

My Voice

Bentz's integrity is not the issue

I would like to assure Mr. Warner Wasley that my letter published in the Jan. 12 edition of this newspaper was voluntarily submitted by me and was in no way solicited or requested by this fine publication, as I'm confident is also true of the others published that same day.

Mr. Wasley's personal belief that Rep. Cliff Bentz is "a person of impeccable integrity" is neither evidence The Observer holds a bias against him nor does it shield him from civil criticism for his actions.



ROGER BARNES
LA GRANDE

If Mr. Wasley feels that public outrage against the tacit approval of sedition is just intimidation

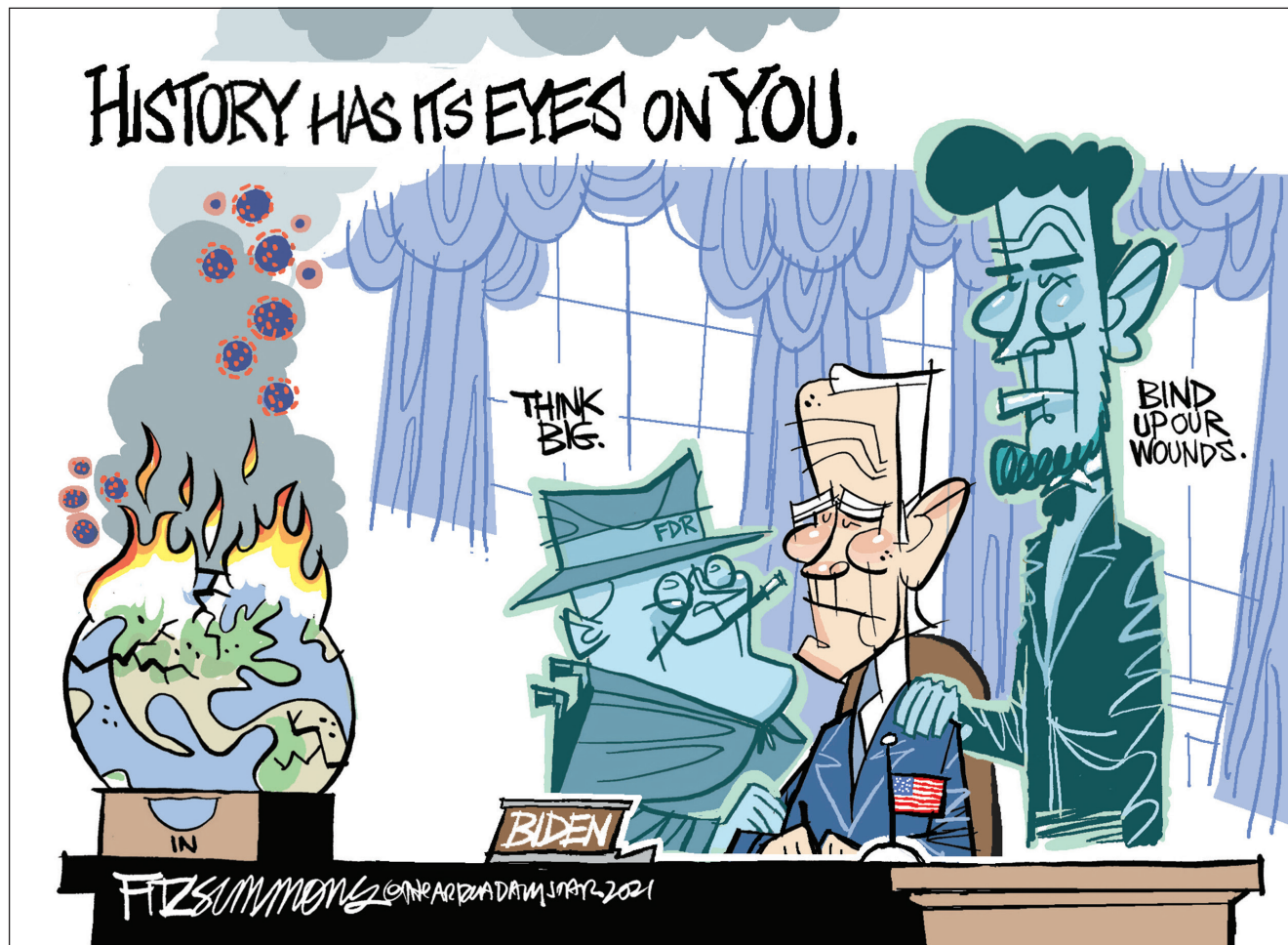
and harassment of those following a conservative path, I suggest he reexamine where this path has led.

Mr. Wasley characterizes the letters of that day as "hateful," but I ask that anyone reading my previous letter or this one not mistake my utter disgust and contempt for the actions of Mr. Bentz as hatred. My deep sense of patriotism for this country was offended like never before by the events at our nation's Capitol on Jan. 6 undertaken by a group singularly motivated with a monumental lie. This grandiose fiction perpetuated by far too many political and media figures presented a terribly striking example of what Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes analogized as "falsely shouting 'fire' in a crowded theatre." The tragically predictable consequences of lending credence to this lie had hardly even sunk into our collective consciousness when Mr. Bentz and too many of his colleagues chose to reiterate the impotent cry suggesting there was still smoke in that proverbial theatre.

