

Court strayed off the path with cycle route vote

The Grant County Court should revisit its rejection of a proposed bike route in Logan Valley. That decision, made in December, was based on misinformation that the Court swallowed hook, line and saddle.

The issue is not whether the Court likes bike routes, or cyclists, or even the proponent of the plan, Mike Cosgrove. The issue is whether residents can expect the Court to make its decisions on facts, rather than the unsubstantiated fears and clamor of a few.

This situation unfolded over two court meetings, on Dec. 10 and 17. In the first, the two members on hand decided to support the bike route presented by Cosgrove, who needed a support letter to advance the proposal at the state level. The Court members deferred final action on the letter until the next meeting, when a missing commissioner would be there.

But in the second meeting, the full Court was swayed against the bike route when detractors protested it, claiming it would cross two private ranches.

That detail ran counter to Cosgrove's presentation one week earlier, when he clearly stated the route would be on public and tribal land; however, he wasn't at the second meeting to answer the new concerns. No one on the Court bothered to check out the contradiction, despite the fact that Cosgrove had left his contact numbers with them.

Burned once before by a hubbub over a bike path proposed for private land, the Court members scattered for cover like chickens from the shadow of a hawk. The

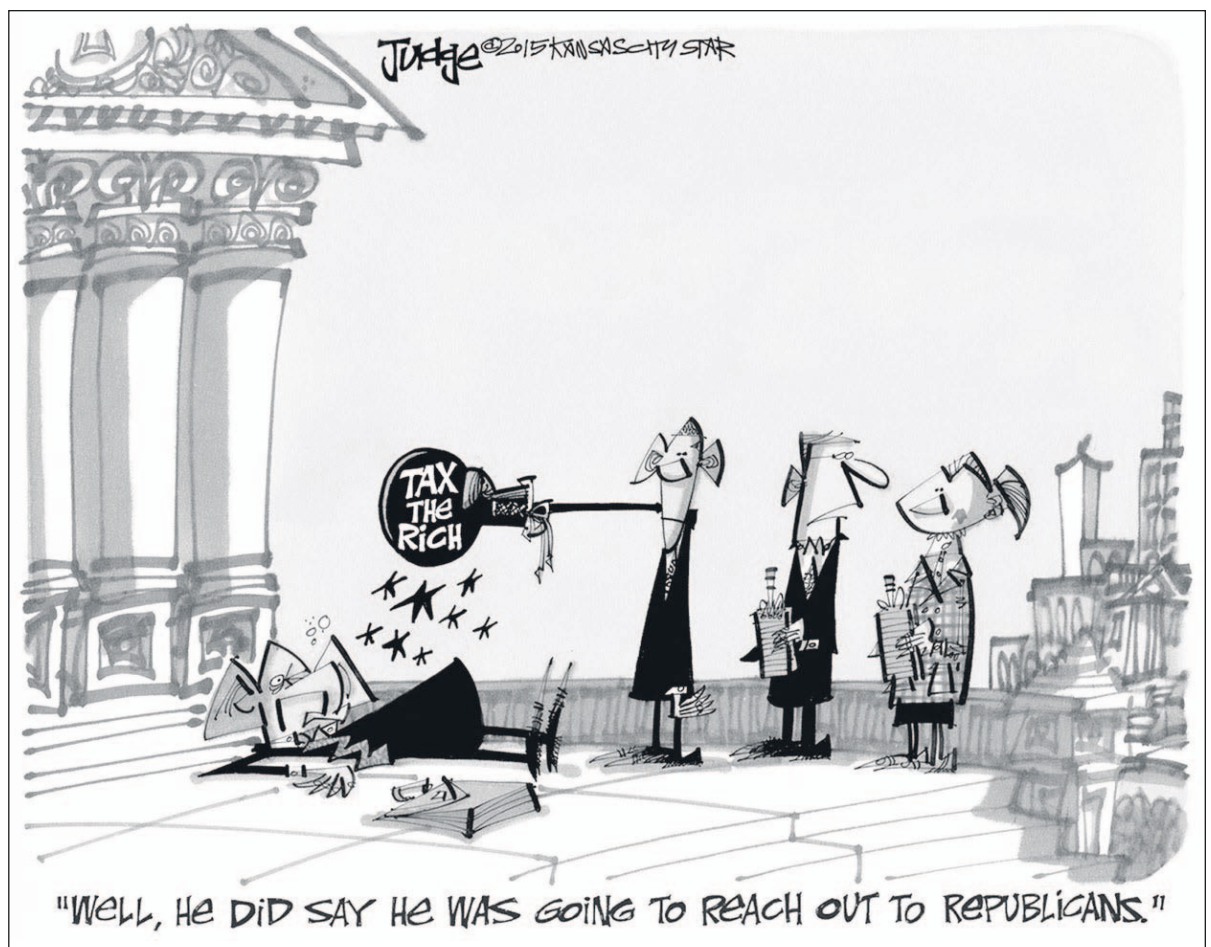
vote was unanimous: The Court would not write a letter supporting the bike path. They assumed – again wrongly – that the project could go ahead without their support.

