

Common Good

August anniversaries: nuclear war and voting rights

August includes anniversaries related to major challenges directly affecting lives of all Oregonians — nuclear war and voting rights. The final words of U.S. Rep. John Lewis are key to defending democracy, voting rights and peace: “Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble.”

As children of the 1940s and ’50s my five sisters and I were taught to defend ourselves by ducking and covering under our school desks, huddling in the interior halls of our schools or sheltering outside in roadside ditches. Basements in public buildings were stocked with water and crackers and identified as fallout shelters by yellow and black metal signs.

COMMON GOOD



BILL WHITAKER
LA GRANDE

Aug. 6 and Aug. 9 mark the 75th anniversaries of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. An estimated 130,000-280,000 people died there. Fallout shelters

would have been useless.

During the Cold War several incidents (for example, mis-identifying flying geese as Russian missiles) could have resulted in disaster. During 13 tense days in October 1962, President John. F. Kennedy faced off with Nikita Khrushchev over Soviet missiles being installed in Cuba. The world teetered on the brink of nuclear war. We wondered if each day might be our last.

The crisis was resolved when Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles and Kennedy promised not to invade Cuba and agreed to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey.

Pressured in part by the civil disobedience of the anti-nuclear movement, the U.S. and USSR/Russia have held talks aimed at avoiding “mutually assured destruction.” SALT I dramatically reduced both nations’ nuclear stockpiles. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, negotiated by Ronald Reagan and ratified 93-6 by the U.S. Senate (May 28, 1988), required the United States and the Soviet Union to verifiably eliminate all ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers — 2,692 missiles were destroyed. INF led directly to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) that further reduced Russian and American nuclear arsenals by one-third.

Since then both sides accused the other of violating the INF. President Donald Trump withdrew from the INF (Aug. 2, 2019). The only remaining limit on U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals is New START signed by President Barack Obama. With the treaty due to expire Feb. 5, 2021, Russia supported a five-year extension. Trump characterized the treaty as an Obama deal favorable to Russia and demanded a new three-way treaty including China. China is not interested. New START will expire unless Biden is elected.

The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists’ “Doomsday Clock” measures the risk that nuclear weapons will be used. On Jan. 1, 2020, in response to worldwide governmental dysfunction in dealing with global threats, the hands on the clock were moved to 100 seconds to midnight, the highest level of risk since 1945. That was before the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Another major challenge commemorated in August involves voting rights. Aug. 6 also is the 55th anniversary of the Voting Right Act, and Aug. 18 is the centenary of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution stating the right to vote “shall not be abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” Neither the 19th Amendment nor the Voting Rights Act could have been passed had there not been massive mobilizations and civil disobedience, without supporters willing to risk arrest, jail and mistreatment by police and government officials.

The Voting Rights Act was crippled seven years ago by the Supreme Court moving against voting rights after Republican U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell prevented President Obama from appointing a justice during the final months of his presidency. Republicans are trying to suppress voting by persons likely to vote for Democrats by limiting access to voting by mail (thus forcing voters to risk exposure to COVID-19 by voting in person), gerrymandering congressional districts, reducing numbers of voting locations, requiring voter photo identification, purging voter rolls and spreading lies about voter fraud.

I agree with John Lewis that voting and participating in the democratic process are powerful agents of nonviolent change. I believe each of us must embrace “good trouble, necessary trouble” as we help build what Martin Luther King Jr. called “the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself.”

About the Author

Bill Whitaker lives in La Grande. He is professor emeritus of social welfare at Boise State University. He taught community organizing, social policy and planning for 40 years.



Letters

Legal, taxable product should be allowed to work for us

I am writing to raise awareness for the growing amount of tax revenue bypassing La Grande and Union County on a regular basis.

