

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
Florence, OR 97439

Opinion

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Homeless population in Florence are not illegal campers by choice

(Editor's Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)

While reading the Siuslaw News article "Florence Clarifies Illegal Camping Code" (Sept. 19), I realized that during the Ronald Reagan presidency we lived in an age of trickle-down economics; during the Donald Trump presidency, we appear to live in an age of trickle-down brutality.

The descriptions of the homeless, on page 1 of the article sounded disturbingly similar to the president's descriptions of the "illegal aliens flooding across our southern borders."

Rapists. Perpetrators of domestic violence. Obstructers of visual clearance.

Ouch.
In the article, Wendy FarleyCampbell was quoted on page 1 saying "once, a few years ago, (there was) even rape" when she was discussing the costs imposed on the city due to homeless campers. During the last few years, was this the only rape investigated?

How many rapes or allegations of rape were lodged and investigated during this same time period concerning people who were not

homeless campers?

More than one, I would imagine. Could it therefore be said that the homeless are less likely to commit rape than our tourists or residents who live in houses? I would not make that supposition; so please, stop the divisive rhetoric. It serves no purpose but to make an already bad situation worse.

When I first moved to Florence, our primary homeless population was middle-aged guys with substance abuse issues — usually alcohol or pills.

This is no longer the case. One night, I visited at the Cold Weather Shelter with a young family of four; we also had a second family with children there that night.

Couples are very common out on our streets now — and in a very disturbing trend, lone females both very young and quite old. I can spot the newly-homeless quite quickly: they have a look of shock on their faces.

I'm a good person, how did I end up out here? their faces say.

On their first morning as a homeless person, they also wake up as a criminal. There is nowhere legal to camp if you have no money in this area, so they camp illegally because they have no choice. And

so a bad situation becomes steadily worse, as well as more difficult to escape from.

After spending the first half of the article bad-mouthing the homeless victims who end up on our streets, the article explained that the City has removed the prohibition on camping on public land.

This didn't make sense to me,

GUEST VIEWPOINT

By Steve Wandrus
Homeless in Florence

So I re-read the whole piece. The article doesn't mention it, but the change in the Florence City Code was necessitated by a Sept. 4 ruling of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals saying in part:

"As long as there is no option of sleeping indoors, the government cannot criminalize indigent, homeless people for sleeping outdoors, on public property, on the false premise they had a choice in the matter."

Homeless people camping in Florence can stay on two types of land: public or private. We (by the way, I am one of your chronic campers) try to choose public land because there is usually less hassle involved than staying on private land — though it is often hard to

tell what is private land and what is public land.

Anyway, the new ordinance specifies that it only applies to camping on private land, not to camping on public land.

If you camp on private land, you either have the owner's permission or you do not. Camping on someone's private land without their permission is already illegal — that is what private property means. So there was no need to make up a new ordinance to make behavior that is illegal "more illegal" since it is *already* illegal.

It appears the ordinance only addresses camping on someone's private land *with* the owner's permission.

The significant portion of the article, then, wasn't the many paragraphs talking about how horrible the homeless are; the significant portion of the article was column 1 on page 6A (again by Wendy FarleyCampbell):

"This isn't just to address the tents and things like that; it includes people turning sheds in back into a place to house people, which hasn't been approved or doesn't have building permits for that type of use. It isn't safe ... It's to address a lot of different issues,

not just outdoor camping."

The second significant portion is apparently in opposition to this, columns 5-6 of the same page:

"In July, code changes became effective, allowing for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to be allowed on single-family residential properties, regardless of zoning."

Now the Florence City Ordinance made sense. It would appear it was crafted in an attempt to circumvent the ADU rules, which are now Oregon State Law (State Bill 1051).

From my understanding, the City of Eugene is now being sued in court for making a similar attempt to circumvent state law.

It would be a shame, as well as a waste of taxpayer money, if the City of Florence chose to follow the same path.

If you wish to end illegal camping in Florence, give us a legal place to camp. We are not illegal campers by choice; we are illegal campers because we have no *other* choice.

If you want to change the situation, please offer choices that are not illegal; and please, please, stop the denigration of our already-demoralized homeless population.

