

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)



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Siuslaw News

Published every Wednesday and Saturday at 148 Maple St. in Florence, Lane County, Oregon. A member of the National Newspaper Association and Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association. Periodicals postage paid at Florence, Ore. Postmaster, send address changes to: Siuslaw News, P.O. Box 10, Florence, OR 97439; phone 541-997-3441; fax 541-997-7979. All press releases may be sent to PressReleases@TheSiuslawNews.com.

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DEADLINES:
 Wednesday Issue—General news, Monday noon; Budgets, four days prior to publication; Regular classified ads, Monday 1 p.m.; Display ads, Monday noon; Display classified ads, Friday 5 p.m.

Saturday Issue—General news, Thursday noon; Budgets, two days prior to publication; Regular classified ads, Thursday 1 p.m.; Display ads, Thursday noon; Display classified ads, Wednesday 5 p.m. Soundings, Tuesday 5 p.m.

NEWSPAPER SUBSCRIPTION RATES:
 In Lane County — 1-year subscription, \$79; 6-month in-county, \$56; 10-week subscription, \$25; Out of Lane County — 1-year subscription, \$102; 6-month out-of-county, \$69; 10-week subscription, \$35; Out of State — 1-year subscription, \$134; E-Edition Online Only (Anywhere) — 1-year subscription, \$65.

Mail subscription includes E-Edition.
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

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.

POLITICAL/ELECTION LETTERS:

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.

Email letters to:
nhickson@thesiuslawnews.com

WHERE TO WRITE

- | | |
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| PRES. DONALD TRUMP
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500
Comments: 202-456-1111
Switchboard: 202-456-1414
FAX: 202-456-2461
TTY/TDD Comments:
202-456-6213
www.whitehouse.gov | U.S. REP. PETER DEFazio
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2134 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6416
541-269-2609
541-465-6732
www.defazio.house.gov |
| OREGON GOV. KATE BROWN
160 State Capitol
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Governor's Citizens' Rep.
Message Line:
503-378-4582
www.oregon.gov/gov | STATE SEN. ARNIE ROBLAN
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Commissioners should support citizen-initiated 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.)

Citizens turn to the initiative system when their elected officials refuse to act on issues important to them. Americans are empowered through direct democracy — the citizen initiative system — to change law when they feel it no longer protects their rights and interests.

We aren't the first people to face unresponsive elected officials captured by the bidding of big business. The citizen initiative process itself comes from a time when the people were being ignored by government in favor of big business. That's why, in 1902, Oregonians adopted the initiative process as a tool of direct democracy, in what has become known nationally as the "Oregon System."

Oregonians recognized that they needed a pathway for making law, a process that should operate for citizens as it does for elected officials.

For example, in 2015, concerned citizens from Lane County launched Freedom from Aerial Herbicide Alliance (FAHA). They crafted a citizen initiative, the "Lane County Freedom from Aerial Spraying of Herbicides Bill of Rights," to ban the timber industry's practice of spraying toxic chemicals on logged lands.

Why? Because government has been ignoring citizens in favor of big business. FAHA's sister organization, Our Community Our Rights (OCOR), wrote the attending initiative, the "Right of Local Community Self-government," which legally authorizes residents the right to write and pass laws that protect their health, safety and welfare, such as the spray ban law.

Again, this was done because government has been ignoring the peo-

ple in favor of big business. For two years, both organizations worked diligently to gather 15,000 signatures (30,000 total) to duly qualify each initiative for the ballot so that residents of Lane County can exercise their power to make law.

And despite citizens insisting that these issues should be voted upon, neither initiative has yet to appear on the ballot.

Why? Because big timber interests have sued for their claimed rights to increase profits — at the

GUEST VIEWPOINT
By Michelle Holman
Volunteer educator, organizer for Community Rights Lane County

expense of the rights of the Oregonians, not to mention the health of the environment. At this very moment, the two citizen-led initiatives are languishing in the Oregon State Court of Appeals instead of being rightfully debated by the people of Lane County.

So, while the big timber-incited legal battles have been playing out, FAHA and OCOR turned back to the Lane County Commissioners and asked them to act on behalf of the people.

Numerous community members attended many meetings urging the commissioners, who serve as the county's public health stewards, to protect the public health.

At those meetings, testimonies from citizens about serious ill-effects on their families' health fell short in getting commissioners to act in the public interest. When residents made explicit asks of the commissioners to ban the sprays, commissioners refused.

When concerned citizens asked commissioners to refer the spray ban and self-government initiatives to the ballot — a power they hold — commissioners refused that option

as well, citing a fear of punishment by state preemption law as a bigger concern than undermining the people's democratic right to vote.

Going even further to help commissioners assist county residents, FAHA and OCOR reworked the initiatives to address preemption concerns, adding a clause stating that the portions of the laws pertaining to the claim of preemption would sustain a "hold" until state preemption is lifted.

Still no action from commissioners.

Over these past two years, the community has been repeatedly put off by its elected county officials. When push comes to shove, Lane County Commissioners appear to lack the courage to stand with the people who elected them, choosing to hide behind unjust law that serves corporate interests.

As an added insult to the work of those from over 100 years ago who fought for the right of the people to directly make law through the initiative process, the courts have also subverted democracy by ruling in favor of corporate interests over the people's right to the ballot box.

We are not asking commissioners to support the initiatives. We are demanding that the democratic principles that protect the peoples' right to the Oregon System be upheld.

Once the measures reach the ballot box, anyone is entitled to vote their values/conscience.

Regardless of what happens with these two initiatives, Lane County citizens will continue working to overturn the laws that reward corporate greed over the needs of the environment and all inhabitants.

We have a moral responsibility to protect the places in which we live, especially when our elected officials will not.

