

Support the Sisters school bond that is on the May ballot

The Sisters Elementary School is packed. And the district is facing growth and not enough room to handle the students.

The district needs a new elementary school. We urge Sisters voters to support the \$33.8 million bond on the May ballot to build one.

The good news: It doesn't look like voters will be paying any additional taxes because of the new bond. The 2001 bond is set to retire as the new one would kick in. And the target rate is 93 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value — same as the 2001 bond.

The money would go toward building a new elementary school. School Board Chair Jay Wilkins told us that's the priority. The district wants to build it right and build it to last.

Growth in Central Oregon isn't a surprise. In Sisters, the quality of the schools, the setting and the small town are key drivers. The district has about 1,100 students now. That's predicted to grow by as much as 30% over the next 10 years, the district says. The elementary school has about 350 students now. It's K-4. And it's overcapacity, according to the district.

The new school would house K-5 students and have more capacity than the old one, giving the district some room to grow. Moving the fifth graders to the elementary school will also free up some space in the middle school. The new school is estimated to be completed for the 2023-2024 school year.

One of the big unanswered questions is: What happens to the existing elementary school? That has not been decided. It could be repurposed for any number of things. Old

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schools have been transformed into apartments and hotels. It could be a community center. It could be senior housing. If the bond passes, the district says it will engage the community to find out what residents want. Obviously, not everyone may agree. That question, though, is not on the ballot.

Oregon school districts don't have a lot of options when it comes to building new schools or building maintenance. In Oregon, state school funding is intended to go toward the classroom. If a school district needs a new building or more than routine maintenance, it needs to ask voters. Sisters voters have generally been very supportive of the school system. The district is the envy of many others because Sisters voters have even stepped up to tax themselves to put more money toward the classroom with an operating levy.

Keep the schools strong in Sisters. Vote for the school bond on the May ballot.

Bill to raise alcohol taxes has not moved

Don't say it's over until the legislative session is over, but the bill to boost taxes on alcohol in Oregon appears to be over.

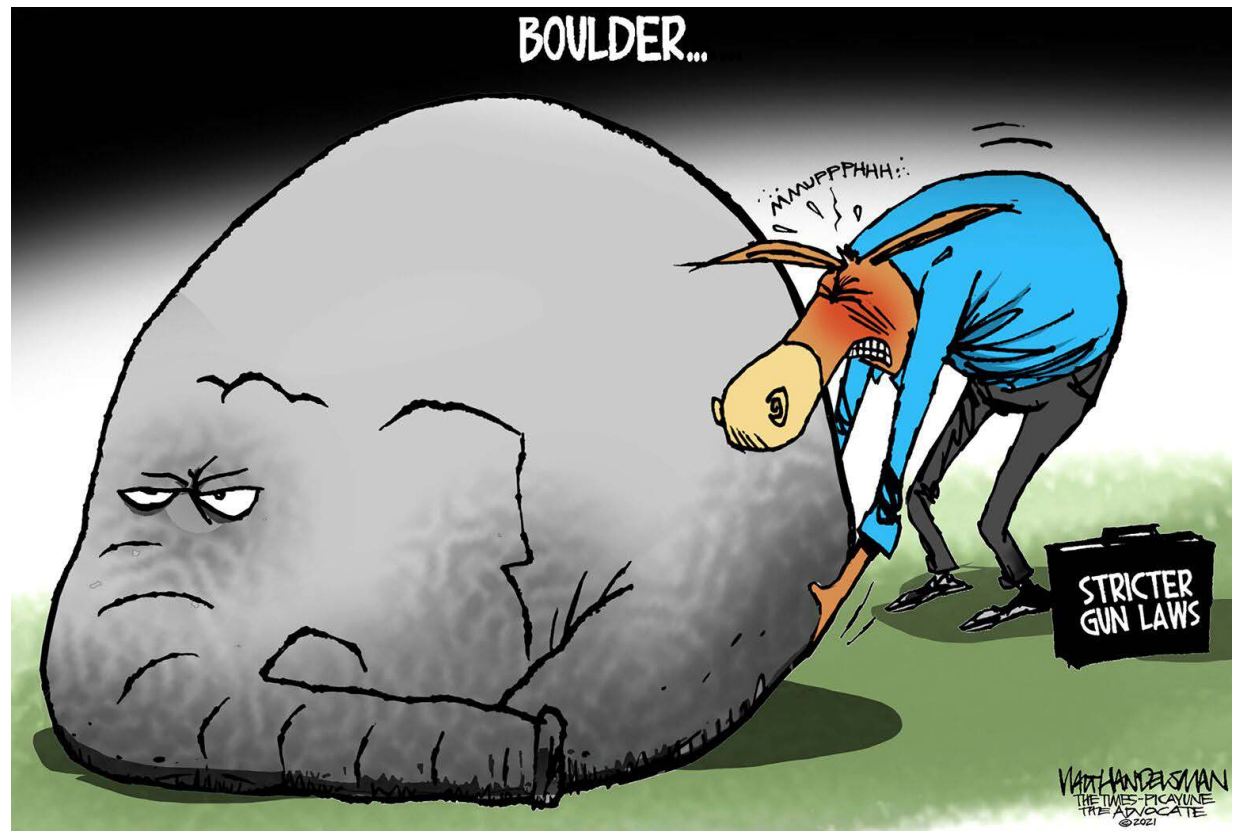
House Bill 3296 would raise state taxes on beer, wine, cider and distilled spirits. It could raise those taxes by as much as 2,800%. It would raise taxes on say a six-pack of beer by \$2 or more.

