

**GUEST EDITORIAL FROM
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE**

Tweens may not need you now, but they'll come around

They spend a few long minutes in front of the mirror making sure their hair is combed, their clothes match and their jewelry is in place. From the hallway, I watch the preening with a tight smile and no small measure of wistfulness. Those carefree days of childhood, I realize with a pang, are crowding fast into the rearview mirror.

But then, not more than a half hour later, my granddaughters transition from the self-conscious act of grooming to something more mundane but no less important. They're happily playing house with their younger sister, lining up a collection of little wooden frogs and giving each a distinct voice and a special role.

The twins, my oldest grandchildren at 11 (and don't forget the half!), are well-ensconced in that spot I call "The In-Between": not yet teenagers, but not quite little girls either. It's a quicksandy kind of place, with shifting allegiances, evolving friendships and more than a few bouts of drama. They are, by all accounts, official tweens, steady voyagers in the switchbacked path from childhood to adolescence. It happens when puberty begins its long stroll to the porch but before its fateful knock at the front door.

One day tweens are all about doing things for themselves. The next they cling like infants. One hour they're giggling, the next they've turned as dark and angry as the summer sky before a thunderstorm. It's a tumultuous trip, one that will only get more frantic with higher highs and lower lows.

Of course, some changes are gradual but also more enduring. Many children begin to shed their baby fat and display the leaner lines of adulthood. With others the opposite happens; a rawboned figure starts to flesh out into curves. It's a metamorphosis we all experience, some sooner, some later, and it's that unpredictable timeline that often determines the pecking order at school.

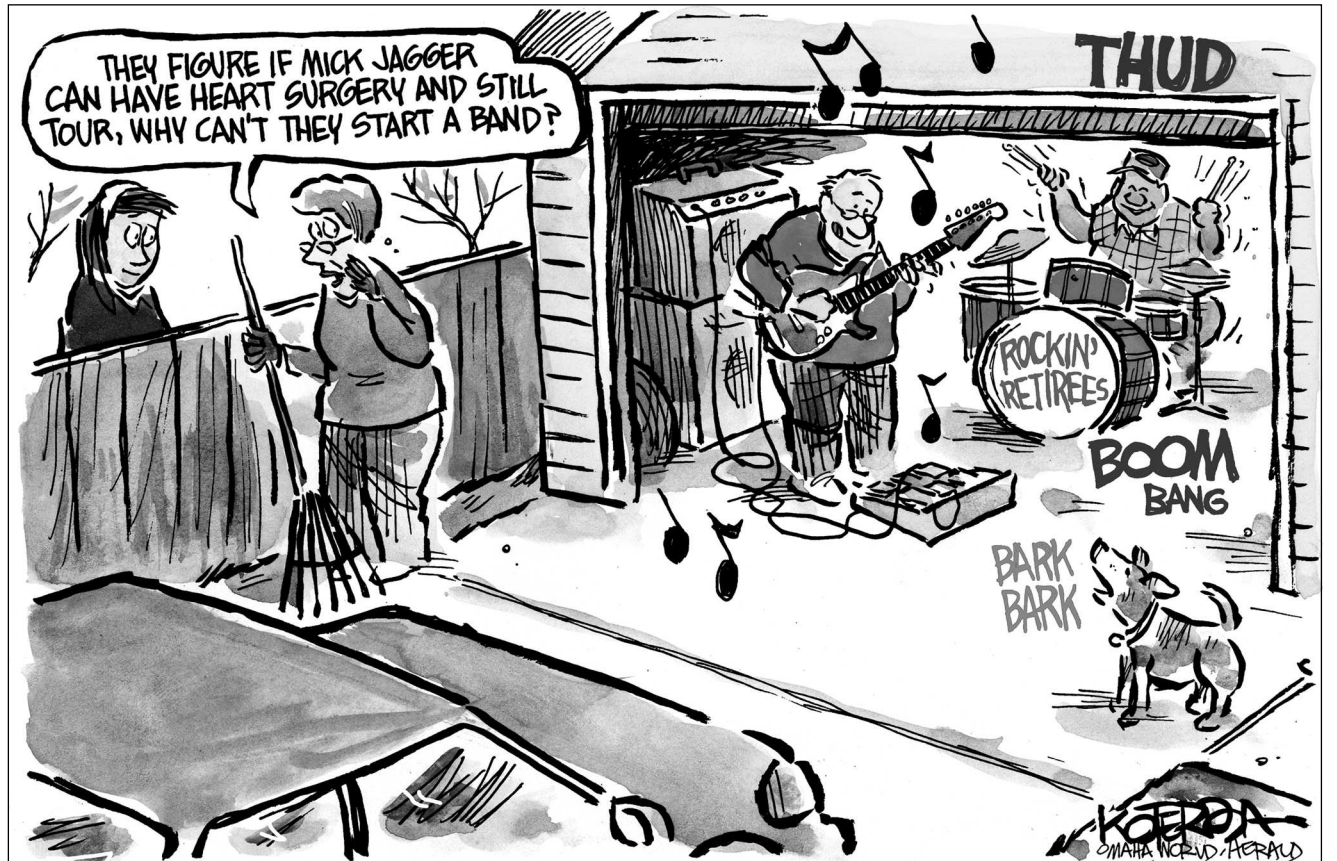
For girls, body changes in tweenhood seem to happen overnight — or at least that's what it feels like for grandparents. When the twins were introduced to training bras, I acknowledged this passage with surprise and amusement. That feeling, however, slipped into sadness, a sense that life was moving too fast. Whatever happened to those bald babies I rocked to sleep just yesterday?

