EDITORIALS & OPINIONS

The Bulletin
AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

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Fee increases for Lower Deschutes do make sense

Boating on the Lower Deschutes River has plenty of fans. The fees charged for it? Not so much.

But the Bureau of Land Management's rationale for new fees for boating and camping is simple. Its costs for upkeep are rising. Its revenues aren't keeping up.

The BLM's annual costs are $730,000-$760,0000. With the current fee structure, the BLM estimates it would bring in just shy of $500,000 in 2022. With the new fee proposal, it would bring in about $650,000.

Right now a boater pass costs $2 per person per night for most days plus another $6 transaction fee for recreation.gov. On Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day through Labor Day, the fee is $8 per person plus the $6 transaction fee. You can get them on recreation.gov.

The new fee: $5 per person per day every day plus the $6 transaction fee.

The switch to a $5 fee is not a brand new idea. The BLM had planned to move forward on implementing it last year. The pandemic brought that to a halt. Jeff Kitchens, the Deschutes field manager for the BLM, said the BLM did not believe it would be fair to do when so many people were struggling. He told the John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council on Thursday that the BLM wanted to give people plenty of time to comment. That was a smart move.

There is also a proposed brand new fee for campers. Boater use levels on the Lower Deschutes have not changed dramatically. Hiking and biking has. Many of them use the river camping sites. Kitchens said 10 to 15 years ago you might see five to 10 visitors hike or bike through Segment 4, which is Macks Canyon to Heritage Landing. Now that many people hike or bike through in a few hours on some weekends.

The proposal is for a new $5 per person per night camping fee. People who have a boater pass or who are already paying a fee for a developed camping site would not have to pay.

Neither of these fee changes are final, yet. The BLM plans on opening them up to public comments beginning in March, Kitchens said. The target implementation would not be until 2022.

Caring for public lands costs money. As much as we don't like to pay user fees to access them, fees charged to the users of the land make sense. You may also want to send a note to Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden, Jeff Merkley and Rep. Cliff Bentz asking them to ensure the BLM has adequate funding, so it doesn't need to rely on user fees.

Historical editorials: Unbreakable Bend jail

Editor's note: The following editorials originally appeared in the Feb. 3, 1905 edition of what was then called The Bend Bulletin.

"Of course Bend will have a jail that it will be impossible to break," remarks the acute Salem Statesman.

...

In considering the statement of the Bend post office, which appears in another column, it should be a remembered that a year ago Bend was too insignificant to have a post office at all. Now its business is next to the largest in Central Oregon.

...

If Oregon must have a convention to revise its Constitution, this year is as good as any for it. If it is to be the device for eliminating the initiative and referendum, amendment, however, it is ill-timed, for that feature of the constitution has not yet proved a failure in the estimation of the people who voted for it and they would not adopt a new constitution in which it should not be found. A few years later all might be willing to drop that novelty. And again they might not.

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.

NASA/Bill Ingalls

NASA's Perseverance team cheers the landing. We cheer with them.

Neither AI nor humans can properly moderate content on Facebook, Twitter

BY CATHY O'NEIL
Bloomberg

I wouldn't want to work at a social media company right now. With the spotlight on insurrection planning, conspiracy theories and otherwise harmful content, Facebook, Twitter and the rest will face renewed pressure to clean up their act. Yet no matter what they try, all I can see are obstacles.

My own experience with content moderation has left me deeply skeptical of the companies' motives. I once declined to work on an artificial intelligence project at Google that was supposed to parse YouTube's famously toxic comments: The amount of money devoted to the effort was so small, particularly in comparison to YouTube's $1.65 billion valuation, that I concluded it was either unserious or expected to fail. I had a similar experience with an anti-harassment project at Twitter: The person who tried to hire me quit shortly after we spoke.

Since then, the problem has only gotten worse, largely by design. At most social media companies, content moderation consists of two components: a flagging system that depends on users or AI, and a judging system in which humans consult established policies. To be censored, a piece of content typically needs to be both flagged and found in violation. This leaves three ways that questionable content can get through: It can be flagged but not a violation, a violation but not flagged, and neither flagged nor considered a violation.

Plenty falls through these cracks. People who create and spread toxic content spend countless hours figuring out how to avoid getting flagged by people and AI, often by ensuring it reaches only those users who don't see it as problematic. The companies' policies also miss a lot of bad stuff: Only recently, for example, did Facebook decide to remove misinformation about vaccines. And sometimes the policies themselves are objectionable: TikTok has reportedly suppressed videos showing poor, fat or ugly people, and has been accused of removing ads featuring women of color.

AI was covering for the inevitable failure of user moderation, and now official or outsourced moderation is supposed to be covering for the inevitable failure of AI.

Time and again, the companies have vowed to do better. In 2018, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg told Congress that AI would solve the problem. More recently, Facebook introduced its Oversight Board, a purportedly independent group of experts who, at their last meeting, considered a whopping five cases questioning the company's content moderation decisions — a pittance compared with the fire hose of content that Facebook serves its users every day. And last month, Twitter introduced Birdwatch, which essentially asks users to write public notes providing context for misleading content, rather than merely flagging it. So what happens if the notes are objectionable?

