

EDITORIAL

Don't trim
prison terms

It might surprise you to learn that some members of the Oregon Legislature believe convicted rapists, murderers and people who exploit children for pornography in certain cases spend too much time in prison.

Among the issues lawmakers need to address — the effects of the pandemic, most obviously — mollycoddling felons can certainly be reserved for a future legislative session.

Yet the Legislature is considering Senate Bill 401. It would replace Oregon's system of mandatory minimum prison sentences for certain violent or especially heinous crimes — a system in place since voters approved Measure 11 in 1994 — with one that would give judges the authority to impose prison terms for such crimes.

Oregon district attorneys, most of whom oppose the bill, say its passage would result in people spending less time in prison — up to 40% less — after being convicted of crimes including first-degree sexual abuse, first-degree kidnapping and first-degree assault, along with rape and murder.

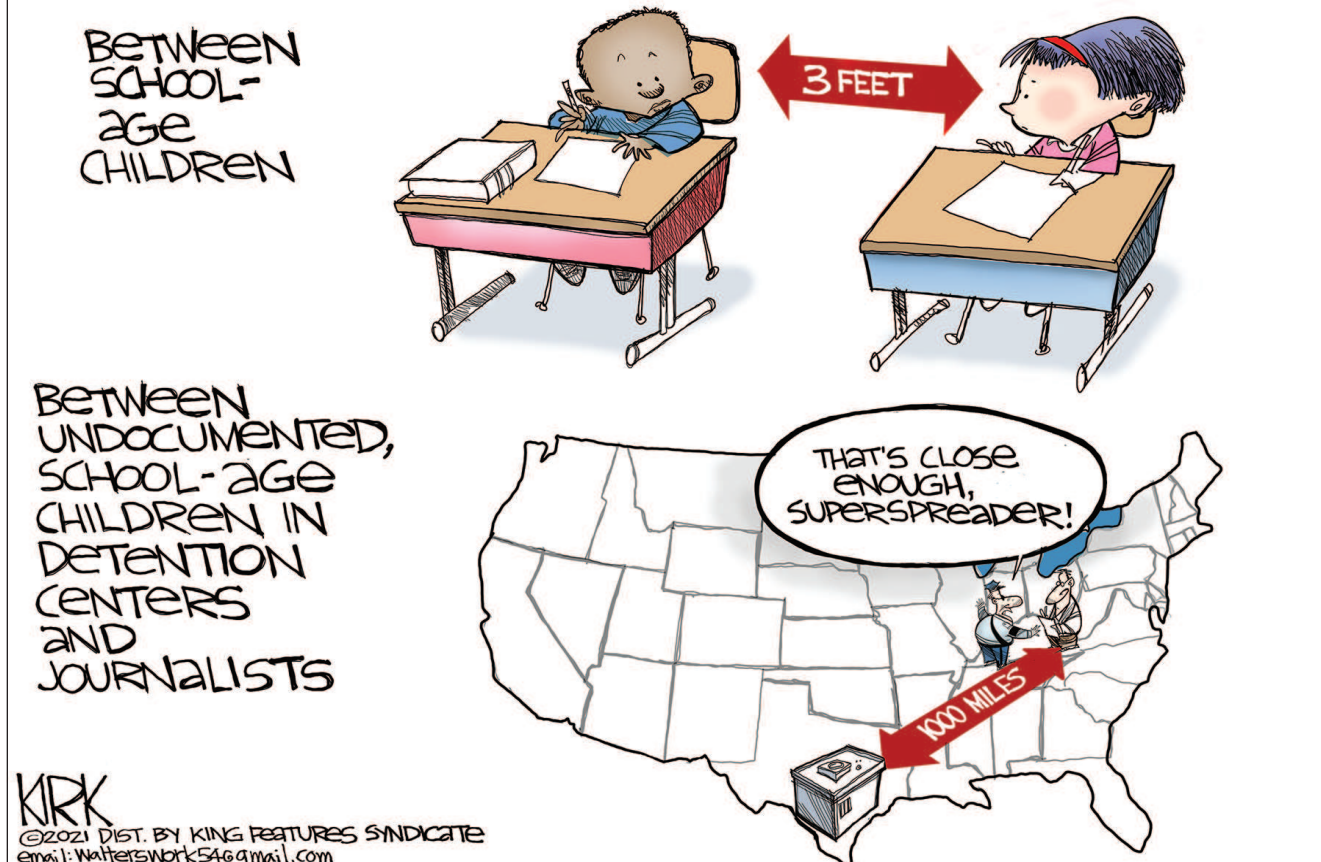
Lest you think the current mandatory minimum sentences are excessive, consider that a person convicted of first-degree rape will serve eight years and four months. Exploiting a child for pornographic purposes brings a sentence of five years and 10 months. The harm these criminals cause to their victims, of course, has no release date.

