

## **Editorial: Huffman soars in right direction**

Rep. John Huffman, R-The Dalles, has been headed in the right direction since the shift from military use of drones to civilian applications began several years ago.

Concerned about balancing proactive use of the growing industry with people's privacy, Huffman formed a special work group to research issues three years ago.

Seated on the panel were law enforcement officials, prosecutors, defense attorneys, civil rights advocates, aviation officials and industry representatives.

They have since been meeting to discuss issues related to drones and storage of data obtained through electronic surveillance.

In 2013, Huffman crafted a bill to stop government entities from excessive snooping. Authorities are now required to get a warrant before using a drone to monitor someone's activities. There are exceptions for imminent threats.

Huffman's legislation also negated the possibility of police arming drones at a time when there is interest among agencies in rigging them with rubber rounds and tear gas.

The bill also stripped from local governments the authority to pass rules or ordinances regarding drones, reserving that power solely for the Legislature.

That prevented what Huffman believed would be an inconsistent "patchwork" of regulations that could harm the state's economic development potential.

Huffman will return to the legislature in 2016 to further strengthen the rules regarding use of small, remote-controlled aircraft.

Under consideration will be regulations for information sharing between law enforcement and other state agencies that are not required to follow warrant restrictions.

The Chronicle strongly supports Huffman's intent to stop hobby drones used by citizens from being weaponized.

During a recent interview, Huffman said he was inspired to take action after seeing a YouTube video made by an 18-year-old Connecticut engineering student that showed a drone firing a semi-automatic handgun.

Huffman also rightfully plans to seek penalties for drone owners who interfere with manned aircraft.

This problem gained media attention after drones interfered in the flights of several planes carrying water or retardant to battle wildfires this summer.

New rules are also likely to be adopted that prohibit flying near chemical plants, dams, prisons (a drone owner attempted a contraband drop earlier this year) and energy facilities.

Huffman has also undertaken to educate people about the rules regarding drone use in order to keep up with federal law and technology changes in the unmanned aircraft field.

He said reports that an unmanned aerial vehicle had been flown over the Columbia River to capture footage of last year's July 4 fireworks display is an example of the lack of understanding the law.

It is illegal, said Huffman, to fly over the Columbia because the river is a federally navigable waterway, unless the drone operator has first gotten permission from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

There are also strict security rules for flying within a certain distance from airports and near some federally controlled facilities, such as The Dalles Dam.

On the civilian side, Huffman said are a growing number of complaints about drones invading people's privacy by hovering over backyards or outside windows.

Although it is a crime to shoot down or vandalize a drone that is flying overhead, even on private property, Huffman warns that people who are reckless with the devices can be fined for endangering people and property.

It is comforting to know that Huffman and others are looking out for the best interests of citizens.

And that Legislators are trying to craft standards that do not impede proactive use of drones for research and recreational purposes.

We can all help reduce the need for more laws if we follow rules established by the Federal Aviation Administration, which is expected to require that all unmanned aircraft users register for accountability purposes in the near future.

That will allow authorities to track the aircraft back to the owner in the event they do something unsafe or illegal.

Here are the FAA guidelines:

- Don't intentionally fly over unprotected persons or moving vehicles, and remain at least 25 feet away from people and vulnerable property.
- Contact the airport or control tower before flying within five miles of an airport.
- Do not fly near crowds or stadiums unless you have authorization to do so.
- Do not fly in adverse weather conditions, such as high winds or reduced visibility.
- Do not fly under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Do not fly near or over sensitive infrastructure or property, such as power stations, water treatment facilities, correctional facilities, heavily travelled roadways, government buildings, etc.
- Check and follow all local laws and ordinances before flying over private property.
- Do not conduct surveillance or photograph persons in areas where there is an expectation of privacy without permission.

Using a drone to take pictures for personal use is different than taking photos or videos for compensation. The FAA regulates commercial use of drones on a case-by-case basis.

It is important for people to be good neighbors with air space the same as on the ground.

We commend Rep. Huffman for striving to find the balance between so many interests with this new phase in American technology.