

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Defining nuisances

Baker County's proposed revision to its public nuisance ordinance includes a welcome change that partially curbs the document of the subjectivity that tends to make such ordinances problematic.

The current ordinance, passed in April 2015, defines nuisance, in part, as "any other material which in any way degrades the appearance of the area."

The problem with that language is that there is no general agreement about what constitutes the degradation of the appearance of an area. Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so is ugliness.

The proposed revision, by contrast, employs straightforward language and deals not with how something looks, but whether it could represent an objective threat to the public.

The revised ordinance defines three categories of nuisance — an accumulation of solid waste, dangerous buildings or structures, and an accumulation of inoperable vehicles. Solid waste is a nuisance not because it might look distasteful to some, but only if it "injures or endangers the health, safety and general welfare of others" (the ordinance does not apply to licensed landfills).

The health and safety of the public is a legitimate issue for the county to concern itself with. So are buildings that are objectively dangerous — the revision defines these as buildings in which the "life, health, property or safety of the public or its occupants are endangered."

The section regarding inoperable vehicles, however, is troubling, particularly its definition of a nuisance as "vehicle bodies or parts equating to three or more total vehicles on one property."

To some people a few rusting cars in a field is an eyesore. But unless the vehicles truly endanger the public, the county ought not put an arbitrary limit on how many rigs is too many.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City editor

OUR VIEW

Template for a new climate bill?

Editorial from The East Oregonian:

Nearly three years ago lawmakers on both sides of the political fence joined together and spent 18 months canvassing Oregon to seek input on a billion-dollar plan to upgrade the state's transportation system. Elected leaders visited just about every part of Oregon where they met with stakeholders and key community members. They then went back to Salem and crafted a sober, precise bill that, while it raised taxes, was very much a vehicle of the people.

The result was the passage of House Bill 2017, a massive transportation initiative.

Lawmakers should take a careful look at the process to get House Bill 2017 passed as they contemplate Oregon's failed climate bill from most recent legislative session. Then they should copy that process and go back on the road to meet with the people of Oregon.

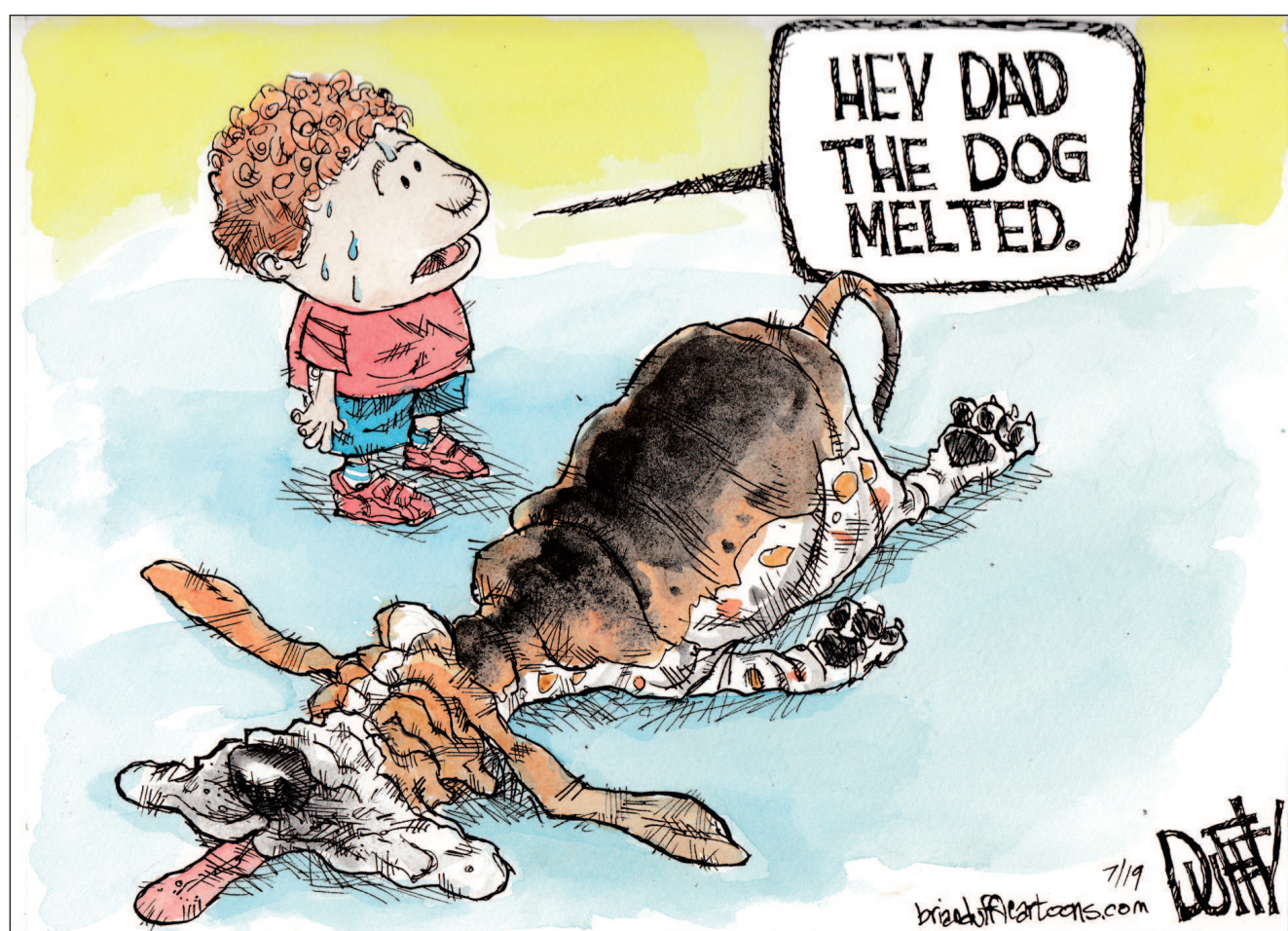
The climate bill ended up dominating the legislative session and eventually sparked a walkout by Republican lawmakers. There was criticism of the Republican move and threats by the governor to send the Oregon State Police out to find them. The bill created a tremendous political rift inside the Legislature. Democrats, who have a supermajority in the Legislature, tried to essentially ram the climate bill through.

