

Opinion

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Fireworks fines OK, but drop bounties

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

There's a bill in the Oregon Legislature that would dramatically increase the fines for violating state fireworks laws. That's a good idea.

Far less attractive is a portion of House Bill 3351 that would pay neighbors and others who turn possessors of contraband fireworks in to local police or other authorities. The provision should be dropped from the measure.

Current law allows the state fire marshal to impose a fine of up to \$500 for violating fireworks law or rules established by the fire marshal's office. Under the bill, that maximum skyrockets to \$5,000. The fine would, in Bend and elsewhere, be added to those imposed by the city for violating the city's own fireworks ordinances.

It's a hefty price to pay, but while fireworks that are legal for household use in Oregon are designed to be relatively safe — they can't travel more than six feet, for example — those that cannot be sold here have serious problems.

Thus firecrackers, which are illegal in Oregon, can blind and maim, and they and other illegal fireworks can start fires, as they did on Pilot Butte July 4, 2018.

That fire, which was started by what Bend police described as a "mortar" type firework, led to the evacuation of a nearby apartment complex, cut power to about 27,000 local residents and scarred about 10 acres on the southeast edge of the butte.

Upping the price for such damaging behavior makes sense.

Less sensible is paying people to turn their neighbors in when they suspect illegal fireworks are being used. They're apparently already doing so in substantial numbers. In 2018, for example, Bend police dealt with 150 fireworks-related incidents on July 4, a substantial increase from the year before.

Paying people to turn their neighbors in is no way to keep the peace. Good citizens are likely to report dangerous situations even without the promise of a reward, and that should be enough.

Letters to the editor

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TYPES OF DEMOCRATS IN THE HOUSE



Get serious on net neutrality

JON HEALEY

Congressional Democrats launched their latest effort Wednesday to preserve the free and open nature of the internet, introducing bills in the House and Senate to reinstate the utility-style regulation the Federal Communications Commission adopted in 2015 before abandoning it two years later.

This is not a serious piece of legislation. Instead, it's the political equivalent of virtue signaling — a display of support by Democrats for the strongest possible net neutrality rules. And it has no chance of becoming law.

Democrats should know that by now Republicans may support the idea of net neutrality, but they won't support neutrality rules that treat internet access services like the phone monopolies of yore. And that's what the 2015 FCC rules did.

I get the legal argument for why the FCC, led by Democratic Chairman Tom Wheeler, went that route. Under the current version of the federal Communications Act, the FCC can't bar internet service providers from doing such evil deeds as blocking or throttling legal websites and services unless it classifies broadband internet access as a "telecommunications service," making it eligible for the strict rules once applied to phone monopolies.

And yes, I know that many communities have only one or two broadband ISPs, and I get the argument that connecting to the internet is a lot like picking up the phone to make a call — the user decides where to go online, and all the ISP does is deliver the traffic, unaltered.

But here's the thing. If Democrats are going to legislate, why settle for restoring the 2015 rules that Republicans oppose? Why not try to forge consensus on a whole new section of the Communications Act that autho-

rizes and instructs the FCC to preserve net neutrality?

The FCC's authority to regulate is the key sticking point here, and it has been for years.

Before the latest GOP-controlled FCC renounced the whole idea of net neutrality rules last year, the commission had been trying to safeguard the status quo online for well more than a decade, under both Republican and Democratic chairmen. But before 2015, every time they adopted rules or took action against ISPs that violated net neutrality, the courts rebuked them for overstepping their authority.

The 2015 rules sought to solve that problem by reclassifying ISPs as telecommunications services, giving the FCC all the authority it needed to enforce net neutrality rules. But the reclassification also gave the agency the authority to enforce rules dating back to the 1930s that had nothing to do with net neutrality — for example, the rules governing the prices ISPs charged for services.

It was a square-peg, round-hole approach, and it proved to be the rules' political undoing. Major phone and cable companies asserted that this regulatory overhang would discourage investors and reduce spending on broadband networks, and Republicans sided with them. And once Republicans retook control of the FCC in 2017 under Chairman Ajit Pai, they not only repealed the 2015 rules, they also declared that the FCC had no authority to regulate almost anything ISPs did.

