

Americans don't waffle over chances to gather

■ **OUR OPINION:** America comes together over diverse celebrations

If you have an unexplainable desire for pancakes today, don't panic. You're probably just suffering from residual aftereffects of a recent seven-day celebration.

In case you missed it, last week was National Pancake Week — a noble tribute to one of America's favorite breakfast foods. Yep. Short-stack lovers from Bangor, Maine to Astoria, Ore., had National Pancake Day (on Feb. 20) to flip those floppy flapjacks out of the frying pan and into their mouths.

The peculiar week is one example out of many, from the whimsical to the serious, that the U.S. finds itself celebrating throughout the year.

But why?

It is one way for us to have some silly, harmless fun (or pay respect to a cause or person), in spite of our uptight, fast-paced and problematic society. And maybe it's nice to get behind a holiday that means absolutely nothing in the overall scheme of things.

Perhaps the most important reason we spend any amount of time on these sometimes shallow celebrations is that, particularly now in a time in which our country is fractured in a million different ways for just as many reasons, celebrating anything often has the wonderful side effect of actually bringing people together.

And even if we are able to socialize, communicate, and share our experiences only for a single day, over something perhaps as insignifi-

cant as a pancake, it's worth it.

Pennsylvanians stand in the cold, drinking hot chocolate and laughing together, to wait for a woodchuck to wiggle out of his home on Groundhog Day (Feb. 2) to determine how much longer winter will be hanging around.

This year, the fuzzy little forecaster saw his shadow and predicted several more weeks of winter.

February is also Black History Month — a time to remember and celebrate African-American contributions to this land. March is Women's History and Asian Awareness Month. Johnny Appleseed Day is March 11.

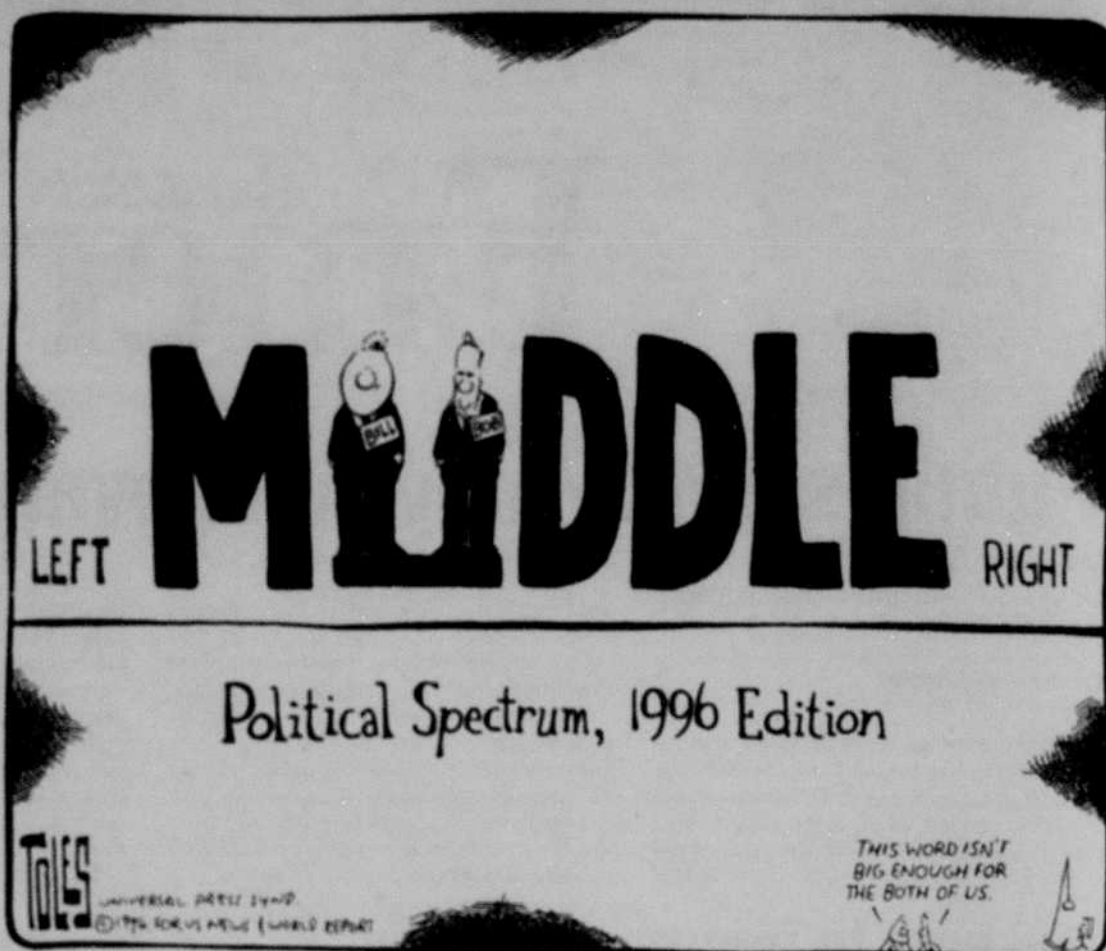
In April, Native American Month, we also remember Holocaust victims and celebrate Earth Day. May gives us Mother's Day and Armed Forces Day, and June has Father's Day and Flag Day.