The idea behind the bill is to take the revenue raised and put it to a very worthy cause: fighting addiction to alcohol and drugs with treatment centers across the state. Oregon could use more access to treatment.

But this is also a state with brew-

ing and distilling businesses that has been hit hard by the pandemic. Does it feel right to target them with a kick in the gut when they are down? We don't think so. And legislators have apparently agreed. The bill has sat unmoving in committee since the beginning of March. It is not even scheduled for a hearing.

We are no experts in reading legislative tea leaves, but if this was a bill you were hoping would flounder, it's probably safe to start raising your glass in a toast to its failure. But that failure also means Oregon will still not have an answer for people who need access to care and can't find it.



My Nickel's Worth

Signal in roundabouts

Since we have acquired so many roundabouts in Central Oregon, and people do not know how to exit using their turn indicators, it would help a lot of traffic issues if ODOT could put up signs stating "Use right-turn indicator when exiting" or something similar. It is so frustrating to sit as you are trying to enter the roundabout with people exiting and not using their turn indicators. After all, it is the law to signal when turning right or left.

— Barbara Russell, Redmond

Don't eliminate off-street parking requirements

The Bend City Council is about to take up the issue of (continuing or reducing) off-street parking requirements. I urge them to not eliminate it! You will never get drivers to give up their cars and start taking buses or riding bikes to get where they need to go. If more land is needed, expand the UGB (urban growth boundary)!

Eliminating off-street parking for businesses or leaving the choice to (greedy) developers and their bottom lines will not solve anything. It will create chaos. I am a senior, and I can guarantee you that I and others like me, and even much younger people who drive, will not change our stripes just because the council tries to force us to.

Is there some crazy idea out there that people will get rid of their cars?

Does anyone think the majority of people will walk or ride bikes in the winter? Walkers will walk, busers will ride, and drivers will always drive, and never the twain shall meet. I am incredulous such a plan is even being considered. It is a totally inane and very bad idea!

— Katy Sanchez, Bend

More density is no good

The city of Bend is destroying itself from the inside out. The City Council is destroying Bend in the hunt for financial fees payable to the city. The idea that building cookie-cutter, garbage box houses on 4,000-foot-size lots is ludicrous. Jamming people together will raise conflict and create more police calls and trash is a given.

Want proof? Try to travel through Third Street and Reed Market or Brookwood and Reed Market at any time between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. any weekday. The city will have you believe that people want small lots, small houses and mini roads between the back of houses.

Baloney! If that was true then acreage would be super cheap! It's not! Acreage is at an all-time premium! It's all about the money.

— Marv Brophy, Bend

Bad plans by the Democrats

The Border Patrol recently reported that the border "is not secure" as they are overwhelmed with the number of immigrants crossing illegally. The

immigrants are evidently responding to the promise of amnesty given by Democratic candidates during the last election. Why would the Democrats make such a promise when it was very clear that this would encourage individuals from many nations to cross our border illegally?

It is obvious that this is a blatant power grab by the Democrats as they know that about two-thirds of the immigrants will vote Democrat once they are given the vote. Think about it. There are more than 12 million illegal immigrants now in the U.S. and they are now coming over the border by the thousands each year.

The Democrats also have introduced legislation to offer amnesty to a million farmworkers under the guise of providing needed labor. Many of these workers will not stay in farming long if they can find a better paying job, so the legislation will not help farmers very long, but will increase the size of the Democratic voting base.

