bentz, said last year’s deadly Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol Building is being blown out of proportion to divert attention from the real issues facing the country (“Bentz alleges 2020 election was ‘bought’,” Jan. 15 edition of the East Oregonian).

I can’t imagine a more pressing issue than determining what and who precipitated the attempted insurrection. The efforts of the U.S. House Select Committee on the Jan. 6 attack have clarified the premeditated nature of that attack and the enormity of the organized attempt to subvert the presidential election through massive election fraud.

That’s right, while conservatives scream about voter fraud, which is extremely rare and has not affected the outcome of elections, many support the brazen election fraud sought by the former president (such as asking the Georgia secretary of state to “find 11,780” votes). Now they want to enable future election fraud by subverting voting and election protections at the state level.

The crux of the problem is the former president, and many of his minions, refuse to accept the reality of his election loss. And those who begrudgingly admit he lost, downplay his efforts to steal the election and inspire the insurrectionists.

Our country desperately needs people (particularly elected officials) to embrace truth and call out lies. A compulsive liar like the former president wouldn’t be a problem if no one listened to him. But his compulsive believers, and the politicians who know better, continue to enable him. The reality is an overwhelming majority of one political party’s entire congressional delegation has rejected reality and truth in the quest to secure minority rule.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th century American essayist and staunch opponent of slavery, noted that every violation of truth “is a stab at the health of human society.” And thus, our current mess.

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