The fight over net neutrality will continue to go back and forth like this until Congress writes new, internet-specific

provisions into the Communications Act instead of relying on outdated rules written for previous generations of communications technology. Republicans might not be crazy about that idea, but there's a solid free-market reason to regulate until there is vibrant competition among internet service providers throughout the country. As things stand, ISPs have the incentive and the opportunity to favor selected sites and services online for a fee.

Republicans have, in fact, put forward bills to write net neutrality rules into law — but without giving the FCC the power to adopt new rules should circumstances online demand them. There's a middle ground here that authorizes the FCC to write and enforce a limited set of net neutrality rules, and it's time for lawmakers to find it.

The X factor is the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, which is considering a lawsuit against the FCC's decision to repeal the 2015 rules. If the lawsuit prevails, Republicans will be much more interested in a legislative fix — and Democrats will have no reason to support one. If the court upholds the FCC, the roles will be reversed. For that reason, the best time to seek a compromise may be now, while there's still doubt about what the court will do.

Unfortunately, that's not what Democrats are proposing. Maybe they're counting on enough Republicans in the Senate to join them in supporting the 2015 rules, as three did last year. But that's not enough to get a majority in the Senate this year, and it's certainly not enough to override a certain veto by President Donald Trump.

Jon Healey is a columnist for The Los Angeles Times.

GUEST EDITORIAL

Keep repeating the truth about the value of vaccines

Editorial from The Baltimore Sun:

It's vexing that we need yet another study to debunk the myth that vaccinations cause autism in children. But here we are again, 20 years after U.K. doctor Andrew Wakefield made that unsubstantiated claim and set off a wave of anti-vaxers that persists today.

Researchers at Copenhagen's Statens Serum Institute were the latest to refute the claims in study results released this week that looked at more than half a million children and found no inkling of a link to developmental disorders.

The study comes as the country may be primed for a major and much needed backlash against the anti-vaccine movement, fueled by measles outbreaks in Washington and other states. The Washington health secretary pleaded with federal lawmakers Tuesday for a

nationwide campaign to refute the notion that vaccines harm children. There were 206 cases of measles in the first two months of the year.

That follows stands taken by now-enlightened adults speaking out against parents who didn't get them vaccinated as children. Even social media sites, often criticized for many of today's societal ills, are doing their part to quiet the anti-vaccine rhetoric as the public health consequences become more dangerous. Amazon Prime is removing such videos, while YouTube will demonetize such clips. The Philadelphia Inquirer reported Monday that Facebook and Twitter are blocking such posts.

It's about time that all efforts are taken to put to rest an unfounded theory on vaccines made popular by a doctor with a financial interest in making such claims and an actress with no medical degree (yes,

we are talking about Jenny McCarthy). The proof is in the science that vaccines keep children healthy. Measles was declared eradicated in the United States in 2000, but that is now threatened.

While most parents do vaccinate their children, the number who doesn't has quadrupled in the time since the false claims about vaccines were first unleashed, according to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It has created a completely unnecessary public health crisis in parts of the country.

Treating a disease like measles and stopping its spread is an expensive proposition. And Not it endangers those who can't get vaccinated, including vulnerable newborns.

States should tighten or eliminate the rules that allow parents to exempt their children from getting

vaccines because of philosophical or religious objections. It's not surprising that the worst measles outbreaks occur where the exemptions are most lenient.

In Maryland, parents can exempt for religious reasons, but they do so simply by signing a form and don't have to prove their religious affiliations. Such lax rules leave the door open for any parent to claim an exemption.

Some states that have dealt with outbreaks are looking at getting rid of religious exemptions, including New Jersey, Oregon, Nevada and Arizona, according to the National Vaccine Information Center. In Washington, legislation was introduced to eliminate the philosophical exemption and tighten the one that lets parents opt out for religious reasons. In one of the most notable cases, California got rid of most exemptions in 2015 after an

outbreak in measles connected to kids who visited Disneyland.

The anti-vaxers have been far from quiet as the debate over vaccines has erupted once again. They go as far as calling the CDC a fraud. Some lawmakers in states around the country have also proposed legislation to make the exemptions more lax, including one in Arizona in opposition to the bill eliminating exemptions. We need to drown out their voices.

President Donald Trump hasn't helped matters, having tweeted on several occasions about his belief in the link between autism and vaccines, even though health experts in his administration disagree. He has also met with Wakefield and other strong advocates of ending vaccination. It might be difficult getting a public health message supporting vaccines past the president.