

**EDITORIALS**

**SB 322's death provides hope**

The Oregon Senate Committee on Education made a wise choice when it allowed Senate Bill 322 to die in committee.

The bill would have phased out what are called fifth-year programs, referenced in recent stories including "Fifth-year programs OK, for now" on Page 15A of this newspaper, affecting 26 school districts in the state, including three in Polk County.

We believe this was not because the concerns behind the bill — the source of the funding for the programs, the K-12 state school fund — were invalid or that the programs couldn't be improved to better serve students.

Our concern — and that of many school officials — is that there was no guarantee of a replacement for what districts were offering if they were forced to shut down in two years. Legislation to create "free community college for all" is working its way through the legislative process.

Furthermore, while an idea worth exploring, free college may not offer one of the aspects that made fifth-year programs so critical: building a "bridge to college." Extra support, counseling and college preparation classes gave students who otherwise might have faltered in their first year the help they needed, and more importantly, the knowledge they could succeed.

Is that not among the goals education leaders have for students in Oregon?

That made the efforts to end the programs as baffling as it was worrisome before the committee took no action Thursday.

Dallas School District invited anyone interested in promoting — or ending — the programs to learn more about its version, Extended Campus. District officials were willing to share success stories and had statistics to back them up, including the fact that nearly 80 percent of those enrolled in their first year of college through Extended Campus continued into a second. Also, 130 of the 472 students who have participated in the program were the first in their families to attend college.

Dallas and other districts with fifth-year programs weren't given the opportunity to share those stories, if the response at a March public hearing on the bill was any indication.

Testimony provided at that hearing was heard — and now with more school districts at the table, a better plan can be created.

We hope the phase-out idea, supported by Hilda Rosselli, the college and career readiness director for the Oregon Education Investment Board, doesn't return.

For those students or former students who took the time — and courage — to testify before the committee, including two from Dallas, this was more than just a chance to see how government works. It was proof that, though it may be rare, not everything comes down to dollars and cents. Your successes are important, your experiences do matter and your opinions count.

In this case, it appears your elected officials and school leaders are ready to roll up their sleeves to save programs that are a proven avenue to higher education in Oregon. We wish them luck.

**PUBLIC AGENDA**

Public Agenda is a listing of upcoming meetings for governmental and nongovernmental agencies in Polk County. To submit a meeting, send it at least two weeks before the actual meeting date to the *Itemizer-ObsERVER* via fax (503-623-2395) or email (ionews@polkio.com).

**MONDAY, APRIL 27**

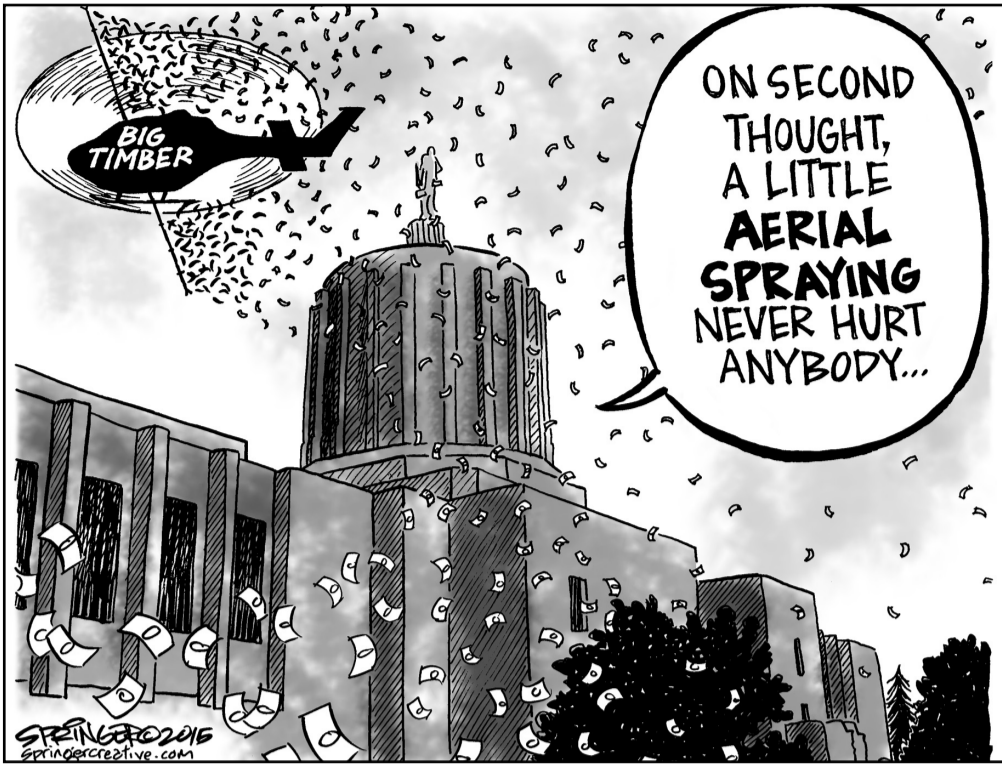
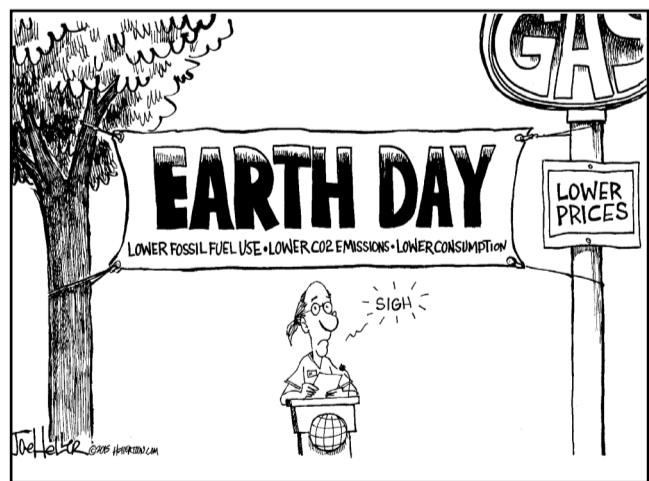
- Independence Library Board — 4 p.m., Independence Public Library, 175 Monmouth St., Independence. 503-838-1811.
- Dallas City Budget Committee — 6 p.m., City Hall, 187 SE Court St., Dallas. 503-831-3502.
- Dallas School Board — 6:30 p.m., Dallas School District office board room, 111 SW Ash St., Dallas. 503-623-9664, ext. 2334.

