

## Free parking is an endangered species in Bend's downtown

Finding a free parking spot in downtown Bend is going to be as rare as a warm summer day with nobody floating the Deschutes.

Paid parking is not just coming to the downtown parking garage. It's the plan throughout downtown.

For the next six months at least, on-street parking will remain free in much of the heart of downtown and have a two-hour limit, according to city plans. Plans for paid parking for the parking garage have been announced. Later this year the city intends to "develop strategies and an action plan to move to paid on-street parking" in downtown.

That plan is not all new. It has been coming since the Bend City Council adopted the Downtown Strategic Parking Management Plan in 2017. The plan's catchphrase is "getting the right parker in the right spot." There's a lot of smarts and research put into it.

One thing the plan does not mention is equity. Not once. Paid parking — even though it may be a token cost to many — is regressive. It hits the poor the hardest. It could also have a disproportionate impact on communities of color. Is that what Bend wants? Shopping downtown to be an exclusive experience? Nobody wants that, right?

Well, unfortunately some people do think like that. Some members of Bend's downtown parking advisory committee pushed in 2018 the rapacious attitude that paid parking could tilt parking availability to people with more money to spend. Not a proud moment in the evolution of Bend's parking strategy.

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Bend's parking plan also gives short shrift to how much easier it will be for businesses elsewhere in Bend to compete with those in downtown. Two words: Free parking.

Arguments about equity and competition don't necessarily override the reasons for moving to paid parking downtown. Parking fees are far from prohibitively restrictive. But other costs of living in Bend aren't going down, either.

You may remember the Forest Service made plans to start charging people a small amount for limited permits for wilderness access in the Cascades. When it did, it made a special effort to find ways to ensure low-income people would not be disproportionately impacted.

## Make a splash with state audits

Getting zinged by the auditors from the Oregon Secretary of State's Office can be embarrassing for state agencies.

The more important outcomes can be: accountability and improvement in how the state is run. The 2018 audit of Oregon's child welfare system is a great example.

As good as the auditors are, they only can do so many audits. Choosing which audits get done is a key decision. Legislators talked about that Thursday as Secretary of State Shemia Fagan and state auditors previewed their plans in the Joint Committee on Legislative Audits.

The plan includes a look at unemployment benefits, wildfire response, vaccine distribution, 911 response, Oregon's mortgage interest deduction and more. Those are smart topics.

If anything, we wonder if it

would be smarter to do many more. That would require more staff and expense.

Something cheaper that could be done would be for Fagan to try to make a splash with a news conference when audits note significant problems.

Of course, some people would call that grandstanding. The subject of the audit won't like it one bit. Fagan has enough good sense to know when it is warranted.

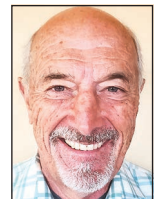
Former Secretary of State Dennis Richardson did it with the 2018 child welfare audit. We can't say it would have made any difference, but imagine if the same clamor was made every time auditors and other state staff warned about the problems modernizing the state's delivery of unemployment benefits. We all know how that turned into a mess when the pandemic hit.



## Focus on improving higher education, not criticizing OSU-Cascades' success

BY NEIL R. BRYANT

In 1999 when I was a state senator, I introduced a bill to allow COCC to award four-year degrees. At that time, Central Oregon was the largest geographic area in the U.S. with a population of over 100,000 that did not have a four-year university. Central Oregon students and businesses were not being adequately served by the state system.



Bryant

The governor, the Oregon Board of Higher Education and chancellor opposed my bill, but they acknowledged something needed to be done. Over the next two years, working with the Central Oregon region, the board eventually proposed a branch campus in Bend, and conducted a competition between OSU and the University of Oregon over which university would administer the new campus. A branch campus of a major university offered many benefits including a recognized "brand," and lower administrative costs. Ultimately — working with a group of Central Oregonians — the state board of higher education approved OSU's proposal for Oregon's first branch campus.

Gov. John Kitzhaber included \$7

GUEST COLUMN

million in funding for the new campus in the state budget, and with legislative approval in 2001 the journey began with one building at COCC.