Although correlation doesn't always equate to causation, it is beyond dispute that violent crime rates in Oregon have dropped by more than 50%, to the lowest level since the 1960s, since voters approved Measure 11.

It's conceivable, of course, that a significant number of Oregonians have changed their mind about mandatory minimum sentences over the past 27 years. If legislators believe that's so, then they should give voters a chance to replace the current system rather than making the decision for them.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING



OTHER VIEWS

Cameras build trust in Chauvin trial

Editorial from Minneapolis Star Tribune:

The eyes of the world are on Minneapolis.

On its citizens, as they react to the trial of Derek Chauvin, accused of murdering George Floyd last year in a killing that sparked riots locally and protests globally. But also — finally — on one of its courtrooms. For the first time in state history, the trial is being livestreamed and available for Minnesotans — and the world — to see.

The coronavirus is partly the reason for livestreaming. The public and news media have a right to witness court cases, especially those with such consequence, and sensible social-distancing protocols significantly restricted courtroom access for the Chauvin trial. There's also the need for transparency, the currency of trust in any endeavor.

It's about making available "an instrument of government which is for many people very opaque," Professor Jane Kirtley, director of the Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics and Law at the

University of Minnesota, told an editorial writer.

Viewing the judicial process can increase confidence in the jury's verdict. "I think it's important for [citizens] to see what's happening," Kirtley said. "I would say that about any deliberation. But given the very strong emotional reactions that many in our community, if not communities around the country and even the world have had, it would be very difficult for those communities to accept the verdict if they did not know what kind of evidence was presented that led up to it."

Trust in the system can compound throughout the community, Leita Walker, a partner at the Ballard Spahr law firm, told an editorial writer.

"Our hope is by livestreaming this people are able to watch it and see how the justice system works, that it builds faith in that system, and it has sort of a cathartic effect on our community," said Walker, a media law attorney who represented a coalition of media outlets, including the Star Tribune, that advocated for livestreaming the trial.

Until now, Minnesota has been known

for its restrictive cameras-in-the-courtroom policies and only allowed audio and video recordings after a guilty plea or a guilty verdict.

"So far the audiovisual coverage of the Chauvin trial has been no big deal, and I hope that policymakers in Minnesota and elsewhere see that and realize that we can and should provide that as a matter of course," Walker said after jury selection and the first day of the trial. "It shouldn't only be something we do during a pandemic."

The policymakers who made livestreaming this possible, including Hennepin County Chief Judge Toddrick Barnette and Judge Peter Cahill, deserve credit. Without any apparent compromises to the gravity of the proceedings, livestreaming is allowing the world to witness the system of justice designed to give every defendant a fair trial. Their example should guide decision-making on transparency in future court proceedings.

As Walker explained, "When journalists can collaborate with the court to show the public how the judicial process works, everyone wins from that."

Two farewells: to a colleague and an author

In theory I could tally how many times Chris Collins' byline has been published in the Baker City Herald.

But this task, alas, will have to remain theoretical.

I just can't devote myself to a single task for the next month or so, what with newspapers to assemble, hikes to take and limbs to gather in my yard after the latest spring norther whips through our willows, which shed worse than the shaggiest terrier.

I expect that even if I had no other commitments, it would be the heavy work of multiple weeks to compile anything approaching a complete record of Chris' contributions to this newspaper over the past four decades.

Adjectives flood my thoughts at the prospect.

Immense.
Gargantuan.
Overwhelming.

But as I contemplate Chris' career at the Herald, which ends this week with her retirement, another description, this one requiring two words, floats to the surface of that mental flood.

Consummate professional.

This phrase, I think, defines Chris' tenure more even than its longevity and consistency, though both of those are substantial.

The quality of her work, besides benefiting multiple generations of Herald readers, also inspired her colleagues.

I remember nothing about my first day in the Herald's newsroom. This bothers me in no small measure, and never mind that it happened almost 30 years ago.