Finally, there will be an attempt to eliminate the filibuster, which will lessen the power of the minority party. All the major Democrat leaders are on record in the past as saying they would not support this move. Why now? This is an additional attempt to increase power while collectively making make it more difficult for any party to compete against the Democrats in the future.

Are we witnessing the end of the two-party system?

— George Petersen, Redmond

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

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Sequestered in my retirement community, but liberation comes soon

BY MARGARET SULLIVAN

Special to The Washington Post

The needle jabbed my arm. Second COVID-19 vaccination, done. Liberation in sight. Thursday, Feb. 11, 2021, the auditorium in our continuing care retirement community in Falls Church, Virginia, buzzed with matter-of-fact activity. Three weeks earlier, it had been giddy. Not just for our initial shots, but — wow — for the first time in ages, perhaps 45 of us at a time were coming and going in the same place, chatting with neighbors we hadn't seen in weeks.

Such life-changing inoculations bookend my life: as a baby in 1934, for smallpox, and now, as an old woman, for COVID-19. In between, I've seen vaccines developed for polio, measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox and shingles (I was part of that trial). Blessedly, this latest one heralds a much-needed return to sharing our lives with others.

A year ago, on March 13, 2020, our campus of about 500 residents — ranging in age from the late 60s to 103, mostly still physically and men-

tally active — was locked down for our protection. We realize we're vulnerable. My husband and I had chosen to move here to make the most of the years left to us, with care when needed.

In the "before time," the community was welcoming, busy, social. We visited our families, or they, us. Meals were communal. Grandchildren invaded on weekends. Residents volunteered in the neighborhood and organized events here. Our artists created. Our singers made music. We checked on people we hadn't seen in a day or two. When one of us died, we gathered to mourn and remember.

We were closely connected with life around us.

That January, news of the infectious COVID-19 virus began circulating. Then, "in an abundance of caution," the shared salt and pepper shakers disappeared from our tables. The frozen yogurt machine stopped dispensing and wore a sign: "This machine is currently fasting. Hopefully it will be back to a regular diet soon." Hand-sanitizer dispensers appeared.

Following the declaration of the global pandemic, our management issued a protocol mandating that residents stay on campus, with masking and social distancing. No one but staff could enter.

Being sequestered wasn't surprising. But the reality jolted: not just the abrupt loss of in-person contact with family, friends and events outside, but also the diminished social interaction and daily stimulation inside.

Communal dining ended — we eat in our rooms. No more interesting speakers or Saturday movies. Meetings canceled — or, later, virtual. Days blended: Is this Monday or Friday? Living single meant one kind of loneliness; living double, another. Not being able to visit friends on the assisted living floors added worry about their isolation.

As our protocols evolved, family visits stopped, then became possible if the visitor had a negative test — then, after the Thanksgiving COVID spike, stopped again.

Even cloistered behind our gates, we remained active in the world. Staff

and residents held a vigil on our lawn in honor of George Floyd and for social justice. Although we couldn't join the peaceful marches downtown, our signs shouted from our fence. Our polling place — the auditorium — was relocated; therefore, voting by mail became urgent. A group of us helped residents request ballots, package them for mailing and track them.

Far too many people, we know, don't have our options. Enormous losses in some nursing homes makes us grateful our community is careful and reasonably safe, if not totally unscathed. Fifty-two residents had COVID-19. Twelve of those, our friends and neighbors, have died. Eighty-one staff members have been sick and, mercifully, recovered.

Our heartaches and losses are complicated and multilayered. Many of us mourn friends or family. We who are also caregivers grieve as a spouse's diminishing cognition accelerates in lockdown. We ache to be able to hug grandchildren — or anyone.

Keeping on keeping on is exhausting. A COVID fog has settled in.

"How are you?" is as much commiseration as greeting.

On the other hand, virtual life has been sanity-saving. Social media makes connections much easier than even five years ago. Although my husband and I haven't been with our out-of-town children in over a year, we Zoom with them weekly. We "sat in" as one defended his doctoral dissertation. When we mourned my brother's death from the virus, the family gathered in comforting warmth online.

Although our shots don't bring back this lost year, they are a greatly appreciated step forward. With 98% of the residents and 93% of the staff vaccinated, we can begin to open. We mask and distance. But plans are afoot for eating together again. The first visitors — family members — are coming to our apartments. We will go places and hug grandchildren. With the weather warming, this overlong year grinds toward the welcome future.

■ Margaret Sullivan, author of "Fragments From a Mobile Life," is a resident at Goodwin House Bailey's Crossroads in Falls Church, Virginia.