

Deschutes is shortchanged on pot money

The 2021 Legislature is drawing to a close. We hope an important bill for Deschutes County will still move forward: House Bill 3295.

It would enable Deschutes County to continue to receive marijuana tax revenue. It's a bipartisan effort of state Reps. Jason Kropf, D-Bend, and Jack Zika, R-Redmond.

The way the state's rules were written, counties are supposed to share in marijuana tax revenue unless they don't have any marijuana businesses. But even though Deschutes County has pot businesses, the county won't get any money. That will mean a loss of about \$125,000 that the county could use to fight addiction and crime. That's only the amount as of now. In the future, it could be more.

It's not fair that Deschutes County could miss out.

The state's rules for the pot revenue simply didn't anticipate what happened in Deschutes County. The county has marijuana processors and growers. But in 2019, Deschutes County commissioners put a moratorium in place that there could not be new ones — in areas outside the

county's cities. Deschutes County residents voted in November 2020 to keep that moratorium in place for new marijuana processors and growers — in the areas outside the county's cities.

So then the Oregon Liquor Control Commission looked at Deschutes County's situation and the law. It decided because the county does not allow all types of new marijuana businesses it is not entitled to any marijuana tax revenue. Kropf summed it up well in legislative testimony. The rules were written like an on/off switch, he said, when it should have been written like a dimmer switch.

Deschutes County officials argued the result wasn't fair to county residents. The county mounted a challenge in Oregon Tax Court.

Kropf and Zika proposed a legislative solution. And that bill just made it out of committee last week. The Legislature should pass it before it adjourns.

Problems with state accounting, again

The Oregon Secretary of State's Office audits tell us what we know but need to be reminded about: State government makes mistakes with money.

Every year there's a roundup of these mistakes. And it's clear it's necessary. For the fiscal year 2020, state auditors found \$6.4 billion in accounting errors. That's right, \$6.4 billion.

Those were unintentional mistakes. It's not like somebody was trying to abscond with \$6.4 billion. They were mistakes. Basically, numbers were put in the wrong column and later caught thanks to state audits. It does make you wonder what wasn't caught.

What can be more important is when the audits uncover weaknesses in the policies for handling money.

For instance, the Department of Consumer and Business Services is a state agency dedicated to consumer protection and business regulation. It failed to properly follow new accounting rules required for fiscal year

2020. Other state agencies got it right. The department misinterpreted the new rules and reported about \$400 million incorrectly. That department also failed to have required documentation explaining how it made decisions about handling money in two areas, such as determining what is uncollectible money.

And there's more. When state auditors tested some spending to ensure proper procedures are followed so federal funds may be used to pay for them, it found mistakes. The biggest problem was in the child care and development fund. That is a federal grant program that helps provide child care services for low-income families and improve child care overall. Auditors found \$4.2 million in errors. Numbers were miscalculated, provider copays were off, there was a lack of documentation to back up payments and more.

New report. Similar conclusions. Without state auditors peering over the shoulders of other state agencies, even more mistakes would be made.

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.

SUMMER STRIBUNE/ART MED/AGENCY
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Columnist suggests a return to the fantasy epic for summer reading lists

BY HUGH HEWITT
Special to The Washington Post
Summer beckons, and so does the easy season's need for a good, nourishing read.

Everything after J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" is in some way derivative, but fantasy epics remain a staple on many bookshelves, including mine.

CNN's Chris Cillizza sent me into the endless but eventually satisfactory Wheel of Time series by Robert Jordan. The New York Times' Ross Douthat nudged me toward British writer Joe Abercrombie, with a warning that his books are as grown-up and dark as "Games of Thrones" but have the decided advantage of an author committed to finishing his epics.

During the pandemic's endless opportunities to walk, I blew through Brandon Sanderson's "Mistborn" series (on audio) but hesitated on brink of his "The Way of Kings." Patrick Rothfuss is delivering the goods in his Kingkiller Chronicle trilogy, but he's only two-thirds finished. So, Abercrombie it will be when next I get the epic itch.

The attraction of epics is much the same as those of Patrick O'Brian's 20 works built around British naval officers Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin: The writers create entire worlds around a few central characters and a long list of recurring friends, lovers, competitors and enemies. "For the past 30 years the greatest novel-

ists writing in English," asserted playwright David Mamet, "have been genre writers: John le Carré, George Higgins and Patrick O'Brian." From Mamet, that's quite a tribute.

Thriller authors, like Daniel Silva and Brad Thor, have legions addicted to their knowledge and storytelling prowess. C.J. Box's books deliver an understanding of the mountain west not easily available to city folk on the coasts — and an unlikely hero in Joe Pickett. And I inhaled "Ridgeline," the new historical fiction by Michael Punke (author of "The Revenant"), about an 1866 battle in Wyoming's Powder River Valley between the Lakota and the U.S. Army.

These writers are terrifyingly prolific — add up their titles and ask yourself, "How do they do it?" They serve the need for the human imagination to travel far from whatever reality it inhabits day to day.

Nonfiction writers broaden our horizons, too, but their work is both harder and easier to absorb. Three nonfiction books have made it on to my "necessary bookshelf" this year — works that need to be read to understand our age: Niall Ferguson's "Doom," Josh Rogin's "Chaos Under Heaven" and Joby Warrick's "Red Line" can grip as tightly as any thriller, but the reader has to take mental notes if not actual ones.

These books form the basis of important — and official — conversa-

tions in our national politics, and the details matter.

