

Other Views

Three governors, three COVID-19 responses

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown’s order of additional restrictions prior to Thanksgiving elicited expected responses, from those who signal their belief in science to those clutching their copy of the Constitution close to their chest.

However, the vehemence directed at Brown still caught me off guard.

Some of this expression can be attributed to the rural/urban divide. Many in Oregon feel the liberal north-western corner of the state



ANDRÉ  
ALYESKA  
FOUNDER, FEBRUARY 5

unfairly dominates the more conservative eastern and southern parts of the state. Solid liberal majority aside, I can understand some resentments.

I also readily acknowledge the gap between conservative and progressive approaches to both life and policy. We will always have these arguments; the sparring and competition between ideas isn’t only necessary for democracy, it makes it stronger.

But likening mask mandates or lockdowns to that of jack-booted fascism is beyond hyperbole. Misrepresenting a legal process as communist is divisive. Governors across America are using executive orders during this pandemic with one goal — to save lives.

Well ... some are, some aren’t.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem has valiantly taken a hands-off approach by not issuing statewide stay-at-home orders early in the pandemic. She followed up with more inaction by refusing to issue a mask mandate at President Trump’s July 3 celebration at Mount Rushmore and refusing to cancel the Sturgis motorcycle rally in August.

South Dakota has been rewarded for this rugged individualism by regularly posting among the states with the highest per capita number of new coronavirus cases, forcing hospitals to prioritize treatment of severe coronavirus cases over lesser ones, leading to that evil of socialism: rationing health care.

North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum was loath to yield the pen, hoping he could urge residents to use masks, rather than order them to, before breaking down and issuing a mask mandate along with limits on social gathering.

He was too late to cancel the party, as ICUs have reached capacity in the state, forcing yet another order that allows North Dakota’s frontline health care workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 to continue working in coronavirus units. Note to small government types: This is not a great example to cite for problem solving at the local level.

Back in Oregon, Brown’s critics complain about the stifling of conservative values and infringing on personal rights. There are rumblings of another recall. Never mind that multiple prior recalls have failed. But that is the privilege of living in a free country; you can demonize a political opponent without fear of repercussion from the state for doing so.

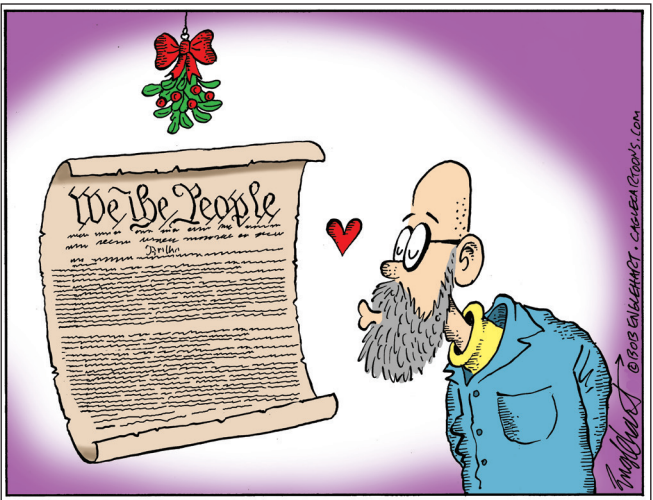
This country is made up of laws. I am told this by many who feel that rule of law is tantamount to maintaining order and, in turn, our freedoms. And yet many of this law and order persuasion fail to see that, while executive orders aren’t laws, they are lawful, their use spelled out in state constitutions.

Mask mandates and freeze orders are attempts to protect our health care workers and vulnerable neighbors. Infections are on the rise due to people spending more time indoors during the colder fall and winter months. ICU hospital beds are approaching or at capacity in many regions. This was predicted, yet the seriousness of this virus continues to be denied in some quarters.

And now the holiday season is upon us. This year it’s simply not in our best interest to celebrate as we always have. Pandemic restrictions are not designed to undermine individual responsibility or deny religious freedom. They are asking for people to be more socially responsible, compelling those that need it.

I was raised to believe that we have an ethic in this nation to look out for each other, that when a crisis arises, we come together. I don’t understand where it went. Please be safe. Please look out for each other and our health care workers by limiting gatherings. And please be kind.

André Alyeska lives in Corvallis and is the founder of February 5, an organization that strives to change the tenor of discussion in order to create a broad middle ground.



Other Views

We’ve been living with too much rudeness



CHRISTA  
WORTHY  
WRITERS ON THE RANGE

There’s a lot of disgruntlement if not downright hate these days in America.