Thankfully, that low moment in Oregon legislative history is behind us. Yet the supporters of the climate bill are not going to go away and there is more than a good chance some type of similar legislation will be presented in the future. We also need to face the fact that all of us need to be more than a little concerned about our climate and the way it is changing. Climate change is real, but the real question is what can Oregonians do about it? What is the best path forward?

That's why the template used to pass House Bill 2017 should be carefully considered by our elected leaders. The recent climate change bill was a hodgepodge of wishful thinking, half-baked science connected to a cap-and-trade system that is convoluted and complicated. Our lawmakers can do better.

We need to address climate change, there is no doubt about that, but how we do it will be what is remembered. The way it was handled during the last Legislature was baffling and, ultimately, troubling for voters.

Going across Oregon, seeking input from the people, is the best way to move forward. And, if the people indicate they do not want a climate bill any time in the near future, well, so be it.



Challenge your own beliefs

The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard famously observed that if everyone is a Lutheran then no one is a Lutheran. What he meant is that if you're born into a culture in which everybody has a similar worldview, you don't have an opportunity to develop genuine belief because your convictions are not subject to scrutiny.

Put another way, if you don't talk to people who hold different views, you will not know what they believe, and you won't even know what you believe. Having conversations with people who hold beliefs different from yours affords you the opportunity to reflect — and only then can you evaluate whether your beliefs hold true.

Immigration. Abortion. Gun control. The seemingly impossible issue du jour is irrelevant. What is relevant: To justify your confidence you must sincerely engage people who have solid arguments against your position.

Over the last few years, Americans seem to have convinced themselves that not speaking to people who hold different moral and political beliefs makes us better people — even on college campuses where intellectual sparring has historically been part of the curricula. It does not. However, it does make us less likely to revise our beliefs and more likely to convince ourselves that others should believe as we do.

Over time, failure to have conversations across divides cultivates a belief myopia that strengthens our views and

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deepens our divisions.

Forget about healing political divides, overcoming polarization or the dangers of mischaracterizing people who hold different beliefs. Reaching out and speaking with someone who has different ideas is beneficial, not for utopian social reasons, but for your own good — for your "belief hygiene." You engage in dental hygiene not to bring insurance costs down for the masses, but because you don't want cavities, pain and gum disease.

You should engage in belief hygiene for similarly selfish reasons: It's an opportunity to reflect upon what you believe and why you believe it. If other social goods happen to occur as a byproduct — friendships, increased understanding, changed minds — that's great.

Having conversations across divides isn't particularly complicated.

