

Thinking Out Loud

Indian traffic and American ideologues

Years ago, as one of my friends was finishing up a semester of study in Delhi, we decided to spend a month traveling in India together. Although I haven't traveled a lot, it's clear that experiencing other places and cultures gives you a different view of your own.

Comparing the life you know with other worlds makes you identify what you love about your own country, and think about the things we could

do differently or better. One of the things I remember about India is the traffic. To venture into traffic was to venture into a world of chaos. Each day started with the sounds of distant car horns, followed by others, until the din of automobile horns was deafening, everywhere. Roads didn't necessarily seem to have lanes; instead, drivers snaked their way forward wherever an opening appeared. Traffic was not limited to automobiles —instead, the massive, crawling entourage included scooters, bicycle rickshaws, elephants, colorfully painted trucks with groups of people riding on top, camels, entire families on a single motorcycle, live pigs being transported on mopeds, bicyclists carrying loads the size of a small house. Even in the cities, monkeys scampered across the tops of slow-going vehicles. People walked freely in the traffic, begging or selling food or merchandise. While the traffic generally moved in a single direction, there would always be someone attempting to go the opposite way, like a salmon swimming upstream.

It was amazing. It was amazing to imagine cities of millions, which seemed to have no traffic system of any kind. It was amazing to imagine any place tolerating a traffic system that was so erratic, uncontrolled and dangerous. India was a British colony until 1947; I would have expected India to have inherited a traffic system with more order. I tried to imagine imposing traffic rules on millions of people who were used to being completely unregulated, and couldn't even imagine how it could be done.

The Indian traffic system certainly provided maximum individual freedom. It was entertaining — you could never guess what you would see when you ventured out. It was inefficient — there were times when I swore I could have walked across a city more quickly. And it was dangerous. I saw two fatal accidents and many near-misses during my month in India.

As Americans, we tend to accept traffic regulations such as seat belt requirements or mandatory auto insurance, but the traffic chaos in India made me think about our own characteristic resistance to having the government impose rules or tell us what to do. We live in a country where citizens are famously independent — it's a hallmark of being American. We — myself included — don't appreciate being told what to do. We are resistant to the idea that the government can restrict our freedom. Depending on our particular point of view, the government has no business restricting our access to or use of public lands. The government has no business implementing protections for workers (or perhaps no business implementing regulations protecting business interests at the expense of workers). The government has no business requiring us to wear masks, or close down businesses or to restrict gatherings or our freedom to worship as we please —not even temporarily, not even to prevent transmission of a contagious and deadly virus.

The government certainly has no right to impose restrictions on our gun rights.

In America, we have rights — and our individual rights so deeply define our national identity that many consider it un-American to even think of restricting them. But what if those individual rights conflict with the common good of our communities?

Sometimes I think that American resistance to the idea of government regulation creates a situation similar to the traffic in India.

Sometimes, I wonder whether America doesn't have just a different kind of traffic circus, with many of us so focused on our individual rights that — like the drivers in India — we never even stop to consider what would be best for our communities as a whole.

Anne Morrison is a La Grande resident and retired attorney who has lived in Union County since 2000. Thinking Out Loud is her monthly column for The Observer.



ANNE MORRISON
LA GRANDE



Letters

Suggestion for Oregon's 'dumbocrats senators'

I have a suggestion for our two dumbocrats senators. Can't you waste our tax dollars enough with a phony impeachment? Now you come to red country and waste our rights to use our lands the way we want. How about you just stay west of the Cascades in your socialist swamp?

Kenneth Parsons
La Grande

The end of our republic as we know it?

I've been listening to the second impeachment trial and hope everyone else has too. Trump's words and actions during the campaign and post-election clearly paint the picture of a leader bent on overthrowing our constitutional democratic process.

When, long before the election, he said the only way he could lose is through fraud, he was clearly out of touch with the way elections work. Then, after the election he said he would never concede and incited his hardcore followers to overturn the electoral process, culminating in the Capitol riot and threats on the lives of our elected officials, including his own vice president, Mike Pence.

Finally, when he saw the carnage his words and actions caused, he failed to lift a finger to call them off, clearly showing his disregard for his oath of office, our Constitution, the rule of law and the lives of our elected representatives.

Against this, his lawyers' defense is First Amendment rights to free speech. Ridiculous. Also that he cannot be removed from office since he is already out. A technicality, especially in the face of the monstrosity of the crime that was committed.

I thought this second impeachment would just be another empty show of partisanship. I no longer think so. If after the damning evidence presented in this trial Trump is acquitted on a party-line vote, I believe it will signal the end of respect for democracy in the Republican Party and possibly the end of the republic as we know it.

Dave Felley
La Grande

If opposing views are censored there won't be any unity

The media has always influenced public opinion and controlled what most people know about cur-

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rent events, but over the last four plus years that influence has grown exponentially. The media, including social media and big tech, in my opinion, are more biased than they have ever been. They have essentially become the propaganda arm of the Democrat Party, the Washington establishment and the left. What now passes for news is filled with opinion, misinformation, disinformation, fabrication, distortion, character assassination, omission and censoring.

What is now our "news" is presented from the perspective of the left. Anyone with a different view is suspect and labeled, vilified, condemned or ignored. This is obvious to people with a more conservative view of the world but apparently not even seen by those on the left.

We have had several years of the media and the left tearing this country apart by segregating everyone into groups and telling us that they are the only ones that can fix the problems they created, all the while blaming those problems on others. They constantly blame others for the very things they themselves are doing.

The media has essentially coluded with the establishment in government to do whatever it takes to help them keep their power. They couldn't stand a man who actually thought Americans should come first. Who thought the government placed a burden on most people's lives with overregulation and punitive controls. Who thought people should be free to create their own destiny and be free to have their own thoughts even if they differed from others. The media's goal for more than four years has been to destroy him and anyone who supports him.

It is going to be really hard to unite the country if half of the country is disenfranchised by the media and told their opinions don't matter. If opposing views are censored there won't be any unity. I won't be holding my breath waiting for the left to change their ways and acknowledge they aren't always right, no matter how many times they tell us they are.

Mark Barber
La Grande

The left's hatred must not go unchallenged

I take extreme offense to Anne Morrison's column The Observer published Jan. 16, 2021. Having known people who were in concentration camps in Germany, to try to compare those who don't agree with you with that most terrible history is irresponsible.

I consider myself a patriot, respecting our flag, the laws that keep us safe, not picking only those with which I agree, condemning violence, burning and looting, taking over parts of cities with violence, allowing violent groups to attack federal buildings as we have seen much too often recently, those arrested only to be set free again. The violent actions of Antifa and BLM should be condemned.

You are pleased to say the "Trump rioters" but do not seem to condemn the violence we have experienced in Portland, Seattle, California, even though innocent lives were lost and businesses burned. Do we have two standards to be applied? The left would rather vilify patriots and glorify the left extremists. Does the end really justify the means?

We have witnessed for the past four years the hatred of our president and the disrespect for the office by the Democratic Party. There was the "resist" movement, bloody head of the president on a platter, his family being vilified and threatened, violence and disregard for the voice of the American people, some being gleeful but with the sadness of many. This hatred began the day President Trump took office. You can be sure damage has been done and with the rest of the world watching.

After four years with constant hatred and ridicule for our president, we are now being asked to work together as another impeachment is being tried. I for one am tired of allowing people with so much hatred to go unchallenged.

Edward Ater
La Grande

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