They don't deserve it.

Misunderstandings about the upcoming Siuslaw School Bond measures

(Editor's Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)

There are lots of conversations in our community about the upcoming vote on school bonds for Siuslaw Schools — and that's good; there are also some misunderstandings — and that's *not* so good.

I'd like to take a moment to help clear up a few of those misunderstandings.

- Misunderstanding #1: "If the bond passes, property taxes will go up by \$2.72 per \$1,000 of assessed value."

This message misses the fact that the old middle school bond assessment is about to expire. That assessment was for \$.90 per \$1,000, so our property taxes will actually rise only by the net effect of the two events taken together.

The net rise in property taxes will be only \$1.92 per \$1,000. Your property taxes will still rise, but by about 1/3 less than you might have thought.

- Misunderstanding #2: "The buildings look fine, so we shouldn't have to pay for new ones."

Yes, the facilities look fine — from the outside.

Dedicated district employees do a good job... but explore the inner details, particularly in the high school building, and you'll find a very different story: rusty pipes and valves, broken equipment and an appalling lack of energy efficiency.

When the old boiler that heats the high school breaks down (which it does, far too often), students and teachers are shivering in downstairs classrooms. When the heating system works, upstairs classrooms and offices are too hot. When some parts for these old systems fail, they have to be made to order at great cost and delay.

Fumes from the auto shop permeate the building, and fresh air is scarce.

- Misunderstanding #3: "Our kids are getting all the education they need in the existing facilities."

Sure, Florence area children have been educated for many years in the buildings we have.

But education is changing. If we don't keep up, our kids will fall behind. There is far more technology

in today's classrooms, yet we don't have adequate electrical systems.

Twenty-first century education includes active learning — yet many of our existing classrooms are too small. There is increasing emphasis on teaching trade skills, yet our facilities are inadequate.

All-school assemblies are criti-

GUEST VIEWPOINT

By Robert Orr
Director, Citizens for Siuslaw Schools

cal to education today, yet the high school has no auditorium.

Also, good nutrition aids learning and health, yet the high school has no cafeteria.

- Misunderstanding #4: "Let's just fix up the old buildings and save money."

It would cost millions of dollars more to renovate the old high school than to build a new one. To renovate, it would be necessary to replace mechanical and electrical systems (including wiring and pipes inside walls and the concrete floor), enlarge classrooms, add an auditorium and cafeteria, and reinforce the entire building for earthquake safety.

For several years, students would take classes in temporary facilities.

- Misunderstanding #5: "The bond funds will be used only to build a new high school."

While the majority of funds will be used for a new high school, major repairs will be done at the elementary school and some repairs will be made at the middle school.

Some classrooms have visible water damage, which will only get worse over time. The elementary school building is *not* earthquake-safe, and the entrance is not safe from intruders. More and larger classrooms are needed, and some have no windows for natural light.

Facilities are not contiguous so young children sometimes have to walk long distances during the school day, using valuable learning time.

- Misunderstanding #6: "We should spread out the work over time and not try for such a large bond measure all at once."

Construction costs have been rising about 5 percent per year (and more in Lane County). At this rate, if we do half the necessary work now and wait five years

for the other half, the delay would cost an extra \$15 million.

If we wait 10 years, it would cost an extra \$33 million. Postponement would cost much more in repairs and maintenance to keep the buildings functioning. It would also mean spending over \$50,000 each year in utility costs that could be saved with new facilities.

- Misunderstanding #7: "Residents with no children in the school system won't benefit from the bonds."

New school facilities will attract more young professionals and entrepreneurs to our community, enhancing property values and promoting a healthy and prosperous community.

Better school facilities will bring us more health care providers — a huge need here. A new high school will have space for conferences and conventions, bringing customers to local businesses.

And the new high school will provide a vital emergency shelter for the community.

Please consider these things when voting for the upcoming Siuslaw School Bonds... for our children and for our community.

Tracy Wolfard

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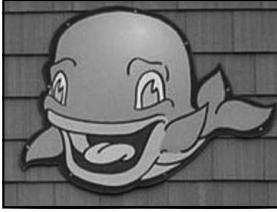
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