

Take your foot off the gas on 97 and enjoy the scenery

For those of us who regularly drive U.S. Highway 97 as a commute to and from work — and according to local stats that's about 90% of the drivers on the road between Bend and Redmond — one realizes it seems like playing Russian roulette.

Nearly every on-off ramp through the city of Bend has its foibles. For example, locals know that the on-off ramp at Colorado Avenue heading north is a quick merge that takes some finesse. Most drivers on 97 coming up on the on-ramp are aware enough to allow for cars to merge. But if one is unfamiliar with the way it works, look out. The same is true in the northbound lane as drivers quickly dart onto Hawthorne or Truman exits (90-degree turns) hoping they aren't rear-ended in the process.

Today's in-depth piece by Bulletin reporter Kyle Spurr is a stark reminder of how dangerous Highway 97 has become. Seventeen fatal crashes last year, killing 20 people, about double the previous two years combined. That doesn't include adjacent roads, such as the one just outside of Madras where two people died in a three-vehicle head-on wreck just last weekend.

Much of the blame for the wrecks are speed-related, distraction and intoxication, according to officials. But there's also just plain impatience.

Take any given Friday afternoon from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Highway 97 heading south. People are in a hurry to get to the best camping sites at Paulina, East or the numerous Cascades lakes to the west. The roads are congested with campers towing off-road 4-wheelers. Much of the Friday afternoon scanner traffic is about road-rage incidents on 97. It's a recipe for disaster.

The two-lane stretch just south of the Sunriver exit is a prime spot for trouble as weekend campers merge from four lanes down to two. For-

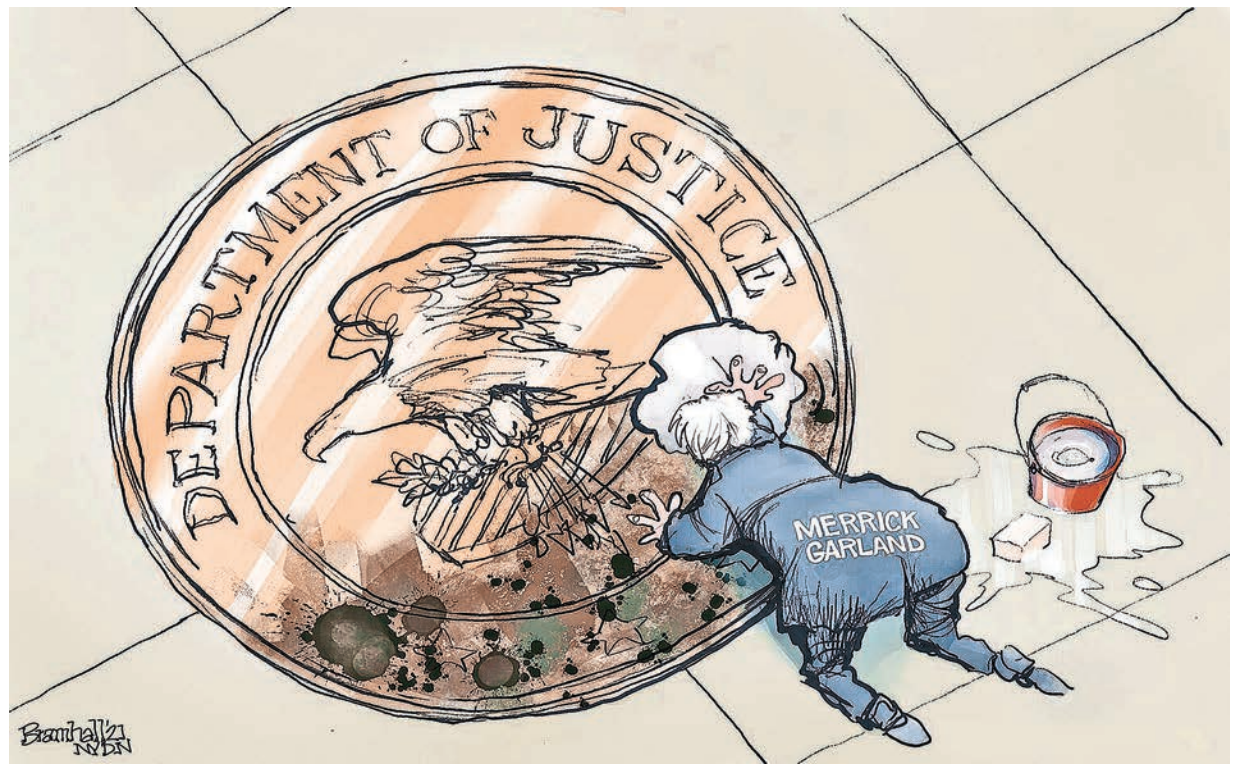
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tunately, that stretch of road is now under construction to become a four-lane road.

