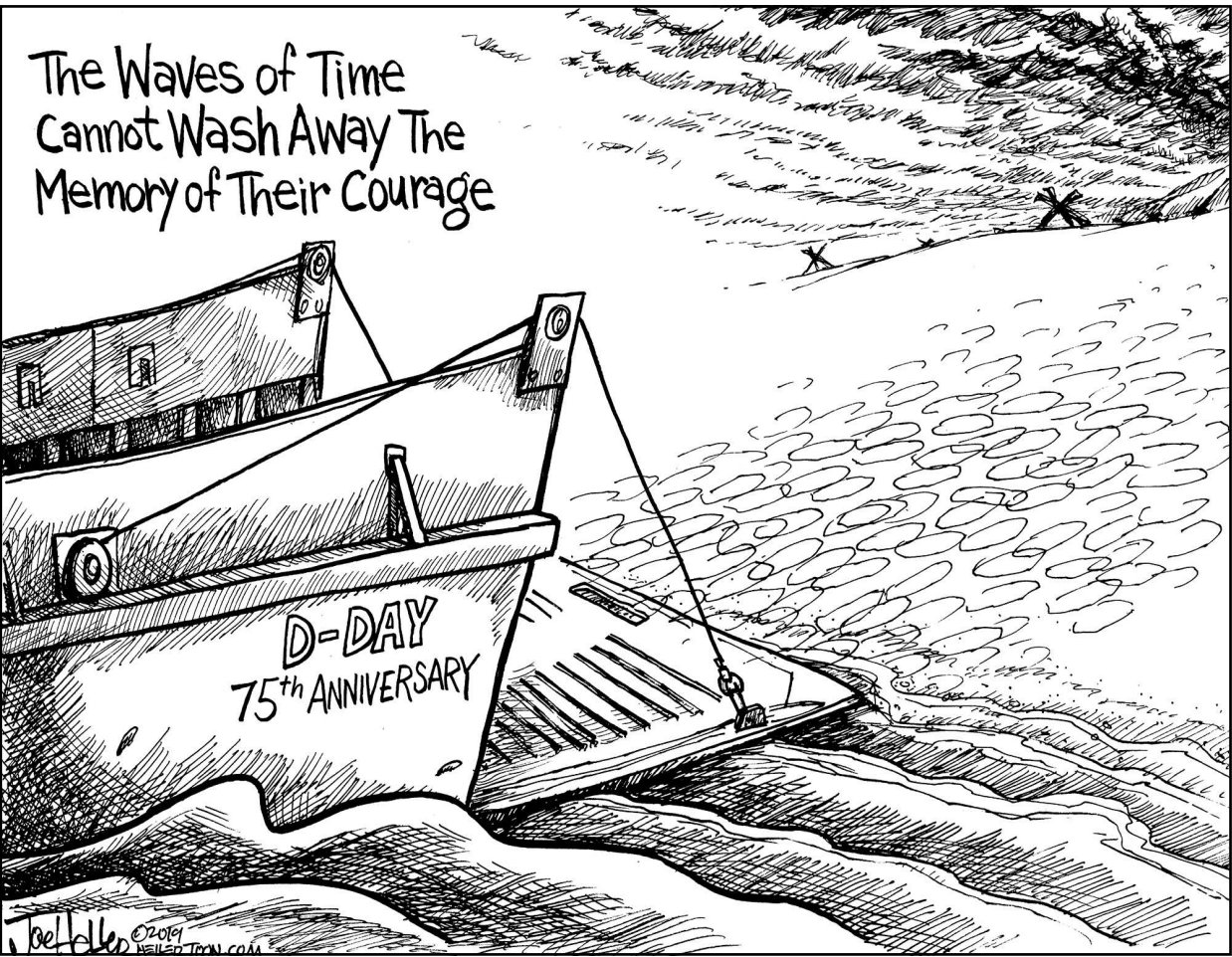


Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
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Opinion

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.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



For more than 50 years, Oregon beaches have been ours — thanks to bipartisanship

I have to admit that people are always impressed when I tell them I'm part-owner of approximately 363 miles of oceanfront property in Oregon which stretches from the Columbia River to the California border.