JAYSON JACOBY

But I do recall, and with considerable gratitude, how comforting it was to work with a reporter as experienced and competent as Chris was, and is.

I feel the same, three decades later.

This is the second time in the past year I have marked such an occasion. I feel sad now as I did then. Just about a year ago I bid farewell to Chris' husband, S. John Collins, whose photographs had graced the Herald's pages since 1978. His job was among those lost to the pandemic.

I have adjusted to John's absence, though the void he left remains. I suppose I will do the same in the wake of Chris' retirement.

But when the issue bearing the last of her many thousands of bylines has come and gone, a new gap will appear, a new loss in the Herald's journalistic tradition, which dates back 151 years.

Chris was an integral part of the paper for a quarter of that period.

This is a legacy, a record of recording the events and the people that define this place, that simply can't be replaced.

By comparison, counting Chris' bylines would be a simple, if time-consuming, exercise.

Beverly Cleary created the first

literary characters I could actually imagine riding past my house on their bicycles.

Or seeing at the library.
Or playing dodgeball with on the school playground.

(A game, at least in my experience, most often played outdoors, and on courts of crumbling asphalt. When you fell — and you did, or at least I did — any exposed skin became encrusted with shards of blacktop. If you were fortunate you could pluck off most of these without pulling away bits of skin in the process.)

Cleary, who lived in Portland as a child and used the city as the setting for her beloved series of books, died last month. She was 104, which seems to me an accumulation of years wholly appropriate for so prolific an author.

Cleary's best-known characters, sisters Beezus and Ramona Quimby, their neighbor Henry Huggins, and of course Henry's dog, Ribsy, weren't alone in the worlds, fictional and historical, that I inhabited in my earliest days as a reader.

(I was born in 1970 and could no more have missed Cleary's books than I could have avoided Casey Kasem's Top 40 countdown, disco, Shrinky Dinks and the Atari 2600, among much else that defined the pop culture of my childhood.)

I suspect I spent more time immersed in the exploits of Frank and Joe Hardy, and following the itinerant Ingalls family.

But as much as I relished those series, the pictures those books painted in my mind weren't quite

so vivid as those that Cleary created with her prose.

The Hardy boys were teenagers, for one thing, and I was six or so when I first made their acquaintance.

They drove cars.
They piloted speedboats.
They even flew airplanes.
I had a bicycle.

I didn't have a fingerprinting kit or a photo lab. I didn't know the police chief and I didn't get mixed up with robbers, conmen and a variety of other unpleasant thugs.

I could while away most of a day care-ening from one predicament to the next with the Hardys and their chums, such as Chet Morton, Tony Prito and the inimitable Biff Hooper.

But I couldn't envision actually knowing any of them, they were so different from my friends, their exploits so much more dramatic and eventful than my small town, middle class childhood.

The Ingalls family, though having a theoretical advantage over the Hardys — they were real people — were also, as denizens of the 19th century, people whose experiences had little relevance to a boy born in the last third of the 20th.

Theirs was a world without electricity and automobiles, to cite the technologies that best exemplify the gulf between that era and ours.

(Also, I feel compelled to note, a world in which human eliminatory functions were utterly ignored. Laura Ingalls Wilder, though in every other respect a writer with a keen memory for detail — her description of her Pa fashioning

a log cabin door takes up several pages — never, so far as I recall, so much as hinted at the existence of outhouses much less their construction or function.)

But the Quimbys and the other kids who lived on Klickitat Street were recognizable to me from the first chapter.

Indeed, when I rode my bike on the endless and seemingly never boring circuits of my own street — North Fern Avenue — it seemed to me a place not greatly different from the one I read about in Cleary's books. The only notable exception is that Beezus, Ramona and Henry lived in Portland, Oregon's biggest city by far, while I lived in Stayton, which in those days had little more than 4,000 residents.

But Cleary's books are about neighborhoods, not cities, and almost all of her descriptions, of sidewalks and fences and yards and schools, were immediately comforting to me in their familiarity.

Today's young readers perhaps are confused on occasion by Cleary's books. I can imagine a kid wondering why Beezus didn't just use her cellphone to call her parents when Ramona scraped her knee, why Henry didn't think to resort to Google when confronted with a particularly vexing homework assignment.

But for all that I believe Cleary's characters are timeless, their lives as compelling, as the 21st century continues its inexorable and somehow terrible advance, as they were in the 20th.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.