Along with the fascinating undergarments come the dreaded (and mortifying) breakouts of acne, which, in turn, mean more time in the bathroom because pimples require elaborate face-washing and lotion-applying. And lest I forget late tweenhood also brings other changes: mutating sleep habits, an out-sized interest in who likes whom, a sudden desire for privacy, the haranguing for cellphones, the eye-rolling and the "whatevers," the painful realization that parents — and by extension grandparents — don't know everything. Actually, we likely know nothing.

Soon enough they won't allow me any public displays of affection, especially not in front of friends. Soon enough, too, the National Geographic videos I show them won't be so interesting. Soon enough the news stories about space, about dinosaurs, about new inventions and old civilizations will be vanquished by Snapchat and TikTok.

Oh, so many changes — my heart can hardly bear them.

But I will and I must, even as I ache with the knowledge that separation is necessary, detachment inevitable. Having been here before, having survived it with their father, makes me hold on to our moments together with a fierce faith that this is only a phase, only a short step in a long road that eventually winds its way back home.



Encouraging rural broadband investment is the key to bridging the digital divide

Recent advancements in technology have brought faster broadband speeds and greater capabilities for connecting to the internet. Access to high-speed internet is transformative, offering new possibilities for education, agriculture and public safety. While this progress is good, the ongoing debate over net neutrality ultimately threatens the investments that are necessary to ensure rural and other underserved communities gain access and reap all of the social and economic benefits of high-speed connectivity.

Oregon is no exception. There still exists a digital divide between rural and urban areas, and in some rural areas of Oregon, up to 50 percent of homes are not connected to the internet.

Encouraging rural broadband investment is the key to bridging this digital divide and improving rural connectivity, and while the debate over net neutrality has raged for years, a firm solution has yet to be reached.

In rural Oregon, small Internet Service Providers are working to connect all communities but are especially vulnerable to the

impact of national policies. With the implementation of the FCC's 2015 net neutrality rule that regulated internet service as a utility, local ISPs like Eastern Oregon Telecom were forced to direct their focus away from broadband deployment in favor of regulatory reporting and compliance. In 2017, this heavy-handed rule was repealed by the current FCC, but the uncertainty of whether it could be re-instated again is enough to stifle investment.

Last week, the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Communications and Technology approved the Save the Internet Act (H.R. 1644). If passed, this bill would return us to regulation of the 2015 net neutrality rule. U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River), the committee's Ranking Member, rightly opposed the bill saying "we can permanently address blocking, throttling, and paid prioritization in a bipartisan way because we all believe in an open and free internet. We believe in net neutrality."

Rep. Walden has consistently shown leader-



**My Voice
ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Tom Gurr is the executive director of The Pacific Technology Alliance, a coalition of technology leaders, rural and urban organizations and trade groups working to promote public policies that foster choice and access to technology for consumers across the Northwest. My Voice columns reflect the views of the author only. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

ship and a willingness to support the best policies to allow broadband investment to grow. And there is broad bi-partisan support for prohibiting activities like blocking, throttling, and paid prioritization, and ensuring transparency in network management practices and prices. H.R. 1644 goes far beyond ensuring these principles and would allow for the nearly unchecked regulation of the internet, a dangerous policy that would impact the willingness of ISPs to invest in new networks for consumers.

Crafting a law that cements the principles of the open internet is an important step, but broadband must be classified as an information ser-

vice not regulated as a utility. This will avoid the regulatory back-and-forth and provide the certainty necessary to incentivize the critical investments to close the divide for rural Oregonians.

Oregon should be proud of the work that Rep. Walden is doing to close the digital divide. With a broad, bi-partisan approach to codifying the principles of net neutrality, Congress can continue to encourage broadband investment — the key to ensuring rural areas have the latest internet technologies. As Rep. Walden said, net neutrality doesn't need harmful, heavy-handed regulation, "all it needs is a Congress willing to work together on a solution."

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