Where does this leave fantasy epics? Their purpose, beyond pure entertainment, is construction of a moral universe different from ours, with different gods and dilemmas; rituals and standards, tests, triumphs and failures. Many of the epic fantasies construct vast archipelagoes of competing regimes that, while hardly as helpful as Aristotle's "Politics," still dance around the ancient and central question of what form of government is best. Machiavelli is embedded in these tales, as is Rousseau. Very few Thomas Jeffersons, quite a few Stalins and Maos, and occasionally the attempt at the genuinely heroic.

Mostly they give space to roam far from 2021 — or 1968, when I read Tolkien for the first time. For some (not me), escape means science fiction; others have their own guilty pleasures. But as summer approaches, and if you've read everything by Dickens or you are done with Evelyn Waugh, take Douthat's advice (with his disclaimer about Abercrombie's grown-up content) and try something completely different.

What can it cost you, save the price of a book and a few hours away from Twitter and Instagram?

■ Hugh Hewitt hosts a nationally syndicated radio show on the Salem Network, is a professor of law at Chapman University Law School and a Washington Post contributing columnist.

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Upcoming UFO report won't change minds, but maybe it should

BY STEPHEN CARTER
Bloomberg

Those of us who've dreamed of extraterrestrial life since sci-fi-drenched childhoods are awaiting the federal government's forthcoming report on UFOs. And yet the report is unlikely to change any minds.

Which makes the controversy over unidentified flying objects a lot like everything else these days — and a good candidate to teach us a thing or two about the value of cognitive humility.

Let's start with some data. Pollsters tell us that 1 American in 3 believes that we've had extraterrestrial visitors. And — for once! — there's no partisan divide. According to Gallup, Democrats (32%) and Republicans (30%) are about equally likely to believe that at least some UFOs are alien spacecraft. Belief is somewhat higher among independents, at a robust 38%. (And maybe higher still in Roswell, New Mexico.)

Somebody's right; somebody's wrong. Should we decide who by relying on official pronouncements? According to multiple leaks, the congressionally mandated report from the Director of National Intelligence, due any day, will

say that the government has no evidence of extraterrestrial visitors. Does it follow that those who believe otherwise are — to take the current argot — living in a realm that's fact-free?

I'll go with no — but it's important to understand why.

For enthusiasts, the toughest challenge has always been Fermi's paradox: If the universe contains other civilizations more advanced than ours, why haven't we found any sign? Our searches have come up nil, even in regions we've swept with care.

Happily, if you're among the believers, you have plenty of ripostes to choose from.

Readers of Liu Cixin's "Three-Body Problem" trilogy are familiar with the theory that extraterrestrials are quite rationally hiding their locations, to avoid being destroyed by more powerful extraterrestrials. Another idea, proposed by the economist Robin Hanson and his collaborators, is that any "grabby" civilizations out there have expanded so rapidly that we can't detect the signs. Why not? Because their rapid expansions came after the signals we can observe departed their distant galaxies billions of years ago: "If they were where we could see them, they

would be here now instead of us." (A thought that for Hanson helps explain why, if more advanced civilizations exist, we shouldn't be trying quite so hard to contact them.) A third possibility is that more advanced aliens exist, and they're neither hiding nor grabby but instead have found a path of technological evolution that doesn't leave the sorts of signals we're capable of searching for.

Fair enough. On the other hand, the conspiratorially minded might conclude that the U.S. government knows we've had visitors and is hiding the truth. (Cue "Independence Day.") For those who take this view, the claims by various government agencies to have no evidence that UFOs are alien spacecraft might serve only to deepen suspicion. After all, if a massive conspiracy has been hiding the truth for decades, the conspirators are hardly going to disclose the details just because Congress says so!

Besides, according to The New York Times, there will be something for everyone in the report. A number of the UFOs spotted by military aircraft over the years remain unidentified. (UAPs, the government now calls them, for "unidentified aerial phenomena.") The

report is expected to conclude that they aren't part of any known classified program. When Scientific American is forced to admit that "the mind boggles" at the many possibilities, we might reasonably predict that not too many minds will be changed.

But this should come as no surprise. We turn out not to be good at changing our minds. Our political divisions make this tendency worse. Committed political partisans not only have trouble altering their views on contested political issues; even in everyday life, they seem to suffer from a more general cognitive inflexibility.

That's one of the reasons that what we ought to be cultivating is a general cognitive humility — not just about UFOs but about much more in the world around us. Like the Handarrata in Ursula LeGuin's "The Left Hand of Darkness," we need to gain a keen sense of how little we know.

Cognitive humility involves recognizing our biases and shortcomings, in part by cultivating a realistic estimate of our own knowledge and powers of reason. It's a skill that matters. On many contested issues, we tend to make up our minds on which expert to trust only after we know which one

takes the same view we do. There's no reason to expect the UFO debate to be any different.

Consider the strangely behaving object currently speeding out of the solar system. Dubbed 'Oumuamua, a Hawaiian term for "visitor from afar arriving first," most researchers think it is the remnant of a comet, but Harvard astronomer Avi Loeb argues it has characteristics that suggest a technological origin. One needn't get in the middle of that fight to recognize that a lot of observers have chosen sides according to their priors.

Where does that leave me? In the situation where I think we should most often be. Rather than label the beliefs of UFO enthusiasts false, I prefer to say that as much as I'd like them to be right, I'm not yet persuaded. Perhaps the piece of evidence that will make the difference is right around the corner.

And if extraterrestrial visitors ever do arrive, I suspect they'll have plenty of cognitive humility already. (No "Klaatu barada nikto.") Otherwise, they'd have far been too busy fighting each other to make their way across the stars.

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