

# Bills should not be used as political pawns

In the end, it is a shame that a few Oregon lawmakers were forced to resort to a little-known, and hardly used, rule to get a bill that addresses criminal sexual contact off the ice and moving in the Legislature.

The legislation, Senate Bill 649 — also known as Bailey's Bill — boosts penalties for criminal sexual contact with an underage victim if the offender is the victim's teacher. The existing law delivers harsher penalties to a coach caught in the same situation as a teacher. The bill, named after Weston-McEwen student Bailey Munck, received easy approval in the Oregon Senate before it traveled to the House where, for reasons not clear, it stalled at the House Judiciary Committee.

The chair of the committee, Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Clackamas, "indicated" she was not going to give the bill a hearing, which prompted nine members of the judicial committee to invoke House Rule 8.20. The rule stipulates that, if a majority of committee members request a hearing in writing, the chair must set up a hearing within five days.

After invoking the rule, public hearings were held May 18 and May 24.

Bynum's reluctance to move the bill may be connected to political brinkmanship, where it was going to

be used as a bargaining chip regarding other legislation. Hopefully, that is incorrect. If it is not, then that should give readers — not to mention voters — pause.

A bill that addresses a subject as sensitive as criminal sexual contact should not be regulated to a mere chess piece on broader political chess board.

The lawmakers who pushed for the hearing should be lauded. Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Milwaukie, who navigated the bill through the Senate, also deserve praise.

Bailey's Bill should not have ended up stuck in limbo in a committee of the House. The bill, once it reached the House, should have been acted on immediately.

That it was not is troubling. The broader issue, though, is appropriate punishment for those who prey on our children. This bill will fix a glaring hole that seemingly gives instructors a lighter punishment when they, in fact, should receive the same penalty as coaches. It will close a dangerous loophole.

The other key piece of the bill is it has wide, bipartisan support. Currently, such unity among lawmakers is rare and when it occurs should be advanced as quickly as possible.

This time lawmakers did the right thing, and voters should be pleased.



GRADUATION 2021

## GUEST COMMENT

# Returning to normal

I am a 75-year-old veteran. I was raised, and spent most of my adult life, rural counties, including the past 25 years on Starr Ridge. On May 19, Coffee Time broadcast an interview with Bill Newman. I don't normally get involved in politics but was compelled to respond to that interview. Bill's primary concern seemed to be the governor's handling of the COVID-19 epidemic. He claimed it made no sense.

I would like to address Bill's claim to have reached out to the community for anyone who might support the mandates of the governor. I would ask how did you reach out? Did you announce the meeting on the radio or in the paper so people would know? Either of those would have reached me, yet I knew nothing of the meeting.

As to the raising and lowering of local restrictions, they are not arbitrary. The CDC has set guidelines based on cases per thousand population. Unfortunately, our population base is so small that one or two cases, plus or minus, over any given time period can dramatically affect the level of restriction. And why the restrictions, anyway? Why shut down or limit in-person dining? Why wear masks and maintain social distancing? And most importantly of all, why get vaccinated?

Bill offered in response a website at Johns-Hopkins where one could

compute the probability of dying from COVID. He claims the computer gave him a one in a million chance of dying from COVID-19. But this isn't about you, Bill. This is about us. All of us. And it isn't just about dying, though that is horrific enough in itself, it is about getting infected, because infected people transmit the disease. And the infection rate is much higher than one in a million. With a population just over 250 million and over 33 million infected, that works out to one in seven, not one in a million. And all these people are contagious. So are the uncounted thousands (millions?) that have the virus but show no symptoms.

The first concern of the CDC is to stop the spread of the disease. To do that they must consider not just the death rate but the infection rate. The problem is the virus can be transmitted by people who show no signs of it. All of the steps they have taken have been for that goal. To stop the spread of the virus.

I think the aspect of the restrictions that most concerns the average person on the street is the crippling effect on our local economies. But it is not the mandates and restrictions that have crippled our economies. It is the disease itself and its high level of contagion. You want the local business to return to normal? We cannot get back to nor-

mal until the disease is under control. And how best do we control the spread of the virus? Get vaccinated. Since the introduction of vaccinations, the rate of spread if the disease has decreased by 90%.

