

From the editor

Searching for a better way to respond



**PHIL
WRIGHT**
OBSERVER EDITOR

I’m struggling to find the words to respond to the insurrection Wednesday, Jan. 6, at our Capitol in Washington, D.C.

I was on a lunch break from working to churn out the paper for Thursday when I heard about what was happening. My initial reaction was skepticism, so I turned to news sources I trust.

I’m sure I felt what many of you did when you saw photos or videos and read news reports. Shock. Disbelief. Even fear.

My family is relatively patriotic. We have connections to our military and wars, as do so many rural families. My dad served in the Navy just before the country went to war in Korea. One great-uncle nearly died from exposure because he was in the water for so long when the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service bombed Pearl Harbor and pushed the U.S to enter World War II. Another great-uncle fought in the Philippines in that war. My mom had a cousin I never met who flew fighter jets in the Vietnam War. Other cousins and high school friends served in our more recent wars.

So participating in the nation’s patriotic holidays was not just about the barbecues for me and mine. My dad made sure our home flew the U.S. flag on such days. Like the sailor he had been, he would raise Old Glory in the morning and take it down at night.

Beyond feeling aghast at what was unfolding in D.C., I felt deep sadness. I wept for a moment. More than anything else, this hurt.

No matter what, we are supposed to be better than this. We are supposed to show the rest of the world how democracy works. We’re not where coups occur.

Within moments, though,



President Donald Trump supporters try to break through a police barrier, Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021, at the Capitol in Washington. As Congress prepared to affirm President-elect Joe Biden’s victory, thousands of people gathered to show their support for Trump and his claims of election fraud.



Rep. Andy Kim, D-N.J., cleans up debris and trash strewn across the floor in the early morning hours of Thursday, Jan. 7, 2021, after protesters stormed the Capitol in Washington on Wednesday.

I was seething. This was sedition and treason in our nation’s capital, where an invading force has not taken control since the War of 1812.

My ire mounted when it looked like law enforcement and military authorities did bloody little to quell this mob early on. Where were the lines of D.C. cops at the ready in riot gear? I saw pictures of Capitol police suited up for conflicts from previous protests. Why not this time?

A day later as I finish this, the shock, the appall and the hurt remain, sure. But I’m also weary. And looking for more substantive ways to respond in my capacity as

editor of The Observer. I don’t see much point, however, in an obvious call to Congress for new letters of impeachment for President Donald Trump or a demand to invoke the 25th Amendment so he can’t do anything similar or worse.

Besides, Trump is not the only one to blame for this. We all share in this one. We let social media become the great divider, allowing us to live in echo chambers and giving massive bullhorns to extremists to such a degree that finding where moderate views end and the extreme begins is a challenge.

Besides, it’s not like The

Observer’s edit page is going to get much attention outside our little place in the world.

That still leaves me with the question of what can I do? I had to go looking a bit for some answers, but I liked what I read from Kevin Frazier at his blog The Oregon Way, which deals with finding common values and solutions across Oregon.

The easy way to respond to the violence we witnessed, he pointed out, is to stay in our echo chambers and spew what makes us feel good in the moment. The better way is harder because it demands more from us. Here are some of his suggestions, with my own takes:

- Step back from social media. “These companies profit off our partisanship and benefit from our division,” Frazier wrote. “As long as they control our world and occupy our attention, we will be unable to break free of permanently seeing ‘others.’”

- Burst your own bubble and engage with the “other” side, Frazier urged. Schedule an online meeting with someone with a different party affiliation, background or belief system. And don’t get your back up when you don’t like something you hear.

I struggle with that. Make the effort to listen, not tune out the person or just wait for a turn to talk.

- Don’t let national news blind you from seeing the good you can do here, and, I add, the good that is happening here. We have so many local examples to draw from for inspiration, from food banks to artists. Those communal ties are worth celebrating and building on.

Let’s also ask more of our local elected officials:

- Remember who you represent, not just who voted for you. We have several city councilors who won by narrow margins. Those winners need to keep in mind they also have to speak for the people who did not support them. That’s what being a public servant is about.

- Put people, not party, first. Our school boards, city council and county boards of commissioners are too small to draw political party lines. That’s one reason they are nonpartisan in the first place. We need our elected officials to work with community members on practical solutions to issues that affect the community, not on party-driven solutions.

- Talk with us. Don’t only issue news releases and posts on Facebook. We need mayors and city administrators and sheriffs and county commissioners and so on to hold virtual town halls on Zoom or similar platforms — or in person when possible — outside of regular board meetings so you can talk to us and we can talk to you. The Center for Human Development’s weekly update on COVID-19 is a good example of that in Union County. Others should follow suit.

None of this is easy.

But the rewards would be worth the efforts.

Write to us

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- Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed and carry the author’s name, address and phone

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- Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.
- Longer community comment columns, such as My Voice, must be no more than 700 words. Writers must provide a recent headshot (a decent and in-focus selfie is fine) and a one-sentence biography. Like letters to the editor, columns must refrain from complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Sub-

missions must carry the author’s name, address and phone number.

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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)

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POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
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La Grande, OR 97850

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