Contacted later by the Eagle, Cosgrove was clear that without positive response from local officials, the route would be eliminated from the list of projects under consideration statewide. And he was thunderstruck to learn that his path had been scuttled by an unquestioned, erroneous assumption.

At this point we won't even get into a secondary objection based on the idea that cyclists relieve themselves in the great outdoors and thus should be rejected as polluters. If the Court wants to adopt that particular logic for resisting cycle tourism, we'll expect to see them take a similar, tough stand against other tourist sectors that roam our back roads and frequently stray onto private land – hunters, horn hunters, and fishermen, to name a few.

We hope it doesn't get that far. Tourism – in its many guises – has a place in our future, not to replace traditional resource industries but to supplement our struggling economy.

That's a good reason for the Court to clarify its decision, even if it is too late for this proposal to move ahead. If they just don't want to support cycling, they should be honest and say so. But to hang their rejection on false speculation is wrong. Left uncorrected, it casts doubt about the trustworthiness of their deliberations in other matters, as well. – SC



COMMENTARY

To achieve forest goals, hold officials accountable

By Nicky A. Sprauve
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

In 1995, Grant County residents voted to "refuse to recognize Federal Management of certain public lands." In 2002, we voted to establish the Grant County Public Forest Commission and to petition Congress to transfer the title of public lands to Grant County (Measures 39 & 40). The mission of the Public Forest Commission was to take over the management of public lands and to use a percentage of the income to fund public schools and roads. We don't have to look far to see that not one of these measures has been fully realized!

These measures were a response to an increasingly desperate situation in Grant County. Whereas we once received a percentage of all timber sales from the federal government to help cover our expenses, we now receive no income, and have become one of the most economically depressed counties in Oregon with the highest unemployment rate.

Last year, we requested the County Court to pass Ordinance 2013-01, to prevent the Forest Service from closing roads without County Court and sheriff approval. So far, we have had limited success at getting anyone to even try to enforce it. What does this say when we have gone from the big dream of taking over the forests to just trying to keep our access? Where did we go wrong?

Recently, members of the Public Forest Commission attended a Grant County Public Access Advisory Board meeting. We were discussing the County Court's lack of action regarding Ordinance 2013-01. Jim Sproul admonished us by saying, "We are the ones at fault – each one of us ... We are the stakeholders ... And, it got this bad because we let it."

The Public Access Advisory Board practically had their hands touching the ceiling, when it came to a decision. They were 100 percent united. As community volunteers, they were ready to step up to the plate for you. I only wish there was that kind of unity among the forest commissioners. Of the commissioners present, just five were in favor, barely enough to move forward. I was embarrassed by the response. We were elected to do this job, but were deeply divided.

Now, let me be clear. I believe in having your own opinion. I might not like it, but I can support it. That's part of what makes good government. When we bring our varying opinions together to create a better environment, we make true progress. The problem is when you have a division of loyalties.

I believe some commissioners are divided because they belong to special interest groups and collaborative groups, or because they or family members are employed by companies that have a big stake in keeping things the way they are. Individuals with that kind of conflict of interest should ei-

ther recuse themselves or step down. They cannot adequately represent you.

Now, if you think the only place a conflict of interest exists is in the Public Forest Commission, you would be mistaken. This kind of duplicity exists all throughout the county government. If you don't believe me, run down the list of county officials and do an inventory of what you know about each. Then, compare that with the kinds of decisions they make on your behalf. Those with a conflict of interest should stand out very quickly!

So, what can you do? Elected officials raised up their hands and took an oath of office to protect the interests of the people. If we don't, then you need to hold us accountable. I need to be held accountable, too. How? By calling us, writing us, and showing up at meetings. And, if necessary, by changing your vote. I guarantee you that a thousand phone calls or a thousand people in County Court *WILL* get our attention! *If* that doesn't work, elect new leaders. That's your power! Remember what Jim Sproul said: "We are the stakeholders ... And, it got this bad because we let it!"

We don't have to give up our dreams for a better future! Let's all take our responsibilities seriously. Let's make this happen!

Nicky A. Sprauve lives in Canyon City and is a Grant County Public Forest Commissioner. He can be reached at NickyASprauve@gmail.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter: Diversify with tourism

To the Editor:

I have a profound respect for our seasoned Grant County Commissioner Boyd Britton, who was not present during the first meeting on the bike route debacle mentioned in the newspaper Dec. 31; our amateur Grant County Commissioners fumbled the football in the fourth quarter.

Grant County has been the poster child for Oregon unemployment for decades and Mike Cosgrove has been striving to find ways to diversify the county's stumbling rural economy. We all can't be ranchers; there are not that many ranches available.

Mike spent hours figuring out a reasonable, low-cost investment to create a bike tourism route, using existing roads and abandoned railway rights-of-way in Logan Valley. Further, he worked to sell the state Tourism Department on the idea.

