

OUR VIEW

Fill the gap  
in caring  
for mental  
illness

The Oregon State Hospital has some 758 total licensed beds. Because of the pandemic and other things, its actual capacity is now closer to 671. And that can be a problem. The Oregon State Hospital cares for people who basically fall into three categories:

- 1) People who might be in prison if they were not mentally ill.
- 2) People who need care to understand legal charges against them.
- 3) People who are civilly committed. A civil commitment is a process where a judge is convinced through evidence that a person, for instance, has a mental disorder and because of it is a danger to self or others or unable to take care of their basic needs.

By law, the state must accept people at the hospital in the first two categories — people found guilty except for insanity and patients who need treatment to become well enough to aid and assist their own defense. The state hospital has also had to increase its numbers of “aid and assist” patients to ensure it followed a federal court order. The average daily population of aid and assist patients was about 74 in 2000 and in April 2019, it had hit 260.

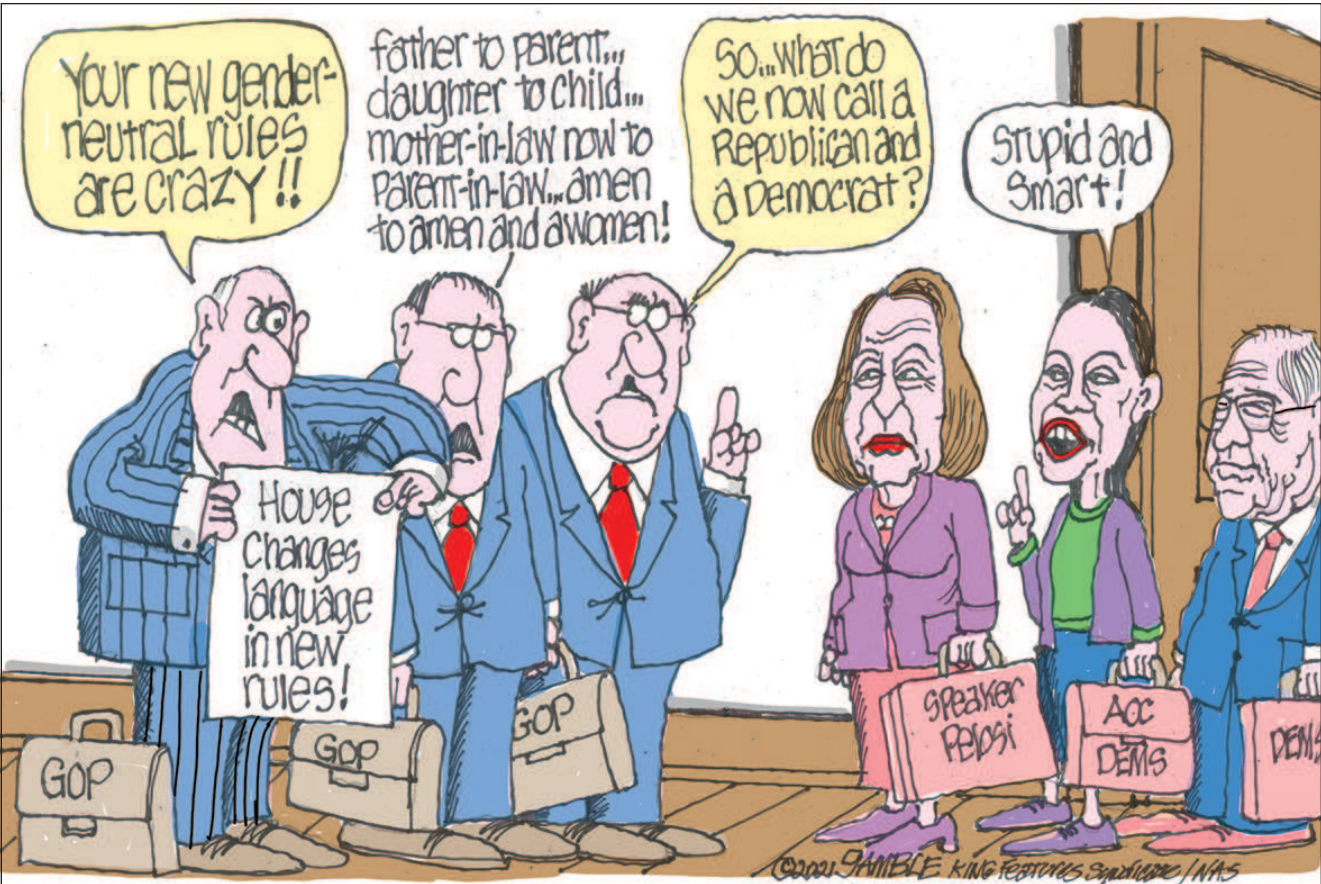
That squeezes the hospital’s capacity to serve other sorts of patients. Patients with civil commitments can be left in community hospitals or at other locations that aren’t the best place to be for long-term care. It’s happening in Deschutes County and in other places around the state. We aren’t talking big numbers of people, locally. There were perhaps five people last year who were civil commitments in Deschutes County who arguably may need the level of care for their mental illness that the state hospital can provide, according to Holly Harris, program manager of Deschutes County Behavioral Health Services. St. Charles does its best. Sage View Psychiatric Center at St. Charles is the only inpatient psychiatric facility east of the Cascades. It is, though, for short-term care.