While Mr. Wasley is unfortunately correct that perhaps a majority of Mr. Bentz's constituents wish to believe this falsehood even in the absolute vacuum of any evidence supporting it, Mr. Bentz did not swear an oath to take whatever course his voters might prefer. He swore an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." Those who attempted to wrest control of the U.S. government that day did so with the explicit intention to subvert the Constitution, with the grand lie as their justification. Giving sustenance to that lie could and did only serve to aid and abet those who had just hours before violently proven their intent of insurrection.

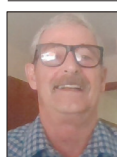
In case, Mr. Wasley feels I have unfairly attacked Rep. Bentz in these letters, four days prior to the publication of my first letter I left a message with Mr. Bentz's office, offering him a chance to discuss this issue. It's been two weeks, and I've yet to hear from him, so I ask that anyone who knows Mr. Bentz please pass along that I welcome the opportunity to hear his defense against my concerns with his representation either in these pages or any other public forum.

Roger Barnes has lived and worked and sometimes voiced his opinions in La Grande for 25 years. He welcomes your comments and criticisms.



My Voice

Some post-elections observations



RANDY KNOP
UNION

As I contemplated writing this recently, my thought was to focus on the election and how people were feeling about the outcome. However, as the events of Jan. 6 unfolded, each day seems to bring new revelations regarding the impact President Donald Trump had on our democracy.

Even prior to the attacks in our Capitol, I knew the presidential election was typical of what most American voters knew: That 61% of Americans said they trusted the results of the election, including two-thirds of independents, according to the November NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll, but only 24% of Republicans — compared with 95% of Democrats — believed Joe Biden won.

Of course, skepticism is not new and hardly limited to one party as a lot of people including Democrats questioned the 2000 presidential election as well. The difference, however, is that we had an orderly and respectful transition of power.

What was most disturbing this go-around?

Watching and reading the barrage of tweets by Trump to address the news media and his followers with baseless voter fraud claims ahead of the electoral vote count by Congress. Such withdrawals from reality, while no longer startling me, became the

rallying cry of the party because the forces of solidarity among Trump supporters have been strong enough to be labeled a cult — sometimes enviously — by critics.

However, I was hard-pressed to find a prior election in which a president so actively tried to manipulate the public — and had so many of his core supporters play along with it. More than a month after Joe Biden was declared president-elect, Trump continued to allege widespread voter fraud and claim the outcome was still up in the air — even after numerous losses in courts, all the way up to the Supreme Court.

That ongoing rhetoric created a perfect storm, adding fuel to an already smoldering fire that ultimately culminated in the attack on the Capitol by thousands of angry protesters, overtaking security forces and forcing the evacuation of our duly elected members of Congress.

Do not get me wrong (although some undoubtedly will), I am not here to bash the Grand Old Party's voters for their earnest choices. Trump's support from well over 80% of GOP voters is nothing for anyone who believes in our republic's democracy to belittle.

I've talked with and listened to enough Republicans to know that many are like a lot of progressive voters I know, who held their noses while voting for Biden: Trump's not their dream candidate, but he's closer than what the other party was offering.

The larger question to me is whether we Americans can pull our

politics back to the real world from fantasy while some of us can still tell the difference.

The question for 2021 is: What's next?

We spent the past year struggling to find our way through a labyrinth of unprecedented challenges: contagion on a global scale, economic upheaval and a series of political crises, which continues today.

Three weeks into 2021 and we have already witnessed several transformational events: The shift of power in the U.S. Senate made possible by the outcome of special elections in Georgia; a U.S. president inviting chaos into our Capitol; and a very real public conversation about whether the 25th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution was warranted given the extraordinarily inappropriate conduct of a sitting president obsessed with his political failures.

We are in the eye of the hurricane. We know there will be more storms ahead of us. Leaders are trying to figure out what we need to do next to advance as a nation, state and community of aspirations, while partisans are trying to discern the quickest path to power in the emergent political landscape.

Meanwhile, most Americans remain gobsmacked by what has become of us — they wonder whether the greatest democratic republic in history has devolved too far down the rabbit hole.

Randy Knop lives in Union and is a member of Union County Progressives.

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Letter to the editor

We thrive by honoring a variety of thoughts and ideas

I am writing in response to Warner Wasley's letter in The Observer (Jan. 19, 2021). Unlike Mr. Wasley, I believe it is important for the newspaper to report on the variety of views held in this community. Otherwise, this newspaper would not be a community paper. He seems to believe there is a uniformity of views in this community, but I believe the community and paper readers span a large spectrum.

Mr. Wasley states that in printing other viewpoints, the newspaper is following a "familiar pattern of some

to intimidate and harass anyone who follow a conservative path." I find that an interesting comment after what I see as years of mounting violence against people of color, immigrants and anyone who disagreed with our past president. There is clear data to show the increase in hate crimes in our country against these groups of people, not against white people, whether conservative or liberal.

The variety of beliefs and diversity of population in our community is why it is very important for the newspaper to report on that variety. It makes it also very important they continue to report on what is happening at a national and state level.

In my 46 years in La Grande, I

have never seen the paper reporting only on our local community, and I would regard that limitation as a form of pandering to the current power and leadership in our community. It seems to me Mr. Wasley is suggesting they are the only ones who should have a voice and presence in newspaper reporting. If that is true, they will be the only ones who have any power and leadership role in Union County.

I want us to be a community that can thrive and become strong through considering and honoring a variety of thoughts and ideas. A newspaper that is not "shut up" by any one group can do that.

*Sandy Ryman
La Grande*

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