COVID-19 gets some blame as people feel the need to get out of the home for some fresh air and believe that the roads are less congested and, therefore, can speed a bit. But the roads are not less congested. They may have been earlier in the pandemic, but not now, and not on weekends.

Add to that the numerous homeless camps that have sprouted alongside the shoulders of the on-ramps. That's increased pedestrian traffic trying to cross 97 at some of the most dangerous intersections.

Our thoughts? Not to sound like your mom, but just slow down. The speed limit in town on Highway 97 is 45 mph, not 65. It can seem slow, but no one's life is worth getting to your destination five minutes sooner.



My Nickel's Worth

Milestone is a wake-up call

"Sobering Milestone" — a year with the pandemic. Gripping article on Page A1 of The Bulletin on March 11 2021.

This front page startled me, listing Central Oregon men and women who did not survive their struggle with COVID-19 in 2020. Fifteen people older than 90 passed. Forty people of the age of 80 to 89 passed. Sixteen men and women ages 70 to 79 died. Same number of folks between ages of 60 to 69. Six people age 50 to 59 passed. And 1 person, age 47, died from COVID-19 in 2020.

Thank you, Bend Bulletin crew, for quantifying the sadness and grief so many relatives and friends must have endured during this terrible time.

This article should be a wake-up call to our state officials to quickly accelerate the increase of vaccines for Central Oregon. We have lost the collective memory of too many of our most experienced and sage residents among us. This must not be repeated again in 2021.

— Steve Wilkes, Sunriver

Union should be a 'closed shop'

I share The Bulletin's desire to see an end to the strike at St. Charles.

I hope that hospital administrators negotiate a first contract with the Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals that provides medical tech workers a fair wage and the same security the hospital provides nurses who are members of the Oregon Nurses Association.

The contract that the hospital had agreed to with ONA calls for a closed shop. All nurses share in the cost of administering the contract that provides them wages, health insurance, a grievance procedure and other benefits.

Hospital administrators want to treat medical techs differently. They want what is called an open shop. In an open shop, workers do not have to join the union or pay dues or fees. But, they still get the benefits of the union contract — including all wage gains and benefits. Plus, the union is legally required to defend them in any disciplinary actions — for free.

In a closed shop or a workplace where agency fees are paid, all workers who benefit from the union contract pay their fair share to administer that union contract. In an open shop, they get something for nothing, and their fellow workers pick up the slack.

I think it is only fair to ask everyone who benefits from a union contract to pay their fair share to administer that contract.

— Michael Funke, Bend

Red Cross can use your donation

President Biden declared March American Red Cross month. On March 11, President Biden signed a bill giving most Americans a \$1,400 stimulus check.

Having spent time on Oregon's wildfires this winter, I had a lot of people wondering what they could do to help out the evacuees. The Red Cross lives off donations. While the fires are out, the Red Cross has turned over its sheltering to the state and counties, the Red Cross's disaster funds were greatly depleted.

While at the hotels which, due to COVID-19, were needed to be turned into shelters, people would thank us volunteers for all we do. The response, along with a thank you, was usually accompanied by "don't forget to thank our donors, without them, we can't provide the services we do." Us Red Crossers are a humble and grateful lot.

I'm reaching out to my fellow Oregonians to take at least a small

amount, and of course, a larger amount is preferred, of their stimulus check and make a donation to the American Red Cross. We never know when a disaster will occur, but we know it will. Let's pitch in now to make certain that the next time we're ready.

— Oscar Knopfler, Bend

Redistricting needs an independent lens

The League of Women Voters of Deschutes County urges the Legislature to create an independent citizens' advisory commission for the 2021 Oregon redistricting process.

