

OTHER VIEWS

Feds not needed to police school board meetings

The National School Boards Association's definition of what might constitute domestic terrorism and hate crimes is awfully broad.

Broad enough, potentially, to encompass actions clearly protected by the First Amendment.

The Association recently sent a letter to President Joe Biden asking for federal law enforcement to help "deal with the growing number of threats of violence and acts of intimidation occurring across the nation." The letter reads, in part: "the classification of these heinous actions could be the equivalent to a form of domestic terrorism and hate crimes."

In response, U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland said the FBI would work with other federal, state and local agencies to "develop strategies against the threats," according to an Associated Press story.

Obviously it's not acceptable for people who are upset with school boards to escalate from verbal or written opposition to physical. But every state has criminal laws regarding assault. And most communities have police departments to deal with people who break those laws.

The School Boards Association offers no compelling evidence of a rash of violence against school boards that local officials aren't capable of handling, or that warrants federal involvement.

The letter to Biden cites an Illinois case in which a person was arrested for aggravated battery and disorderly conduct during a school board meeting. This, not surprisingly, was accomplished without the

involvement of the FBI or any other federal agency.

Other examples listed in the letter include school boards "confronted by angry mobs," an Alabama resident who called school administrators while videoing himself on Facebook Live, and a person who yelled a Nazi salute during a school board meeting in Michigan.

Some of this behavior sounds obnoxious. Some, as with the Nazi salute, is abhorrent.

But being part of an angry mob, or making videos of phone calls with public officials, or even yelling Nazi salutes, not only is unlikely to be criminal, but it's probably constitutionally protected speech.

This is not to suggest that people who are aggrieved by school board actions, or inactions, should seek to derail public meetings, even by nonviolent means such as shouting. This accomplishes nothing.

But the ultimate test of the First Amendment is not that it protects the soft-spoken and the reasonable. That's easy and uncontroversial. If the term "free speech" is to be anything other than an empty platitude, it must offer equal protection for the loud, the boorish and the purveyors of conspiracy theories, even if they cause school board meetings to last longer than they otherwise would, or expose members to uncomfortable diatribes.

In any case, the reality that disgruntled citizens attend public meetings is no cause for asking the most powerful law enforcement agency in the land to get involved.

Editor's note: This editorial originally appeared in the *Baker City Herald*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

County court needs better broadcasts

To the editor:

For several years I and others attended Grant County Court meetings and had the opportunity to become aware of issues before the court and at times comment. When COVID became an issue it became necessary to limit the number of people allowed in the room, and proceedings were broadcast thanks to the assistance of the Blue Mountain Eagle and their technology.

Likely the court will, due to COVID, continue to restrict the number of individuals allowed to physically attend court meetings. The alternative available for attendance is a continuation of broadcasting proceedings. Broadcasts of proceedings should afford to listeners the same level of involvement as experienced

by those physically present in the courtroom. Specifically, communication by anyone speaking should be sufficiently loud and clear so as to be understood. With the present method of broadcast, a speaker at the podium using the microphone can be understood; however, court member comments and comments from the audience are difficult to hear and difficult to understand. There also should be an established procedure to allow those participating via broadcast to make comments. The present system is unacceptable, and I am asking the court to address this matter first by acknowledging this letter and secondly by responding with a reasonable solution. Since COVID has created this issue, maybe there could be some COVID funds available to correct the problem. Just my thought!

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COMMENTARY

Oregon should pause Afghan resettlement



Richard F. LaMountain

In mid-August, three days after Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown proclaimed our state "ready to welcome any and all Afghans." Fifty-one of 55 Democratic legislators, who comprise supermajorities in the state House and Senate, issued letters declaring the same.

So it came as no small surprise when the White House informed Brown in mid-September that, of the initial nationwide distribution of 37,000 Afghan refugees, Oregon would receive 180.

Consider that number vis-a-vis other states'. Our neighbors to the north and south, Washington and California, were allocated 1,679 and 5,255, respectively. Kentucky, whose population approximates Oregon's, got almost five times our number (850). Even reliably-red Oklahoma — every one of whose 77 counties voted for Donald Trump over Joe Biden in 2020 — netted 1,800.

Will Oregon's leaders now — believing an allotment of "only" 180 refugees slights our state's reputation as (in Brown's words) "a welcoming and inclusive place" — implore the Biden administration to send us far more?

Most likely. What they should do, however, is remove their "woke" blinders, look unflinchingly at Oregon's current predicament, and objectively consider the impact a mass influx of Afghan refugees would have on the citizens of an already-overstressed state.

Even before Afghanistan fell, Oregon was beset by multiple crises. Since the pandemic's start, more than a third of a million Oregonians have contracted COVID; as of last week, some 1,400 new cases still were being

reported each day. In our biggest city, crime has exploded; between January and August 2021, Portland already had seen more murders than in any entire year since 1994. And rural communities continue to

rebuild from the summer's devastating wildfires, which consumed hundreds of thousands of acres. Stretched, already, to the breaking point, need Oregonians' leaders volunteer them for yet another costly challenge?

Most harmed by a mass infusion of Afghan refugees would be Oregon's poorest. Statewide, reports the National Low Income Housing Coalition, there is a shortage of almost 99,000 rental homes available to what it terms "extremely low-income households, whose incomes are at or below the poverty guideline or 30 percent of their area median income." Should Gov. Brown and her Democratic colleagues force poor U.S. citizens to compete with thousands more destitute Afghans for our already-scarce low-income housing?