Naturally, they question my claim once they see the 2001 Honda I drive.

And as you might imagine, they are less impressed once I explain how I own this property with more than 4 million other Oregonians, all of whom have unlimited and equal access to the same beachfront timeshare — which we all received as an inheritance from past Oregon Governor Tom McCall.

The truth is, even those who don't live in Oregon received the same "inheritance" when it comes to the Oregon coast, which remains public domain "from the first dune to the sea" along the entire 363-mile or so expanse thanks to the Oregon "Beach Bill."

The bill, officially signed by McCall as HB 1600 and 1601 in 1967, celebrates its 52nd anniversary this July. And while I may not be an actual oceanfront land baron, the fact that I or anyone can walk onto any beach along the Oregon coast, at any time, without

seeking permission or being obstructed by "no trespassing" signs, is almost as good.

As I've mentioned before (usually in a quiet whisper), I spent my early years growing up in California before moving here as a teenager in 1980. As a kid, I was keenly aware that certain areas of beach were restricted because they were privately owned. Fences, property markers and signs warning of potential prosecution for violators served as reminders that a line of privilege could be drawn in the sand.

During one sunny afternoon as an 8-year-old on Manhattan Beach, my carefree play in the surf unknowingly carried me over one of those lines and deposited me on someone's private beach.

From the deck of their three-story beach home I could hear someone yelling obscenities at me, ordering me to "get my _ss off their beach before I got shot."

Though I shrugged it off with the help of friends, the notion that someone would threaten to shoot me for drifting across an arbitrary line on a shore fed by the same surf shared by everyone seemed wrong, even to an 8-year-old.

When our family arrived in Oregon several

years later and discovered there were no privately-owned beaches anywhere along the coast, I knew it was something special.

Though McCall is credited with signing the official legislation in 1967, the notion of keeping our beaches free from privatization began as far back as 1913, when then-governor Oswald West and the Oregon legislature established the state's ocean beaches as a public highway. The crafty move kept developers at bay for more than 50 years as Oregonians took ownership of — and no small amount of pride in — enjoying their beautiful coastline.

It wasn't until 1966 that the highway designation was challenged by William Hay, owner of the Surfsand Motel in Cannon Beach, Ore., who placed large driftwood logs to block off a section of the dry sand in front of his property.

In addition, he set up tables with umbrellas and marked the area with private property signs.

That's when it was discovered that the highway designation established by West wasn't specific enough and could be interpreted as only including the "wet-sand" portion of the state's beaches as a public highway. At the time, according to the

Oregon Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, that meant that 112 of the 362 miles of beach property could be considered privately owned.

In response, the State Highway Commission, along with McCall and the Oregon legislature, introduced HB 1600 and HB 1601, which Associated Press reporter Matt Kramer thrust into the public commentary with stories about Oregon's "Beach Bill."

Kramer's articles appeared in newspapers throughout Oregon, prompting beachgoers around the state to get involved, raising awareness and turning up the political heat in the legislature — where Republican and Democratic leaders joined McCall in negotiating the bill.

As a result, the bill passed the Oregon Legislature in June 1967, and McCall signed the Oregon Beach Bill a month later on July 6 — assuring that no lines would ever be drawn again in the sand along Oregon's beaches.

I hope you'll take time to these beaches them during the months and years ahead.

Because thanks to West, McCall, bipartisanship and the Oregonians who came before us, it's more than an opportunity to enjoy our coast's natural beauty; it's your right.

Write Siuslaw News editor Ned Hickson at nhickson@thesiuslawnews.com or P.O. Box 10, Florence, Ore. 97439

—Dennis Hamilton,
Commander AL
Tom Benedict,
Commander VFW
Jerry Hernandez,
Commander DAV

Without the continued support from the citizens and local businesses, our fundraisers could not continue.

Thanks also to veterans groups from the American Legion Post 59 and Auxillary, VFW Post 3232 and DAV Chapter 23.

THANKS FROM VETERANS TO CITIZENS, BUSINESSES
Thanks to the generous citizens and businesses of the Florence area during the recent veterans' fundraisers held at Fred Meyer, Bi-Mart and Safeway.

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The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or documented will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside the Siuslaw News readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

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Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) Explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

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