Sadly, he was at the critical stage when he asked the commissioners to support his hard work on this tourism development; all state agencies like the local support before funding new ideas.

Someone is quoted in this article, "We don't trust this whole thing," so they naively threw the baby out with the bathwater. Disappointing!

We need to diversify and strengthen our rural economies or remain another USA "third world country."

Forest Service friends have attended tourism conferences at Missoula's University of Montana. The first, in December 1995, had a federal publication created titled "Linking Tourism, the Environment, and Sustainability."

The back cover notes: "Tourism is an industry of global significance. It is one of the world's largest industries and has become more attractive as a relatively quick generator of foreign exchange or income to local remote nat-

ural areas. While tourism development is a major agenda item for many Third World Countries, only recently has it achieved the same degree of attention in the United States (1995)."

Diversified professional outdoor recreation, geologic-ecologic and cultural history tourism is a legitimate, beautiful, and rural palomino horse to ride out of the Grant County economic disaster dating to the 1980s.

I appreciate Mike Cosgrove for trying to help out Grant County children's future.

Dave Sandersfeld
Canyon City

Roads are critical

To the Editor:

Sheriff Glenn Palmer of Grant County submitted a letter to Malheur National Forest Supervisor stating that they violated Grant County Ordinance 2013-1. This states all roads and byways are open in the county, unless specifically granted closure through both the County Court and Sheriff office. Closures can only be put into place if both the County Court and Sheriff's Office agree.

This is exactly the sort of thing county governments should be doing: trying to keep our overreaching and over-regulating federal government from taking all the people's liberties. Road closures will have big, irreversible consequences for the future of Grant County. Urge the County Court to stand strong against this and if they don't, the people should hold them accountable and vote them out.

The forests of Grant County are horribly unmanaged. They are becoming diseased, overgrown, ravaged by wildfires and the Forest Service is spending their days trying to manage us out of them.

Mike Hansen
Mt. Vernon

Time for new tack

To the Editor:

I want to congratulate Rep. Tobias Read on his appointment as Speaker of the Oregon House. I hope that as he assumes this new responsibility, he will lead his Democrat colleagues in a direction of common sense, fiscal responsibility and open-mindedness.

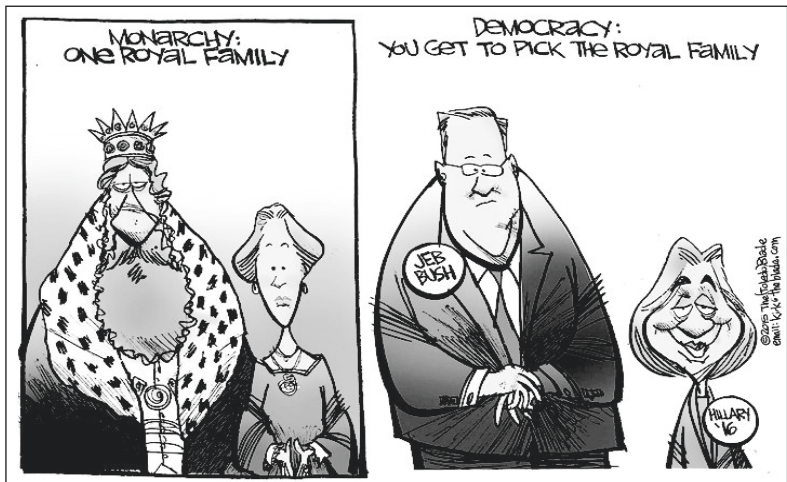
As I see it, the Democrats' legislative agenda ahead is fraught with status-quo tax and spending, leftist progressive thinking and misguided faux-crisis reactions which this state and its people, frankly, cannot afford. The proposed bills tied to Energy and Climate Change / Global Warming have to be considered within the framework of all the science that is out there and not just that science which has been cherry-picked by those who generate their living and financial stability by destabilizing our economy and information pools through outcome-oriented "science." (i.e. government agencies, academia and environmental activists and their attorneys)

Further, and extremely importantly, I hope he sees the necessity to move against the overreach of the federal government into the everyday issues that should be the responsibility of the states and the individuals within those sovereign states.

He needs to look at what the rest of the nation has recognized and mandated at the November 2014 elections and move Oregon out of the doldrums created by the Democrat-run politics of this state for the last 30 years. It hasn't worked and responsible, forward thinking Democrats are recognizing that.

I am a product of the once top-of-the-line education system in Oregon and know it can be that again if we look, not forward, but back at and emulate what made it great in the 1950s, '60s and '70s. It can be done!

Tim K. Smith
Harney County



Blue Mountain EAGLE

195 N. Canyon Blvd. • John Day, OR 97845
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MEMBER OREGON NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

PUBLISHER Marissa Williams, marissa@bmeagle.com
EDITOR Scotta Callister, editor@bmeagle.com
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Cheryl Hoefler, cheryl@bmeagle.com
COMMUNITY NEWS Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
SPORTS Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
MARKETING REP Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
CUSTOMER SERVICE REP Lindsay Bullock office@bmeagle.com

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