And however uncomfortable it may make them, Brown et al should take a clear, unbiased look at the Afghans themselves.

Between 2008 and 2012, the Pew Research Center surveyed residents of Muslim countries, including Afghanistan. (During those years, remember, Afghanistan had a pro-U.S. government and American personnel were working to imbue its people with democratic values.) What Pew discovered:

Ninety-nine percent of Afghans surveyed believed sharia should be the

law of the land. Eighty-five percent believed sharia should sanction the stoning of adulterers. And 61 percent believed sharia should govern not just Muslims, but non-Muslims.

Considered "sometimes" justifiable were suicide bombings (by 39 percent of Afghans polled) and "honor" killings of female family members who had engaged in extramarital sex (by 60 percent).

Crime? In Europe, resident Afghans commit disproportionate numbers of violent offenses. In Austria, for example, a 2018 government report, summarized by the Center for Immigration Studies' Jason Richwine, found that "Afghans' overall crime rate is seven times higher than the rate of Austrians, and that Afghans commit rape at an astonishing 22 times the Austrian rate."

Given all this, how likely are Afghans, as a whole, to assimilate seamlessly into Oregon communities?

Rather than plead for more Afghan refugees for our state, Brown and her colleagues should urge the Biden Administration to seek to resettle them in Central Asian nations — especially Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which border Afghanistan directly, share its cultural attributes and, collectively, have received billions in U.S. aid.

Since 1975, Oregon has welcomed some 70,000 refugees — which testifies mightily to our character and compassion. But given our already-numerous challenges and the problematic values, beliefs and behaviors of so many Afghans, our state, today, must say no to more.

Richard F. LaMountain, a resident of Mt. Vernon, is a former assistant editor of Conservative Digest magazine.

COMMENTARY

Keeping elk on public land

Where are all the elk?

It's a common question heard every fall around campfires and wood cookstoves in the Blue Mountains. Hunters share any number of theories about why they can't find elk: too many predators, too many hunters, too many motor vehicles, not enough (or too much) logging, too much cattle grazing, bad herd management — the list is long and imaginative.

The Blue Mountains have the potential for some of the world's best quality habitat for Rocky Mountain elk. There are about 55,000 elk in the Blue Mountains, and in most areas the herds are near the state's management objectives. So why do some hunters have a hard time finding elk? As is often the case, it's not about numbers, it's about distribution.

Elk like to be where they can find good habitat without being disturbed. Traditionally elk would spend the spring, summer and fall in the Blue Mountains, where they found cooler temperatures and shade, plentiful water and lush forage. With the arrival of winter snow, they migrated to lower elevations, only to repeat the cycle in the spring and follow the green-up into the hills.

But some elk in the Blues have changed their habits to avoid public land, spending more time on lower-elevation private lands, where hunters and motorized vehicles don't disturb them. By the time elk rifle season rolls around, the elk have been pushed around for several months by bowhunters and deer hunters and in increasing numbers they have moved off public lands to get the security they

crave, well before the winter snow.

Private landowners greet this development in a variety of ways. Some are pleased just to see elk on their land. Some want elk so that their family and friends can hunt, and some are finding ways to monetize this public resource by charging for hunting and/or access on their property. And some landowners want no elk on their land because elk eat the same feed as domestic livestock and have a habit of destroying fences.



Bill Aney

I maintain that we need a way to hold more elk on public lands through the fall. This is good for public land hunters, obviously, but it also would reduce conflicts with agricultural interests. I also confess that I don't like the idea of private landowners selling the rights to hunt native wildlife when those animals should be on public lands.

How do we keep them there? The science is known — and it's local. Projects completed on the La Grande Ranger District have demonstrated how managing vegetation and reducing disturbance from motor vehicles can turn around this problematic migration pattern. Forest thinning and prescribed burning creates quality feeding areas that are especially attractive to elk in the late summer and fall when they are trying to put on the calories for winter.

But quality feed is useless to elk if they are constantly disturbed by motor vehicles. With over 4,500 miles of roads on the Umatilla

National Forest, elk often abandon areas used by cars, pickups, ATVs, motorcycles and the like. Fortunately, the Umatilla National Forest has a travel management plan that identifies only a subset of these roads as open to motor vehicles, with the remainder closed for all or part of the year.

This is a good thing for elk as it improves habitat security and can ultimately increase public land elk hunting opportunities when elk relearn to stay on public lands later in the fall.

However, this requires that we all know what roads are open to traffic and which are closed, and follow the plan. A new cooperative venture between the Forest Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Oregon State University Extension Service should help. The effort will be highlighted in the 2022 big game hunting season synopsis, as well as on signboards at National Forest entry points and in printed brochures and downloadable digital maps.

In the meantime, elk hunters need to learn which roads are closed to motor vehicles in their hunting area and commit to driving only on open roads. The Forest Service Motor Vehicle Use Maps are available for free download on their website and paper copies in the forest offices.

We also need to be supportive of forest thinning and prescribed burning projects, recognizing that the high-quality habitat that results will attract and hold more elk and improve the odds for public land hunters.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

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