

O P I N I O N

Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address, and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond, or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is 10 a.m. Monday.

Coping with COVID

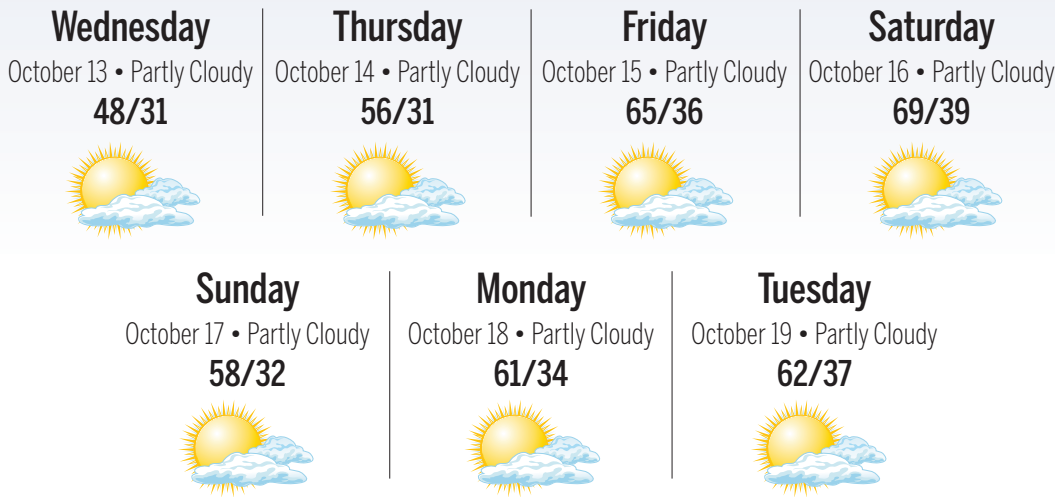
Editor's Note: The Nugget will pause letters to the editor on COVID-19-related subjects for a couple of weeks, after this edition. The community needs a cooling-off period. Letters we have been receiving in recent weeks are becoming increasingly personal and hostile,

and generate more heat than light. The subject has been thoroughly addressed from a variety of points of view, and it seems unlikely at this point that the discourse will provide new information or perspectives for readers.

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Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon



The Nugget Newspaper, LLC

Website: www.nuggetnews.com
 442 E. Main Ave., P.O. Box 698, Sisters, OR 97759
 Tel: 541-549-9941 | Email: editor@nuggetnews.com



Postmaster: Send address changes to
The Nugget Newspaper,
P.O. Box 698, Sisters, OR 97759.
Third Class Postage Paid at Sisters, Oregon.

Editor in Chief: Jim Cornelius
Production Manager: Leith Easterling
Creative Director: Jess Draper
Community Marketing Partner: Vicki Curlett
Classifieds & Circulation: Beth Jacobsen
Proofreader: Kit Tosello
Owner: J. Louis Mullen

The Nugget is mailed to residents within the Sisters School District; subscriptions are available outside delivery area. Third-class postage: one year, \$60; six months (or less), \$35. First-class postage: one year, \$105; six months, \$75.

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If at first you don't secede...

By **Jim Cornelius**
 Editor in Chief

A couple of weeks ago, The Nugget published a very sad letter from a man mourning the death of his oldest friend, a loss made more painful because the friends had become estranged.

Over politics. It's hard to understand blowing up a relationship like that. My nature is to bring people together. Lately, that's been harder and harder to do, and I'll tell you, I grow weary of the effort. So many people have lost all perspective. I doubt whether conciliation is even possible anymore.

The University of Virginia (UVA) Center for Politics published polling data* that points to a stark conclusion: A whole lot of Americans want a divorce from one another. The most startling finding is that "roughly 4 in 10 (41 percent) of Biden and half (52 percent) of Trump voters at least somewhat agree that it's time to split the country, favoring blue/red states seceding from the union."

Americans increasingly see political differences as irreconcilable, reflected in the 75 percent of Biden voters and 78 percent of Trump voters who see those who ardently support the opposing party as a "clear and present danger to the American way of life." (43 percent of Biden voters and 47 percent of Trump voters believe this "strongly.")

That's the language of civil war. Of course, a lot of it is just talk. But civil wars don't start with one big explosion; there's a long powder train laid down by hostile rhetoric and the demonizing of the political and cultural "other." If we do slide into some kind of civil war, it's liable to look a lot more like the chaotic English Civil Wars of 1642-1651 than our own North/South struggle of the 1860s.

In the English conflict, political tension — largely over taxation — between Parliamentarians and an autocratic King Charles II was overlaid with profound religious contention between Puritans and High Church Anglicans. Conspiracy theories abounded, primarily around Puritan fears of a secret plot for a Catholic takeover of Protestant England. Political adversaries became enemies, and enemies were called heretics. There could be no compromise.

Agitators worked hard to make it impossible to reconcile. Swords were drawn, cannon unlimbered, and the realm was plunged into an abyss. Families and communities were ripped apart by conflicting allegiances. As so often happens in revolutionary situations, the Puritans who cut off the head of the high-handed and foolish King Charles II in 1649 replaced his rule with a harsher, more dictatorial regime than he ever dreamed of.

Change the stage dressing to make things contemporary, and they are us. UVA Center for Politics poll finds that "more than two-thirds support — and one-third strongly — emboldening and empowering strong leaders and taking the law into their own hands when it comes to dealing with people or groups they view as dangerous." Do we really want a Cromwell — a "Lord Protector"?

Talk about an existential threat to the American way of life.

This is on us. All of us. The greatest peril we face comes from darkness we carry within: Self-righteous certainty that we hold the truth and those who dissent are either stupid or malevolent. The lure of conspiracy theory that "explains" all things that cause us fear and anxiety. The impulse to empower a self-appointed Witchfinder General to sniff out heresy. The petty satisfaction that comes with seeing some sinner clapped in the stocks in the town square...

We can choose a different path. We can unplug from the social media and cable TV that both feeds and feeds on those dark impulses. We can talk to each other — about anything except the plague and politics. Talk about that magical hike or that wonderful musical experience. Share that spectacular meal or that fantastic piece of art at the gallery in town...

We can reach out to that old friend or family member from whom we've become estranged — not to convince them of anything, not to prove them wrong, but simply to tell them that they matter to us, that our differences ultimately don't mean so much.

And I will strive to keep my faith, to believe that it's possible to bridge divides. It's better than dying estranged.

*<https://bit.ly/UVAPoll>

Views expressed in this column are solely those of the writer and are not necessarily shared by the Editor or The Nugget Newspaper.



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Got a great photo of life in Sisters Country?
 Send your high-resolution photo to editor@nuggetnews.com.