In 2011, the state created the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (the HECC). I was appointed to the HECC. In 2013, the Legislature dissolved the chancellor's office and the Oregon Board of Higher Education and replaced them with seven independent boards. OSU-Cascades remained a branch campus. There was no proposal to make OSU-Cascades independent like the other universities.

With additional capital improvements, OSU-Cascades began to build its own campus. The creation of a stand-alone campus was unanimously approved by the HECC, included in the governor's budget, and approved by the Legislature.

In the intervening years, Central Oregon has flourished with legislative capital investments, OSU-Cascades has helped the region become the state's fastest-growing producer of income tax revenues.

I am not suggesting that OSU-Cascades should always be a branch campus. It takes time to build successful programs, alumni and a dis-

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inct brand. Independence should be discussed when the campus has 4,000 students. At that time, the "economies of scale" and successful curriculum may make independence an option.

Rather than criticizing OSU-Cascades, Rep. Paul Evans and the Legislature should focus on what needs to be done to help higher education. All Oregonians should celebrate the success of the branch campus. It has been a good decision.

We need to move beyond territorial bickering and concentrate our limited resources on actions that will help students to succeed. We are all best served by supporting all of our university campuses as they strive to enable students to compete in a difficult and challenging world.

■ Neil R. Bryant is a resident of Bend who was a state senator from 1993-2001.

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We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

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Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columns and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

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Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

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Bend, OR 97708

Fax: 541-385-5804

## What's the matter with the political culture in Madras?

BY KEVIN FRAZIER

To be clear, nothing that's "wrong" with Madras is distinct to Madras. The causes of the political wrecks that recently disrupted the city have derailed politics at the local, state and national levels.

Unfortunately for Madras, social media and incivility collided to make the city a case study in how our political culture has been totaled.

In case you missed in, two events recently sent Madras City Hall into a tailspin and resulted in some serious democratic damage.

First, Austin Throop was forced to resign after carelessly, thoughtlessly and recklessly calling another councilor a "terrorist." A photo of Councilor Jen-

nifer Holcomb and three other people not wearing masks at a local gym incited the social media comment.

This wasn't the first instance of Throop failing to mince words. This paper reported that Throop had also penned "professional communications" to city staff. These episodes reveal how easy it is to attack people via an email and over social media. Bullies like Throop, from the comfort of their living room, can belittle others with ease.

Unfortunately, Throop is not the exception. Elected officials and voters alike have sunk to the low level of communication enabled by avoiding face-to-face communications (or Zoom talks in this COVID era).

Elected in November, resigned in January, Throop "served" his community for two meetings. The council will now appoint a replacement, a process that's far less participatory

GUEST COLUMN

than an election.

Throop was right to be peeved about Holcomb's behavior, but wrong to think that social media was the forum to resolve the dispute. As it turns out, social media is just about the worst place to problem solve. Yet, so much of our politics is centered around tweets, grams and posts. The result is a doomed attempt at solving problems and a poor effort to truly listen to community members.

Our reliance on social media has also contributed to our politics revolving more around personal squabbles rather than policy debates. The mingling of personal with the political was the second source of damage to Madras' democracy. During a public comment period, a resident used the forum to criticize the wife of City Councilor

Royce Embanks. As a result, Embanks, "raised his voice and stormed out of [the] meeting," according to this paper. Of course, mudslinging in politics is a tradition as old as Smith Rock, but it appears as though we've all become far more accustomed to crossing the line between personal and politics.

A one-off public comment may not seem like a big deal, but it's another piece of snow in an avalanche of disincentives for people to get involved in politics. These sorts of displays undermine the idea that our democratic institutions are places for meaningful deliberation and robust participation.

When we emerge from this pandemic, we should use our collective desire to get outside as a justification to take our politics offline and restore a focus on the issues, rather than the individual. These are cultural fixes we're collectively responsible for and capable of making.

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What's the matter with Madras? What's the matter with our collective democracy? We've stopped communicating. We've stopped listening. And, we've stopped prioritizing good governance.

■ Kevin Frazier was raised in Washington County, Oregon. He is pursuing a law degree at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.



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