Finally, I must address a number of dubious statements Bill made, the first relating to his attempt to find a proponent of the mandates. He claims he could muster no attendee from the school district or the local government (Ron Lundbom excepted.) The basic story he received from "everyone" was "that the state government was threatening to close the schools and stop highway funding if someone even spoke out." That is a pretty serious accusation. His story would be more plausible if he had attached a few names of the "everybody" he had talked to. He also claimed that Doctor Fauci was making millions off the vaccine. On what does he base this? Has he seen the doctor's financial statements? Even the internet has not yet dared such an accusation.

Bill is right about one thing. We need to work together to return our country to its robust past. Get vaccinated. Wear a mask. Respect social distancing. The sooner we understand this the sooner everything will return to normal.

Robin Roberts resides in Canyon City.

## GUEST COMMENT

# Tough love

At a May 19 meeting at Grant County Fairgrounds, we heard about Project Turnkey, which had been quietly promoted by Community Counseling Services, Families First, other social service bureaucrats and a behind-the-scenes steering committee. The project focused on Dreamers Lodge, at the center of John Day on North Canyon Boulevard, as a transitional housing project. Project residents would have been persons on parole, veterans and those coming out of the criminal justice system, and to accommodate residents transitioning from Meredith House, the domestic abuse facility in John Day.

Project proponents stressed "local" residents, but it's a fact that people are sent to or come to Grant County from other places for social services, mental health care, welfare benefits, low-income housing and as a place where they can safely receive unemployment benefits because of limited employment options or jobs for which they are qualified. Sticking to "local" criteria would be challenging, especially to meet occupancy quotas. And where would these people transition to with such limited housing here?

How sensible would it be to place at-risk women and children (domestic abuse victims) next to parolees, and those with drug addiction — which seemed to be the main intended Project Turnkey residents?

And it's almost laughable that this came at a critical time when the city of John Day is uncertain if it can support a police department.

The million-dollar grant that was abandoned was taxpayer money with strings attached to people somewhere else holding flexible strings. Any project of this type would result in significant property tax revenue loss.

On short notice, I, along with more than 350 people, signed a petition to say no to this effort, which was presented to project organizers. The petition addressed to Grant County governments stated "We Demand No Homeless Transitional Living Project in John Day Neighborhoods and Business Districts."

We are told to be sensitive, compassionate, reach out. We heard from individuals and businesses doing just that; and we heard from those who have been helped by that support. I know for a fact that churches are quietly helping people in need. Grant County people as a whole continue to be very generous.

A bigger question begs: Where do we draw the line? When does helping someone become co-enabling? Most, if not all, of those who would be housed at a transitional housing facility are already receiving financial help and various support services. There are sometimes circumstances beyond someone's control, but for the most part,

it's a vicious cycle of bad behavior, poor life choices, being a danger to themselves and the general public, and continued government dependency. Consideration for pets and a place to garden — non-essentials — seems excessive. It's time for tough love. For those who really want to succeed there's already an active safety net with social service personnel seeking to and confident that they can help.

Where did all these desperate problems come from? Concerning the current drug epidemic on our doorstep, everyone should ask themselves:

Who supports or voted to legalize marijuana?

Who voted for a Grant County dispensary (John Day specifically)?

Who voted to tie the hands of law enforcement and courts to lessen consequences and penalties associated with possession and use of hard drugs like cocaine and heroin? And now meth is said to be the biggest drug problem in Grant County!

Decisions like this have contributed immensely to this huge problem. Now we have it. There is no easy answer. Expanded social services and transitional housing can't fix it, and may even open the door for bigger problems for this community.

Heather Swank is a John Day resident.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Not enough time for research

To the Editor:  
I am a long time resident and business owner here in John Day. I voted no on repurposing Dreamers Lodge into a transitional living facility. There is some rhetoric being passed around that is simply not true. I can speak for many of us that voted no. We are not people who are selfish and uncaring. In fact, it is quite the contrary. We

care about the community! That is why I was so passionate to pause this project. The majority of us were literally informed at the last minute. We did not have time to research the project for ourselves or find out specifics. Many of us learned more at the meeting and then immediately a vote was held. It was brought up that evening, Mosier's Furniture was just informed that day. They are in close proximity to the proposed project and were not informed in a timely manner.

I was not entirely opposed to what

Community Counseling Solutions is wishing to accomplish. However, the location was an issue to the neighbors in the residential area, and the area businesses had reservations. In the future, I hope that the community may have adequate time to ask questions and be a part of the solution. We have a compassionate community. On many occasions, we have gone above and beyond to help our fellow citizens.

Katrina Page John Day



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