We are currently losing out on our fair share of this money because of the choice to disallow the lawful sale of recreational cannabis. This aggravates and unnecessarily complicates the lives of a growing number of our local residents and numerous visitors who simply seek to purchase a legal, taxable product — no different, now, than gas, groceries, alcohol and tobacco.

Each year, the state redistributes tax revenue from its lucrative cannabis industry back to those — and only those — cities and counties that have participated in recreational sales. La Grande’s limited sale of medicinal cannabis is a step in the right direction, but it fails to properly serve the whole community, while also falling short of helping the financial needs of the city and surrounding county. If La Grande and Union County could see the increasing benefit of allowing the lawful sale of a legal product, our sizable share of the tax revenue would be returned to us with significant financial benefit to all concerned.

I have requested this matter be placed on the upcoming ballot. Despite the sudden and severe restrictions of COVID-19, nearly 1,000 signatures have been collected from those who support the local sale of legal, adult-use cannabis. It is time to repeal the ban, allow our citizens to vote on the matter and let this legal, taxable product finally work for us.

Rona Lindsey
La Grande

Council’s Measure 5 vote illustrates need for transparency

The La Grande City Council voted to support a legislative proposal to partially repeal Measure 5 at their July meeting. This matter was originally couched inside the “consent agenda,” where routine items of “limited public interest” are grouped for a collective yes/no vote. The item in question, authorizing the city manager to submit city legislative priorities to the League of Oregon Cities, was pulled for public discussion whereupon innocuous “property tax reform” was listed among four legislative proposals supported by the council.

The proposal, available on the LOC website, entails a state constitutional amendment to enact “a system that allows voters to adopt tax levies and establish tax rates outside of current limits and not subject to compression.”

Many La Grande residents likely oppose property tax increases, especially when sky-high unemployment may make property tax payments difficult for homeowners and landlords to afford in November. Full council meeting materials have not been posted online since June 2018, so most city residents were likely unaware that modifying Measure 5 was on the agenda.

As a candidate for mayor of La Grande, I believe the city should post all meeting materials online one week before each meeting, post all public records online, and broadcast/stream all city commission meetings. Informed citizens will help the council make the best decisions for our community.

Alex McHaddad
La Grande

Teachers are heroes

My heroes have always been teachers, and I marvel at that mysterious something deep inside them. I’m not sure what it is or how they got it, but I’m positive the “something” they have is not found in the rest of us.

Virtual learning cannot be as good as in-class learning, or we would have been doing it years ago. But the virus won’t stop teachers from teaching. It’s what they do, no matter what. The year 2020 has been extremely difficult for students, but I can’t imagine the anxiety teachers are feeling in today’s world. The children will learn, regardless of its origin, as long it’s not canned knowledge off the shelf. My heroes need to dish it out, and they will.

With age comes wisdom or lunacy, or something in between, I guess. With all the insight acquired over 73 years, I’m finally old enough and wise enough to know all that wisdom and \$2.75 will buy me a cup of coffee. Old man wisdom is only meant for other old men, to badminton back and forth as they sit and spit around potbellied stoves. It’s wasted on the ears of youth.

The young will acquire wisdom of their own, but only through knowledge. That’s where my heroes come in, as they teach not just numbers and ABCs but also the skill of how to learn. As a bonus, and for no extra pay, they teach such things as compassion, forgiveness and tolerance. They teach our children in all aspects of life, and our children will grow wise from it.

Wise enough to someday gather on a back porch in bibbed overalls to sit and spit for a spell, to talk about things that matter and to look back on a good life — a good life due in some small part to those with the mysterious “something” deep inside.

Hug a teacher — but not yet.

Mike Hayden
Cove

Contact your public officials

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

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Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

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Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.

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Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

State Sen. William S. Hansell (29th District/Athena): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-423, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1729. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/hansell. Email: sen.billhansell@oregonlegislature.gov.

State Rep. Greg Barreto (58th District/Cove): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-384, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1458. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/barreto. Email: rep.gregbarreto@oregonlegislature.gov.

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