Figure out why someone believes what they believe. The best way to do this is simply to ask, "Why do you believe that?" and then listen. Don't tell them why they're wrong or "parallel talk" and explain what you believe. Figure out their reasons for their belief by asking questions. Then ask yourself if their conclusions are justified by the

rationale they provided.

Call out extremists on your side. Identify the authoritarians and fundamentalists who claim to represent your views and speak bluntly about how they take things too far. This is a way to build trust and signal that you're not an extremist. (If you can't figure out how your side goes too far, that may be a sign that you are part of the problem and need to moderate your beliefs.)

Let people be wrong. It's OK if someone doesn't believe what you believe. Far more often than not, their beliefs don't present an existential threat — they're just one person — and you'll be just fine. Don't even bother to push back or point out holes in their arguments. Listen, learn and let them be wrong. Conclude by thanking them for the conversation. (As a good rule of thumb, the more strongly you disagree with someone's position, the more important it is to thank them for the discussion and end on a high note.)

In our highly polarized environment, talking to those who hold different beliefs isn't easy, but it's easier than you think. Fewer people talking across divides creates a hunger for honest, sincere conversation. But what there should really be is a hunger for truth.

And the best way to achieve that is to subject your beliefs to scrutiny.

Peter Boghossian and James Lindsay are the authors of the forthcoming book "How to Have Impossible Conversations."

GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:

The United States is a democracy. So let's stipulate at the outset that anyone who wants to run for president and meets the constitutional requirements should be allowed to take a stab at it. If you can get on the ballot, you have a right to be heard.

Let's also stipulate that nearly 250 years after the founding of the country, Americans still don't know exactly how to identify the unusual and indescribable combination of traits that makes for a great president. Voters have elected presidents with broad and deep experience in government who've botched the job, while occasionally those with far less experience who seemed perhaps not ready for prime time have performed well. Experience isn't everything.

That said, however, we're disturbed by an apparently growing sense that a successful background in politics and policy is no longer necessary for a presidential candidate — and that merely being really, really rich or famous or dazzlingly articulate or wanting the job badly enough could be sufficient to vault a wannabe into serious contention. The latest candidate to put himself forward with very few traditional credentials is Tom Steyer, a billionaire money manager from Northern California who has never been elected to public office or worked in government. He's been active in the environmental movement for the last decade or so and has spent millions promoting candi-

dates and causes, but at least by the standards of yesteryear, he's not qualified for the nation's top office himself. He's earned a lot of money — Forbes estimates he's worth \$1.6 billion — but do we really believe that makes a person suited to run the country?

And Steyer, who presented himself as a populist outsider at his announcement this month, is not the only, uh, nontraditional candidate in the race. Marianne Williamson, the self-help writer, and Andrew Yang, a tech evangelist and entrepreneur, were up there on the debate stage a few weeks ago. For a while there was Howard Schultz, the Starbucks gazillionaire who was actively exploring a run until suspending the effort for the summer (and possibly longer). Back in 2012 we had Herman Cain, the pizza guy, and in 2016 Carly Fiorina, the former tech chief executive turned failed Senate candidate. And, of course, there was you know who, who won the race in 2016.

It's not unprecedented for people, and especially rich people, to seek the presidency even if they haven't worked their way up the political ladder. Think of Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996. But Donald Trump's shocking, against-all-expectations victory in 2016 has emboldened all sorts of long shots to think they might really have a chance. Who would've thought that the mayor of South Bend, Indiana — a city of about 100,000 people — would jump in to the race, or that he would gain any traction?

The theory seems to be (and with

some justification after 2016) that all bets are off, all rules are out the window. Maybe a smidgen of fame, a big personality and deep pockets, along with the marketing savvy to generate a whole lot of free media, are more important to voters than years spent drafting legislation, running a state or immersing oneself in policy.

At the risk of understatement, may we say that this is not a terribly healthy development? Trump is the first president — ever — to take office with neither a background in government nor top-level military experience. And how's that working out?

There are exceptions to every rule, but by and large it still makes sense to hunt for candidates who have proved through a career in public service that they can lead, that they can think critically and learn quickly, that they can persuade and inspire, that they have a vision and a plan to achieve it, that they know when to compromise and when to stand firm. It's still important for a president to have an understanding of policy, to have a track record of navigating among factions, maybe even to have been tested in crisis. Haven't the last three years reinforced that common sense?

By all means, voters should be open to candidates who are not traditional career pols or who have risen to prominence in other ways. But the idea that we should rally mindlessly behind a candidate who claims to be an outsider, and proves it by his or her inexperience, is rapidly losing its appeal.