

# 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 their Government for a redress of grievances.



### Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel 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anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel 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.

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## Addressing homelessness in our community requires addressing our own assumptions, stereotypes

scenic beauty I mentioned earlier.

As much as we may want to tell ourselves that most of the homeless are drug addicts, criminals or suffering from mental illness, the fact is that more than half of the homeless living without shelter in Oregon — over 7,000 of them — are either school-aged (64.4 percent) or displaced veterans (55 percent).

up" and staying with friends or relatives until a permanent housing solution comes along or, as is more often the case, they are asked to leave.

Those 142 homeless students with the SLS go to class, participate in school activities and then finish the day with no permanent home to return to.

According to a study released by the Oregon

tact with as we busy ourselves past them;

The fact is, they are also those whose faces we recognize each day but who never say a word about their homelessness.

They are mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, students, cooks, part-time employees, unemployed veterans and senior citizens faced with deciding between medication, food or shelter.

That's not a stereotype we want to acknowledge. But it's one we must be willing to accept in order to affect the kind of change that will, in turn, change the lives of the homeless in our community and our state.

As we consider state measures and explore local policies aimed at addressing the issues of affordable and transitional housing, the most important component to reducing homelessness in our communities will be our ability to acknowledge our own stereotypes about homelessness.

That is the most important step we can take toward reversing the trend of homelessness in our state — and achieving something we can all be proud of as Oregonians.

### From the Managing Editor's Desk

Ned Hickson

There are a lot of things we are proud of as Oregonians:

The scenic beauty that constantly surrounds us;

Our generally progressive thinking and approaches to important issues;

Not being California.

Yet, amid all the things about Oregon that make us proud, there's one thing I find hard to admit about my beloved state.

While homelessness has declined around most of the nation, Oregon continues to have the highest percentage of homeless families and children. As the number of homeless families has decreased in 41 states across America since 2016, in Oregon we have experienced a 2.5 percent increase — the fifth-highest in the nation.

Right after California.

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), more than half of Oregon's homeless families (60.5 percent) are without shelter, living in cars or tents within areas of that

To bring it a little closer to home, last year just over 10 percent of Oregon's homeless students — or more than 2,400 — were in Lane County's 16 school districts. This includes 142 students within the South Lane School District.

About 9 percent, or 226, of Lane County's homeless students were counted as "unsheltered," which means they were living in cars, campgrounds or doorways.

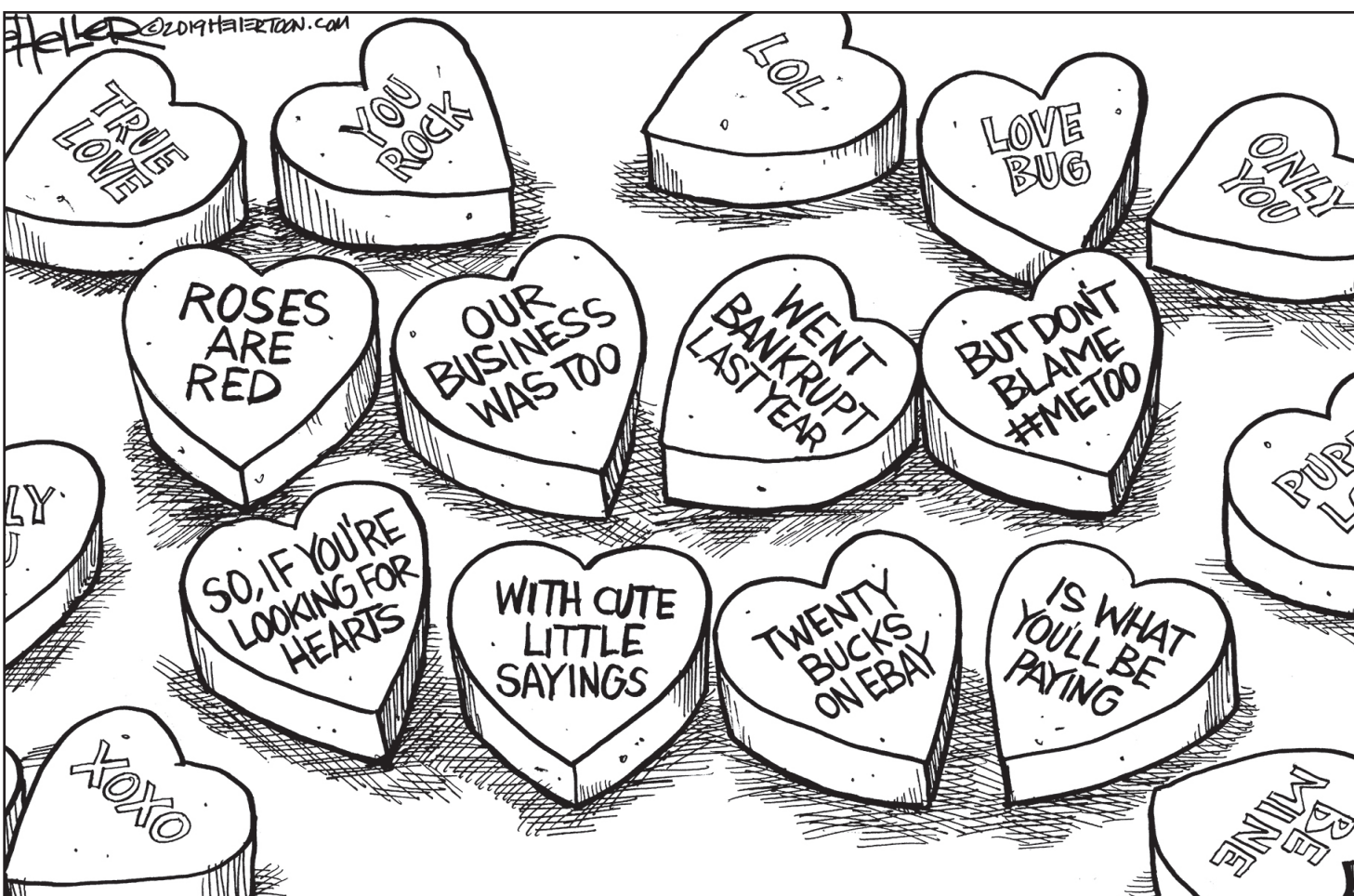
Another 6 percent — or 115 — were located in emergency shelters of some kind, with the majority classified as "doubled

Department of Education in November 2017, there was a 5.6 percent increase in student homelessness — continuing a trend in Oregon for the fourth consecutive year.

Before we can truly address the issue of homelessness, we must be willing to understand that many of those who are living their lives without a home aren't those who are readily identified as homeless.

They aren't necessarily the ones we see on street corners or parking lots asking for change;

They aren't the ones we can easily avoid making eye con-



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