We believe responsibility for redistricting preferably should be vested in an independent special commission, with membership that reflects the diversity of the unit of government, including citizens at large, representatives of public interest groups, and members of minority groups.

The standards on which a redistricting plan is based must require substantially equal population, geographic contiguity and effective representation of racial and linguistic minorities. The standards should provide for promotion of partisan fairness; preservation and protection of "communities of interest," and respect for boundaries of municipalities and counties.

An independent citizens' advisory commission would provide a transparent and equitable redistricting process. People not politicians should draw the redistricting maps. Redistricting plans should be developed independently of the Legislature.

Our Congressional District 2 will certainly be redrawn. You should choose your legislators. Let your voices be heard by contacting the Senate Committee on Redistricting at oregon.redistricting@oregonlegislature.gov.

— Carol Loesche, Bend

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.

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 is preferred.

Email: letters@bendbulletin.com

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

Fax: 541-385-5804

Enjoying the outdoors safely should be everyone's right

BY CLARA SOH

In the past year, many of us were confronted with the harsh reality of the daily dangers, aggressions and racism that Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) face.

From unarmed Black men being gunned down by neighbors while out for a run, to a 150% increase in violent, unprovoked attacks on Asian Americans in the past year, the additional stresses faced by BIPOC individuals are myriad, and are manifest in higher rates of chronic conditions and a more than 10-year gap in life expectancy between races.

And while a recent study published by Oregon State University researchers found that recreating in the outdoors saves Oregon approximately \$1.4 billion annually in averted health care costs due to reduced rates of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and depression, these benefits are not enjoyed equally. Indeed, many BIPOC, LGBTQ+,

and other historically underrepresented community members have the lowest rates of participation in outdoor recreation because they often feel unwelcome or unsafe in outdoor spaces.

These are also the communities that are disproportionately affected by chronic health conditions and could benefit the most from increased recreation in the outdoors.

The remote isolation of some of our public lands makes them ideal places to go to unwind and get away, but can also spell additional danger to BIPOC individuals. Several incidents that have been widely reported show that bias crimes against BIPOC individuals can happen anywhere, even in our cherished outdoor spaces.

During a moving testimony discussing safety in the outdoors, Chad Brown, a Navy veteran and avid fly fisherman recounted having his brake lines cut for having the gall to be a

GUEST COLUMN

Black man fishing in Oregon's rivers.

In another widely reported incident last year, a black family was enjoying a Fourth of July picnic in Lincoln City when they were surrounded by a gang of white men who hurled racial slurs and Nazi salutes at them.

A new bill introduced on behalf of the Governor's Office and the statewide Racial Justice Council aims to address incidents such as these; Senate Bill 289 would increase penalties for bias crimes perpetrated on Oregon public lands by excluding individuals who engage in hate crimes from entering or recreating in Oregon State Parks, and automatically prohibit anyone who commits a hate crime on Oregon public lands from being able to receive a hunting or fishing license in the state of Oregon.

However — perhaps more importantly — the bill would provide a means for restorative justice and rehabilitation. Individuals found guilty of

committing a hate crime on Oregon public lands would be provided with the opportunity for community service and diversity training. SB 289 provides a means to move forward and build a stronger, and safer community.

Over the course of two public hearings, there was overwhelming support for SB 289; including support from Oregon State Police, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and individual Oregonians across the state.

We Oregonians love our outdoors. Particularly in Central Oregon, access to the outdoors is a significant contributor to our quality of life where we can climb, hunt, fish, or go mountain biking all in a single day. There is no place for hate or violence anywhere in Oregon, especially on our public lands.

These are already stressful and anxious times, and many of us look to our state parks and other public lands as places we go to unwind. SB 289 is the first step in affirmatively demonstrating that all Oregon residents and visi-

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tors should feel welcome to enjoy the natural wonders of Oregon, regardless of how we look or who we love.

Clara Soh, of Bend, was appointed to the Governor's Racial Justice Council, as a member of the environmental equity subcommittee. The group is working on SB 289 to prioritize safety in the outdoors for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other historically underrepresented groups. A hearing on SB 289 is set for Tuesday.



Soh