August 13 is International Left-Handers Day, and Women's Equality Day is 13 days later. Sept. 9 is Public Lands Day, followed by National Grandparents Day and the International Day of Peace on Sept. 19.

October is loaded with fun stuff: Leif Eriksson Day, National Grouch Day, United Nations Day and Dictionary Day. Nov. 3 is National Sandwich Day (peanut butter and jelly anyone?) and Dec. 1 is set aside in remembrance for those who suffer from the horrible disease: World AIDS Day.

These days do bring us closer to each other while giving us a break from the same old same old.

Don't worry if you missed pancake week. Could you please pass the butter and syrup?



Eek! Pat could be president; vote for Bob

In two weeks Oregon's presidential primary will have come and gone. As a registered Democrat, I will have had no say in the outcome, but I will watch them with bated breath just the same.

Recently a friend of a friend said, "I don't care; it doesn't affect me." She was referring to not only the primary but the election in general. I could be more upset with her apathy if it were not so easy to feel that way. After all, what can one college student do to affect the outcome of a national election, and why should he or she want to anyway?

Just looking at Pat Buchanan helps me shake off whatever apathy has managed to install itself within me.

For a man who hails ("heils" may be more fitting) as a conservative moderate, he has walked the walk of the right-wing extremist for as long as I can remember. When George Bush was in the White House, he feared Buchanan. I can't blame him. Buchanan terrified me while Reagan was president.

So, I'm at a loss. This one man has caused me to praise the voters I once referred to as lunatics.

You know, those people who are convinced that it is *their* vote that puts a candidate over the top or stops a bill from passing.

They have the last word on representation, taxes and social policies. Some of them are so convinced that they have an effect on the elections that they register as members of the party they hate just to screw with the primary system.

Here's their "logic": If they vote for the other party's worst candidate, that candidate will win the primary. Then, that candidate will compete against the candidate they want to win the election. In the general election, they vote for their real favorite candidate. This pulls much-needed support from the candidate they helped nominate, and their real candidate wins.

This seems a little screwy, but I hope this is happening now. After all, it could make sense. Oregon Democrats have no reason to vote in the primary.

Since the Republican primary first started picking up speed, I have supported Buchanan. His impossible flat-tax thrilled me. The support of prayer in schools made me dizzy with delight. I couldn't decide which tickled my fancy more — banning all abortions or putting a 200-mile-long fence along the Mexican-American border. Even the concerns connecting him with anti-Semitism were delicious.

Here was one man I could count on. He made it clear that he wouldn't sell out; he would change a more accepting democracy into a hate-filled anarchy.

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How could Clinton lose? But then it hit me. What if Buchanan became president? I almost lost my lunch. How could my dream sour so quickly? Could my great prediction end with a die-hard right-winger in the White House?

With the primary system as it is, Buchanan could be the next president. Oregon is a progressive state regarding primary elections. As long as a candidate gets 10 percent of the popular vote, he or she gets at least one delegate.

But it doesn't work that way everywhere. In many states, the candidate who wins the state gets all of the delegates (see California's 163 delegates and Ohio's 67).

Even assuming that only 25 percent of Republicans line up behind Buchanan, Bob Dole, Lamar Alexander and Steve Forbes could split the remaining 75 percent enough to hand Buchanan the nomination.

What good will that do? It's either four more for Clinton/Gore, or the right wing takes over.

But there's an escape from this dichotomous trap: Vote stealers Forbes and Alexander should drop out of the race before it's too late.

Alexander is a great candidate, but he doesn't have the money or the moxie to pull off an election of this kind. With funds less than half the size of Dole's, the only thing Alexander's presence guarantees is a split-vote that will hurt the Republican party's chances of seeing the White House on more than a tour.

If the three-way race doesn't end soon, come November the new president will either be a returning Democrat or a not-so-dyed-in-the-wool Republican. Either way, the moderate Republican majority will be the real losers.

Buchanan followers have labeled Dole as a compromiser. Yet, we have learned that compromise is necessary (see the government shutdown) and a skill that Dole should be lauded for.

Only a moderate, be he Republican or Democrat, can truly represent America and lessen the bipartisanship. I am encouraging Republicans to vote for Dole in the primary. He may not be the voice of a new generation, but he comes closest to representing us all.

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Oregon Daily Emerald

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The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. A member of the Associated Press, the Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union.

Unsigned editorials represent the opinion of the Emerald editorial board; signed columns represent the opinion of the columnist.

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