

OUR VIEW

Chamber president does right thing with apology

Just as we called into question the words of Pendleton Chamber of Commerce Board of Director President Velda Arnaud's last week, we want to commend her for reacting in a positive manner and issuing an apology.

Readers may recall Arnaud, in her monthly column in the chamber's newsletter, criticized the use of gender-neutral personal pronouns, specifically stating she wouldn't use the word "they" in reference to individuals. She also said she would not use nonpersonal pronouns.

Queer, gender nonconforming and nonbinary people sometimes use the pronouns "they" and "them" when they do not identify as either male or female.

In a later interview with the East Oregonian, Arnaud said she did not know why people used gender-neutral pronouns until after her column was published. People then, she said, began to reach out to her to ask her to clarify her position on the issue.

Arnaud said once community members began to call and email the chamber, she returned the emails and calls to apologize.

Arnaud did exactly the right thing. She later commented in a story in this paper that the letter, in hindsight, was a mistake.

That show clearly that Arnaud was ready to take responsibility for what clearly, at best, was a poor use of judgement.

Arnaud had several courses of action open to her after the column, including battering down the hatches and creating an even larger problem by fighting about the sentiments in her missive.

That she did not shows Arnaud understood her column was in bad taste, her words potentially hurtful to those who are gender nonconforming. In many ways her stance — to quickly apologize and recognize her mistake — was a breath of fresh air. Now, the nation is used to officials making dumb comments that are charged with negative connotations and then fighting all comers to prove their point, even when their stance is clearly lopsided and wrong.

No one likes to make a mistake. No one likes to make a mistake and then get called on it in a public forum. However, when officials make a miscue — at least inside a democracy — they must be called on it.

Arnaud's column can be chalked up to simply bad judgment. That's not a crime, nor, that unusual. We all, at times, have exhibited bad judgment.

Arnaud did the right thing by issuing apologies and speaking to the East Oregonian to clarify her actions.

That took a lot of courage, but it was the proper way to diffuse an unpleasant situation.



Solving the state's woes in 35 days



DANIEL WATTENBURGER
HOMEGROWN

This week, the Oregon Legislature will convene for its sixth "short" session in state history. The designation is relative, depending on what you feel can and should be accomplished in a 35-day period.

Gov. Kate Brown and Democratic leaders said during a press briefing last week they hope to approve as much as \$2 billion in spending during the session. This includes \$400 million for affordable housing, \$200 million for workforce development, \$100 million for expanded child care and a variety of other expensive goals.

Republicans have, of course, pushed back on the proposals, saying it's too much in too short of a timeframe. Since voters approved even-year short sessions in 2010, Republicans have consistently called for sticking to the assumed purpose of the sessions — budget adjustments and technical fixes.

Along with deciding how to allocate what may be Oregon's last large influx of revenue, legislators will consider bills to extend overtime pay to agricultural workers, send an additional stimulus check to frontline essential workers, allow Oregonians to pump their own gas and many, many more.

To avoid an unworkable logjam of legislation in a short session, each of the 90

lawmakers is allowed to introduce just two bills. Each of the 20-plus policy committees also can introduce three bills, and budget bills are given their own allotment. If you're doing the math, that's nearly 300 potential bills to discuss, amend, refine and pass in each chamber.

The Legislature follows a strict series of deadlines of when bills must be heard in committees and pass floor votes to stay alive. This quickly reduces the number of viable bills, but also can make full vetting and robust discussion difficult. Committee testimony and debate gets truncated. Legislation moves quickly, often leading to unresolved issues and unintended consequences that must be sorted out later. State agencies are left with gaping holes that must be filled through rulemaking, which can lead well outside the legislative intent.

The average Oregonian won't likely remember any individual previous legislative session. There may be a few high-profile bills that garner headlines and coffee shop conversation, but the years blend together. However, the last short session, held in 2020, was remarkable for two reasons.

The first is that it wrapped up just as COVID-19 was arriving in Oregon. If there was any attention being paid to the Capitol, it was quickly turning to a pandemic in the making.