The answer is not simply: Build more beds at the state hospital. That’s an oversimplification. Just waiting for the pandemic to end isn’t the solution, either. There were problems before the pandemic. Oregon’s legislators have heard about these problems before. Will they do something about it during the 2021 Legislature?

*Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.*

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Your views

Political system doesn’t reflect local interests, values

Either we have representative government or we do not. That value has already been lost in Oregon, where the Democrat governor won the seat with only seven counties out of 36. The federal electoral college system prevents the collection of one political leaning from ruling the nation based upon their popular vote numbers. The electors level the playing field. Were statewide offices decided by the electoral process, say one vote per county, Oregon would reflect the voices of the rural area in a more equitable manner. The result would be a less one-sided political structure. The majority of the counties would feel their interests and concerns were being considered in the decision making process. It is easier to believe in a political system where the local interests and values are reasonably represented.

A single, narrow political structure does not contain the ability to stand against the trends of the moment as voiced by a populous group with a limited perspective and experience. A broader life experience, as a society, allows review of political theory based on the many points of view as educated by the perspective gained from history and analysis. Individual voters have different perspectives based as much upon personal observation and experience as their formal education. Each generation has a perspective based upon events they have experienced or witnessed and the values held most dear by their contemporaries.

We have seen the outcomes where one ideology becomes the dominant social, political order. The expression of political power changes from a process of serving the public to one of controlling the public. Greater control over the individuals metastasizes, becoming tyranny to the underrepresented. Eventually, all but a small group have lost their freedoms. That group become rulers, the rest of the population no longer have say over their own lives. Many examples of such failed nation-states exist today and fill the annals of history with the horrors of life under repressive closed systems. “If we fail to learn from history we are doomed to repeat it.” Not a dreary quote from history, a proven warning.

Rick Rienks  
Baker City

Bentz fails his constituents and should resign

An open letter to Rep. Cliff Bentz (F)\*:

Mr. Bentz, as an Oregon Republican I would urge you to do ALL your constituents a favor and resign.

Your actions and words within days of you being sworn in prove you to be basically dishonest. The oath you took says you will defend the Constitution of the United States, yet you have gone on record urging the overt violation of the Constitution. And that is even after seditionists very illegally were encouraged to violate the law and break into the US Capitol, causing significant damage, threatening the lives of innocent people and compromising national security.

You have proven yourself unfit for the job for which you were elected.

\* (F) is for fascist, the party you clearly represent. You certainly are not exhibiting Republican values.

Rick Meis  
Halfway

Bentz’s decision denied nation’s best interests

I hope all of you Republicans are proud of your vote for this newest traitor to our nation’s capital, Mr. Cliff Bentz. He has opposed the nation’s vote to allow the totally honest and legal voting of the nation to give Mr. Joe Biden the presidency. Mr. Bentz also allowed, with his denial of the people of Oregon voting legally, to accept the hatred desires of Donald J. Trump and the domestic terrorists taking over the nation’s hallowed halls of Congress, the Capitol of the United States of America. How dare you people accept this phony liar and denier of our nation’s best interests. We Oregonians deserve better than this traitor. I hope you resign, your hatred beliefs and white supremacy desires are long past, Mr. Bentz. So, follow your defeated loser and get out of our nation’s leadership role and let us allow someone who will support the people of Oregon properly.