**TUESDAY, APRIL 28**

- Polk County Board of Commissioners — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.
- Independence City Council — 7:30 a.m., Independence Civic Center, 555 S. Main St., Independence. 503-838-1212.

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29**

- Polk County Board of Commissioners — 9 a.m., Polk County Courthouse, 850 Main St., Dallas. 503-623-8173.



**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Sheriff services helps system**

Please support the public safety levy. County officials have not come to this decision easily.

Budget cuts have been made for years to avoid asking for extra taxes. I have closely reviewed the county budget and I find no fluff or hidden reserves. What the county is asking for is truly needed.

City residents might wonder why the levy is important to us.

Consider the criminal justice system as a car with the county services being the transmission. It will not matter how powerful our local engine is, without the transmission we will never get full performance from our vehicle.

Vernon Wells  
*Independence*

**Stand up for sheriff, vote 'yes'**

I read with interest Emily Mentzer's excellent article on background checks.

Our sheriff has stood up for our rights against those who would destroy them.

We should stand up for our sheriff and help him do the job that we elected him to do by providing him the staff that he needs to get the job done.

Vote yes for Public Safety.

Gary Weis  
*Dallas*

**Gun rights story felt one-sided**

A couple of heavily slanted articles in the past month — each election biased in favor of Second

Amendment gun ownership and opposed to further regulation of firearms — are beginning to make it appear that the *Itemizer-ObsERVER* has taken to using news articles as editorial columns.

Most recently (April 8) the *I-O* ran an "article," "More background checks not the answer," in which not a single opinion in favor of the background checks proposed in Senate Bill 941 was even mentioned.

Any competent reporter could easily have found someone to offer a supporting position, but apparently Ms. Mentzer decided that was not important.

Compounding her editorializing errors was the Page 5A, continued from Page 1A headline, "New bill infringes on Second Amendment." Besides merely being an opinion, nowhere in the article itself is there any, even the slightest, mention of the Second Amendment.

How does the bill infringe on the Second Amendment which explicitly gives the right to regulate firearms?

Ms. Mentzer apparently thinks that just dropping the term "Second Amendment" in a prominent headline will suffice in making what has become her argument.

To his credit Sheriff Bob Wolfe offers a couple of other ways to combat the problem of gun violence in the U.S.: "addressing ... mental health issues and crimes committed by individuals while using a gun," both of which, by the way, will cost lots and lots of taxpayer money.

Others cited in the article offer rational — even if self-serving from gun-shop owners — criticisms of the bill,

to wit, that the new background checks won't do much to keep potentially violent and/or incompetent persons from owning guns. To some extent this is true, but how true is certainly debatable.

A balanced, unopinionated article from the *I-O* would be more helpful for its readership's understanding of the bill.

John Mark Krenkel  
*Dallas*

**Gasoline prices too high in Dallas**

I like to spend my money locally when I am able. I drove through Salem and the price at several stations is at or below \$2.38 a gallon. I came back to Dallas and checked prices and they were quite a bit higher.

When the gas started dropping last fall, Dallas tracked Salem very closely. Not this time. Shop around and save some money. It all comes out of the same place.

John Engelen  
*Dallas*

**Public safety levy no longer needed**

I'm wondering if the property tax increase is necessary.

With increased property tax collections due to growth and what appears to be some timber money from Congress, it looks like the county will have over half the funds they need to fund increased patrols. Join me in voting no on the property tax levy.

Debora Nearman  
*Independence*

More LETTERS, Page 6A

**WANT TO WRITE A LETTER?**

Letters to the editor are limited to 300 words. Longer letters will be edited.

Election-related letters of all types are limited to 100 words. Writers are limited to one election-related letter per election season. Election letters from writers outside of Polk County are not accepted.

Each writer is restricted to one letter per 30-day period.

Letters that are libelous, obscene or in bad taste will not be printed. Attacks by name on businesses or individuals will not be printed.

Letters to the editor that are obvious promotions for a business, products or services will not be printed.

The *Itemizer-ObsERVER* does not guarantee the accuracy of facts presented by letter writers; dissenters are welcome to respond. Letter writers who disagree with other published letter writers should maintain a civil discourse and address the subject, not the author.

Letters, like all editorial material submitted to the newspaper, are edited for length, grammar and content.

Letters must include the author's name, address and telephone number. This includes letters submitted via the *I-O's* website. Names and cities of residence are published; street addresses and telephone numbers are used for verification purposes only.

Letters must be submitted from individuals, not organizations, and must be original submissions to the *I-O*, not copies of letters sent to other media.

Letters of thanks to businesses, individuals and organizations are limited to 10 names. The deadline for letters to the editor is 10 a.m. Monday. Letters submitted may not be retractable after this deadline.

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