In short, for a while AI was covering for the inevitable failure of user moderation, and now official or outsourced moderation is supposed to be covering for the inevitable failure of AI. None are up to the task, and events such as the capital riot should put an end to the era of plausible denial of responsibility. At some point these companies need to come clean: Moderation isn't working, nor will it.

Cathy O'Neil is a Bloomberg columnist.

Letters policy

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.

Guest columns

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 columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

How to submit

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.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com

Write: My Nickel's Worth/Guest Column
P.O. Box 6020
Bend, OR 97708

Fax: 541-385-5804

Police aren't always heroes or villains — but change is needed

BY ROSA BROOKS
Special to The Washington Post

In the middle of former President Donald Trump's impeachment trial, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi took time out to draft legislation giving Congressional Gold Medals to the U.S. Capitol Police and the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department. Pelosi, D-Calif., was lavish in her praise of police actions on Jan. 6, when officers defended the Capitol from an insurrection staged by far-right Trump supporters. During the crisis, Pelosi told her colleagues, officers "risked and gave their lives to save ours. … The outstanding heroism and patriotism of our heroes deserve and demand our deepest appreciation."

For D.C. police officers — and officers across the United States — it was a confounding turn of events. After the May 25, 2020, killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, nationwide protests decried American policing as racist and brutal, and the heavy-handed, militarized police response to the protests throughout the summer drew further condemnation. Activists called on cities to abolish or, at least, "defund" the police, and within weeks, politicians in numerous cities were pledging to trim police department budgets. Pelosi and other congressional leaders were calling for "transformational, structural change to end police brutality." After the failed insurrection, however, cops were suddenly heroes: "martyrs for democracy," as Pelosi put it.

When it comes to policing, such whiplash is par for the course. U.S. political culture and rhetoric tend to frame things in terms of binary oppositions: Either cops are selfless, underappreciated heroes, or they're brutal, racist thugs. Either we should double their budgets and put more cops on the streets, or we should defund or abolish the police.

But the failed insurrection simultaneously reinforced and challenged both these diametrically opposed views — which means that maybe Americans are finally ready to recognize that the truth about policing can't be reduced to simplistic sound bites. Policing in America is like a messy ball of yarn: There's heroism and sacrifice, and there's racism and brutality, and it's all tangled up together.

In 2016, I joined the MPD Reserve Corps in Washington to find out what it was like on the other side of the "thin blue line." I wanted to understand how American police officers explain and justify their roles to themselves, and how their stories compare to media and popular narratives about policing.

As a sworn, armed MPD reserve officer, I went from six months as a recruit at the D.C. Metropolitan Police Academy to several years of patrol shifts in Washington's 7th Police District, one of the poorest, most crime-ridden sections of the nation's capital. During parades, protests, details and special events, such as the 2017 presidential inauguration, I worked across the city — and what I found, of course, was not a single story, but a thousand messy, overlapping and sometimes conflicting stories.

Police officers, in my experience, are no more monolithic than any other group of people. Like the rest of us, most cops try to be decent people and make the communities in which they work safer, better places. And like the rest of us, even the best cops don't always succeed.

Police stop vehicles for broken taillights and improper right turns on red because, as a society, we have decided, through our elected representatives, to have armed, uniformed state agents hand out tickets for civil traffic infractions, even though most of us would find it excessive and bizarre to send cops to people's doors to enforce IRS filing deadlines or residential zoning codes. Police deal — often poorly — with addiction, homelessness and mental illness because as a society, we have decided we're unwilling to fund adequate social services.

As a society, we also ask police officers to take on a dizzying and often incompatible array of roles: We want them to be guardians, warriors, social workers, mediators, mentors and medics, often all in the course of a single patrol shift. We want them to show compassion to victims and be tough enough to take on violent criminals; we want them to treat protesters with courtesy even if they're sneered and spat at; we want them to keep marauding mobs from invading the Capitol. We want them to understand mental illness, get guns off the streets, anticipate and respond to political violence, solve homicides and keep old ladies from getting mugged — all without being overbearing, rude or using excessive force, and all while working punishingly long shifts in uncomfortable and often dangerous conditions, under the constant, unforgiving glare of the media spotlight.

Few people can consistently do all these things well. I've seen cops manage to do six impossible things before breakfast — offering comfort to crime victims and deftly deescalating domestic conflicts — then completely lose it on the next call, cursing and yelling and slamming doors over trivial provocations.

One of my partners, a young officer, wept when his efforts at CPR couldn't save an elderly man whose heart had given out. Then, two hours later, he dismissed residents of a neighborhood we worked in as "animals."

The fact that violent crime is real and sometimes requires a coercive response, or that cops are every bit as contradictory and human as other Americans, doesn't justify police abuses, or the racism so deeply baked into our criminal justice system.

If anything, my years as a part-time cop left me convinced that we need to change nearly everything about policing, from how we recruit and train officers to how police departments are structured and overseen. We also need to radically overhaul our criminal justice system, which too often reinforces and amplifies racial and economic inequities.

Rosa Brooks is a law professor at Georgetown and the author of "Tangled Up in Blue: Policing the American City," to be published in February.