

Americans must be open to listening

Guest commentary

America is suffering a slow and terrible illness — paralysis by polarization.

It is as if our society has split into parallel realities, living side by side in different worlds, unwilling to converge. But not unable. By rediscovering that the common interests of a nation's people always outnumber and outweigh the uncommon ones, we can then begin to reverse our worsening paralysis before it becomes terminal.

We know our uncommon interests: the doctrine of pre-emptive war, the rights of the unborn and the degree of separation desired between church and state. Of course there are others, though none so bitterly divisive.

We must also recognize and celebrate our common interests: the passion for our country, the generosity for helping others, the concern for the future of our children and the desire for peace in the world. In some ways, our bounty is our curse.

In this land of plenty, we are not forced to work together out of necessity or thrift. Our ignorance of each other misleads us into assigning easy categorizations: "liberal" or "conservative," "radical" or "war monger." We paint those who disagree with us into absurdly extreme corners in our mind, and never allow them to come out and be heard.

Americans are thus increasingly paying lip service to the ideals of

democracy. A democracy invites and tolerates the clash of opinions and understands its obligation to search for common ground. Indeed, a democracy knows its very survival depends upon it. A democracy recognizes that there are intelligent people supporting each side of every issue. Every truth has an answering truth.

There exists no issue facing us truly as simple as a choice between two absolutes: "good" versus "evil," "right" versus "wrong," "for us or against us." Finding common ground requires, first and foremost, releasing our anger; it must be let go, it is doing us no good.

The clenched fist is the extension of the closed mind. Common ground is reached only through a willingness to listen with a mind that is open. By listening, one permits the possibility of being listened to.

Discussions must be engaged with positive discourse, and a mutual intention to reveal perspectives not previously seen. Perspectives must be offered in the manner that a teacher explains a new concept, not as a soldier defends a barricade.

Facing an uncertain future, Americans must not confuse security with peace. Authentic peace is attainable only by searching for common ground and discovering our common interests.

The time available is not infinite — we must begin our journey today.

Todd Huffman is a pediatrician in Eugene.

Auditions

On June 9 and 10, University Theatre will audition actors for two productions that will rehearse and perform during fall quarter. Call 346-4171 or visit 216 Villard for information regarding scripts and audition appointments.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

guest director: Rob Urbinati

The Dale Wasserman adaptation of the novel by Ken Kesey, to be produced as part of the Ken Kesey Symposium. Urbinati is a free-lance professional based in New York City.

There are roles for four women and twelve men, including one very tall, very strong native American man.

Desdemona

graduate student director: Stephen Rupsch

A response to Shakespeare's *Othello* by Pulitzer Prize-winning Paula Vogel, the author of *How I Learned to Drive*.


There are roles for three women.

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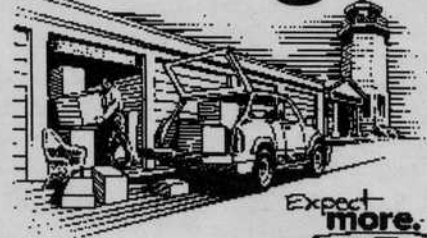
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