The second is that Republicans used a walkout to stall the session and the cap-and-trade bill that had been on Democrats' priority list. This move killed the climate change tax bill as well as hundreds of others. Only three low-profile bills

passed before the walkout. The number is usually in the hundreds.

There should be a happy medium to this all-or-nothing approach. Maybe Republicans genuinely don't think the short session is necessary, preferring to do the work every biennium and address emergencies in special sessions.

Ideally, a short session would look more like December's single-day special session, in which the majority party presented its agenda (eviction protection), the minority party brought its concerns with the bill and a few priorities of its own (illegal marijuana grows and drought assistance), and leaders worked out a bipartisan bridge to passage.

No doubt bigger concepts should wait for the full session. But there is a path to solving immediate crises without reaching beyond what Oregonians actually want. It's in the compromise, which seems harder to find each passing year.

This session will be a test for new leadership in both parties. A new House speaker, new Republican leaders in both chambers, and new opportunities to find common ground.

Ultimately, meeting every two years doesn't seem realistic. But Oregonians all benefit if legislators make the best use of their time when they do convene.

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YOUR VIEWS

Mask up to protect the immunocompromised

Two years into a pandemic, we are more aware than ever that people have different opinions about the realities involved that affect the daily actions we all need to take to help one another survive and continue in our community.

One year in, everyone was sure who should be first to receive vaccines. In many cases, people with compromised immune systems were set aside, forced to wait for the "age group" they were assigned. That wait was stressful to say the least.

Wearing masks has been shown to reduce transmission of the coronavirus, yet so many people are inconvenienced that it has become a socially dangerous subject and those anti-masks feel it is OK to reject masks with acts of social and personal demands to the extent that flights have been rerouted, businesses have lost customers and divisiveness is the common theme.

It is imperative that we all have access to personal health care and comfort. The providers of health and personal care risk their health with every contact and by risking their health, they are risking their financial stability and family security. It was and is necessary to expect first responders and health care professionals to get vaccinated for the good of all the patients they see daily.

While the rhetoric has run loud and foul about masks and requirements, those with compromised systems have been relegated to the silent system of

avoidance. In all the push to return to "normal," their lives have been discounted and ignored.

The need for personal care persists in spite of the risks presented by those who won't wear a mask in public.

If my health care professional falls ill, they don't provide care to anyone until the disease passes. Every time they agree to treat an unmasked individual, they risk every other patient they have on their schedule. The demand of the unmasked costs everyone in real physical terms and there is an untold deep chasm of distrust in our fellow citizens who are convinced that wearing a mask is a bigger crime than infecting an entire office with a potentially deadly disease.

I am the spouse of one who has a compromised immune system who serves the community by being an involved board member of several organizations. He continues to serve because a community only succeeds when citizens participate in the functions that make up the many different organizations and public groups that exist for the cooperation and consideration of all.

The least that should be expected is that everyone mask up when going to a health care professional. If that is too much bother, then stay home. The compromised members of this community have been hermits for two years and those who are still alive want to stay that way.

Colleen Blackwood
Pendleton

We face the same dangers Russia faces

In his marathon press conference on Jan. 19, President Joe Biden told Russian President Vladimir Putin that Russia has something much more important to worry about than whether Ukraine looks East of West — namely, "a burning tundra that will not freeze again naturally."

I do not mean to downplay the severity of Russian aggression against our ally Ukraine, nor the damage the fires in the Russian tundra pose to Russia's economy and stability. But I would ask the president to look at the number of acres in the United States that are in permafrost and are subject to the same melting and fire dangers as the Russian north. Alaska has fires most years on permafrost ground. We face the same dangers Russia faces.

This is not a quick acting crisis so it's hard to see the urgency of responding to it. But we have to act now before the damage is irreversible. We need large scale, immediate action by nations around the world, including action in the United States Congress.

Oregon's senators get it: they know we have to write climate policy and provide climate change mitigation funds now. Eastern Oregon's congressional representative needs to see the urgent need. Please write to him (again) to plead that he support climate change funding and policy. If you have friends in other states, urge them to write to their senators and members of Congress as well. Start with your friends in Alaska.

Lindsay Winsor
Milton-Freewater