An honest and believer in truth to the people,

Phillip Reindl  
Baker City

Denial of COVID-19 severity due to lack of logical thought

I find it disturbing so many Americans believe the COVID-19 crisis is an elaborate hoax — a conspiracy perpetrated by the medical profession, government, political left or a plethora of other groups and organizations social media is rife with today. Misguided, uninformed beliefs, assumptions, and opinions can be dangerous when they serve to support and guide our behavior. It defies rational thought, logic, reasoning, and plain common sense. Critical decisions should be made after careful deliberation by weighing out the best options that are supported by the most relevant information, data, and facts available.

A case in point is the persistent belief that just as many people die from the flu (influenza) every year as COVID. Relying on unbiased media outlets as a primary source of daily information, the advice of the medical profession who have the highest level of expertise in epidemiology, state and local health authorities and the CDC for guidance and data, we are better able to make an informed decision about the credibility of this assertion. The estimated total deaths from influenza (flu) based on CDC data for the past eight years is about 310,000 or about 38,750 a year. The first COVID deaths in the US were reported in mid-February 2020. Fast forwarding 10 months later to Dec. 7, more than 283,000 had died from COVID and the daily death rate had

climbed to 1,111. Two weeks later the death had exceeded 326,000 and the daily death rate had escalated to 3,611. If this daily rate continued through the end of the month, another 28,888 Americans would succumb to the disease. Extending this to mid-February 2021, 166,000 more will die. An estimated total for one year will push the number of COVID deaths in our nation to more than half a million.

What then can be extrapolated from this? The average monthly death rate from COVID-19 would be nearly 43,000. Put another way, more COVID deaths will result in a single month than flu deaths in an entire year. Further, 62% more Americans will die from COVID in a single year than the past eight years of influenza combined. In short, there is a preponderance of evidence to refute the false flu assertion. For months, medical experts have warned the American public that COVID numbers will continue to intensify if the public fails to heed their advice and follow three simple steps: wear a mask, social distance, and avoid contact with large groups. Disbelievers need only to talk face-to-face with families who have lost a loved one, our first responders, medical professionals in our hospitals who work day-to-day in a COVID ward, or the morgue for a reality check. To paraphrase Oliver Perry in the Battle of Lake Erie, “we have seen the enemy and it is us.”

Anthony Johnson  
Baker City

Bentz fails miserably with first test in Congress

One-time Texas Railroad Commissioner and longtime activist Jim Hightower had it right: There’s nothing in the middle of the road but yellow stripes and a dead armadillo. That’s where our newly elected Congressional Representative Cliff Bentz thought he found himself when he arrived in Washington, D.C. Faced with his first test as a Congressman, Bentz failed it miserably.

In trying to walk that line between accepting the results of the election and rubber-stamping the subversion of our democracy, he thought he could have it both ways. So he voted no on destroying Arizona’s electoral votes, but yes on burning Pennsylvania’s. That’s despite the fact that Congress has no business rejecting the ballots of millions of voters in a fair election because they include mail-in ballots.

That he was willing to do so after rioters had trashed the Capitol, smashing windows, and looting offices, was a real eye-opener for me. Just that morning I’d called his office and made it clear that, as a Vietnam veteran, I didn’t go to war to have our elections attacked with lies and deceit. Oregonians have voted by mail for over 20 years. It’s probably the most secure system in the country. It’s elected Democrats and Republicans, and it elected Cliff Bentz.

He betrayed our state and the citizens who elected him. The middle of the road he thought he was traveling was on the edge of a precipice, with sedition lurking below. He better have his parachute ready. It’s a long way down.

Norm Cimon  
La Grande

Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Writers must sign their letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Email letters to [news@bakercityherald.com](mailto:news@bakercityherald.com).