On Facebook, strangers snipe at each other. Old friends “un-friend” each other based on political preference. Talking heads trade insults on cable “news.” The angry acting out isn’t new: Four years ago New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo told an interviewer on public radio that “hate has become the currency of this nation. We hate, therefore we are.” The facts bore him out: The FBI had just documented a 16-year peak in all types of hate crimes.

Which brings me to some of the ways people use prejudice and personal attack as forms of identity, here in the West. In Idaho, where I’ve lived for over nine years, big diesel pickup trucks are a way of life — even for folks who live in Boise and probably don’t need them for hauling.

Before the 2016 election, I began noticing more and more big pickups with full-sized American flags mounted in the rear cab. Soon after, many of those trucks had a full-sized Confederate flag mounted on the opposite side. I asked a man who works on diesel engines why he thought so many guys in big pickups were flying the Confederate flag, here in Idaho. After all, this was the West, not the South.

“They’re just giving the finger to this f\*\*\*ing politically-correct government,” he said.

If that were true, then American flags as protest to Obama should have stopped once Trump was elected. Instead, there were more flags than ever before the 2020 election. I’ve come to see the flag flying as a form of personal identity.

I asked an African-American friend how the flags made him feel. “Intimidated and unwelcome,” was his reply. But they intimidate me, too, and I’m white.

Others use their trucks as weapons of aggression. I drive a 15-year-old little red sporty Japanese car. Back when I lived in southern California, the sunroof was open almost every day. In Idaho, I still like to open my sunroof on nice days. Funny thing is, even though the air here is theoretically much cleaner than it is in Los Angeles, I nearly always end up having to close it. Perhaps because my little red car is definitely not an “Idaho car.”

When somebody in a big diesel pickup equipped with “rolling coal” sees me, he inevitably speeds up, passes me and then steps on the brakes. As I near his tail, a giant cloud of toxic black diesel exhaust blows out, and if I haven’t already shut my sunroof, I’m going to be inhaling it. What drives his aggression and gives him pleasure about harming me?

In 2017, Idaho State Sen. Michelle Stennett, D-Ketchum, introduced a bill to prohibit the practice of modifying diesel engines to increase the amount of soot and smoke belching from tailpipes. The bill failed to pass, but thanks to the Clean Air Act, rolling coal is illegal. In Idaho, however, don’t expect much enforcement.

**Editor’s Note**  
Do you have a point you’d like to make or an issue you feel strongly about? Submit a letter to the editor or a guest column.

I’ve also heard from bicycle riders who say they’re sitting ducks when trucks pass by while belching out black smoke, and this is a particular problem on rural roads. It seems to me there was a time — not that long ago —when this would have been considered rude, if not downright dangerous.

The people who spew hate on the Internet or peddle conspiracy theories on Facebook, who wave flags all over town, or who blow smoke in our faces, all say they are expressing the freedom to be themselves. They are proud to be “politically incorrect.”

Last week at my local gym, a man strode angrily up to the front desk to complain about the rap music playing that day. “Turn off that f\*%in’ music and put on some rock ‘n roll!” he insisted. The staffer at the front desk was Black. After a moment of deer-in-the-headlights shock, he quickly complied.

You know what politically correct means? It means nothing more than good manners, and manners are sorely lacking these days.

Crista Worthy is a contributor to Writers on the Range, [writersontherange.org](http://writersontherange.org), a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. She writes about travel, aviation and wildlife from her home in Idaho.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50

You can save up to 34% off the single-copy price with home delivery.

Call 541-963-3161 to subscribe.

Subscription rates per month:

Union & Wallowa Co. ....\$11.80

By mail, all other U.S. ....\$15

THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801  
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays  
(except postal holidays) by EO Media Group,  
911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850  
(USPS 299-260)

The Observer retains ownership and copyright  
protection of all staff-prepared news copy, advertising  
copy, photos and news or ad illustrations. They may  
not be reproduced without explicit prior approval.

COPYRIGHT © 2020

Phone:  
541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon):  
1-800-781-3214

Email:  
news@lagrandeobserver.com

POSTMASTER  
Send address changes to:  
The Observer,  
911 Jefferson Ave.,  
La Grande, OR 97850

STAFF

Regional publisher.....Karrine Brogitt

Regional circulation director.....Kelli Craft

Editor.....Phil Wright

News clerk.....Lisa Lester Kelly

Reporter.....Dick Mason

Reporter.....Kaleb Lay

Home delivery advisor.....Amanda Fredrick

Advertising representative.....Juli Bloodgood

Advertising representative.....Amy Horn

National accounts coordinator.....Devi Mathson

Graphic design supervisor.....Dorothy Kautz

A division of

eoMEDIA group

eomediagroup.com