

Other Views

# What's news? It depends on who you ask

I need someone to tell me what's happening. I make the request because mainstream (if there is such a thing) news outlets seem to fundamentally disagree about what's important.

On March 14, the top story on the Fox News website, complete with video, was rioting in west coast cities on the anniversary of Breonna Taylor's death — a dozen or so arrests, vandalism, clashes with police.



**RICH MANIERI**  
JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

Sounded like a pretty big deal.

In the interest of balance (if there is such a thing) I went to CNN's website. No mention of the riots.

As I write this, CNN's top story is "Russia targeted U.S. elections in 2020." This story is "breaking news" so it must be important. The subhead reads "An intelligence report identifies Russian efforts aimed at denigrating Biden and helping Trump." The story is based on a U.S. intelligence report that also indicates "Iran carried out a multi-pronged covert influence campaign intended to undercut former President Trump's reelection prospects."

Back to the Fox News website. Crickets on the election story. We have two, U.S.-based, international news organizations that appear to be operating in their own alternate universes.

The easy explanation is that each outlet (and this discussion is not confined to Fox and CNN, they just happen to be easy targets) is driving its own agenda. But there's a more complicated discussion to be had regarding why the media has abdicated its responsibility to seek truth, opting instead to advance its own subjective version of reality.

Stories that run afoul of political orthodoxies aren't reported because they don't exist. Moreover, there's really no interest in seeking balance on hot-button issues — abortion, immigration, gun control or pick another — because there is only one side worthy of representation. Thus, a big story for one news outlet isn't worthy of a mention for another. "Big" and "important" are no longer synonymous for "far-reaching" or "impactful." Ideology is now the metric by which we measure importance.

There are some stories whose mere coverage transcends editorial judgment — natural disasters, elections, wars. Such events are covered because they have to be. There's no decision to make, for example, as to whether we should cover presidential campaigns. How they're covered and what's reported is a different issue.

It's not as if no one else has noticed. A recent poll by the Knight Foundation found that "Sixty-eight percent of Americans say they see too much bias in the reporting of news that is supposed to be objective as 'a major problem.'"

Socially media exacerbates the problem, of course, especially when Facebook and Twitter now see themselves as independent arbiters of truth, allowing them to advance narratives they deem acceptable while extinguishing others. But Facebook and Twitter are not news organizations in and of themselves. There are not Facebook or Twitter reporters. Ground zero for journalistic malpractice is the newsroom, where editorial decisions are made.

It's no mystery why young people often can't distinguish between opinion and news reporting, two things that Walter Cronkite once said should have as much daylight between them "as the Bible and Playboy magazine." A bit crass, maybe, but correct.

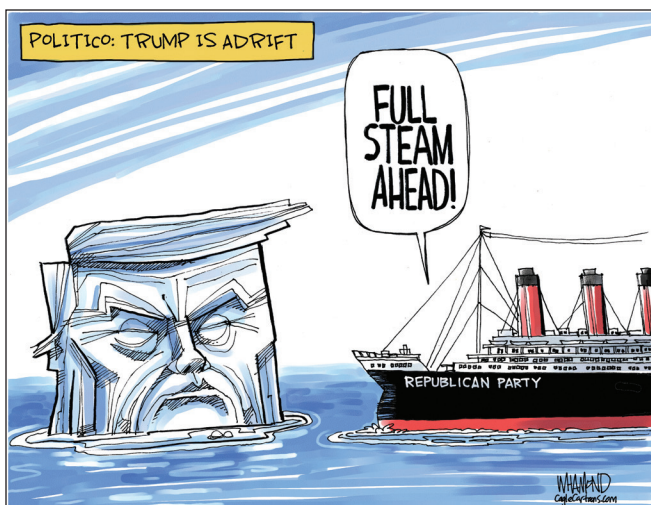
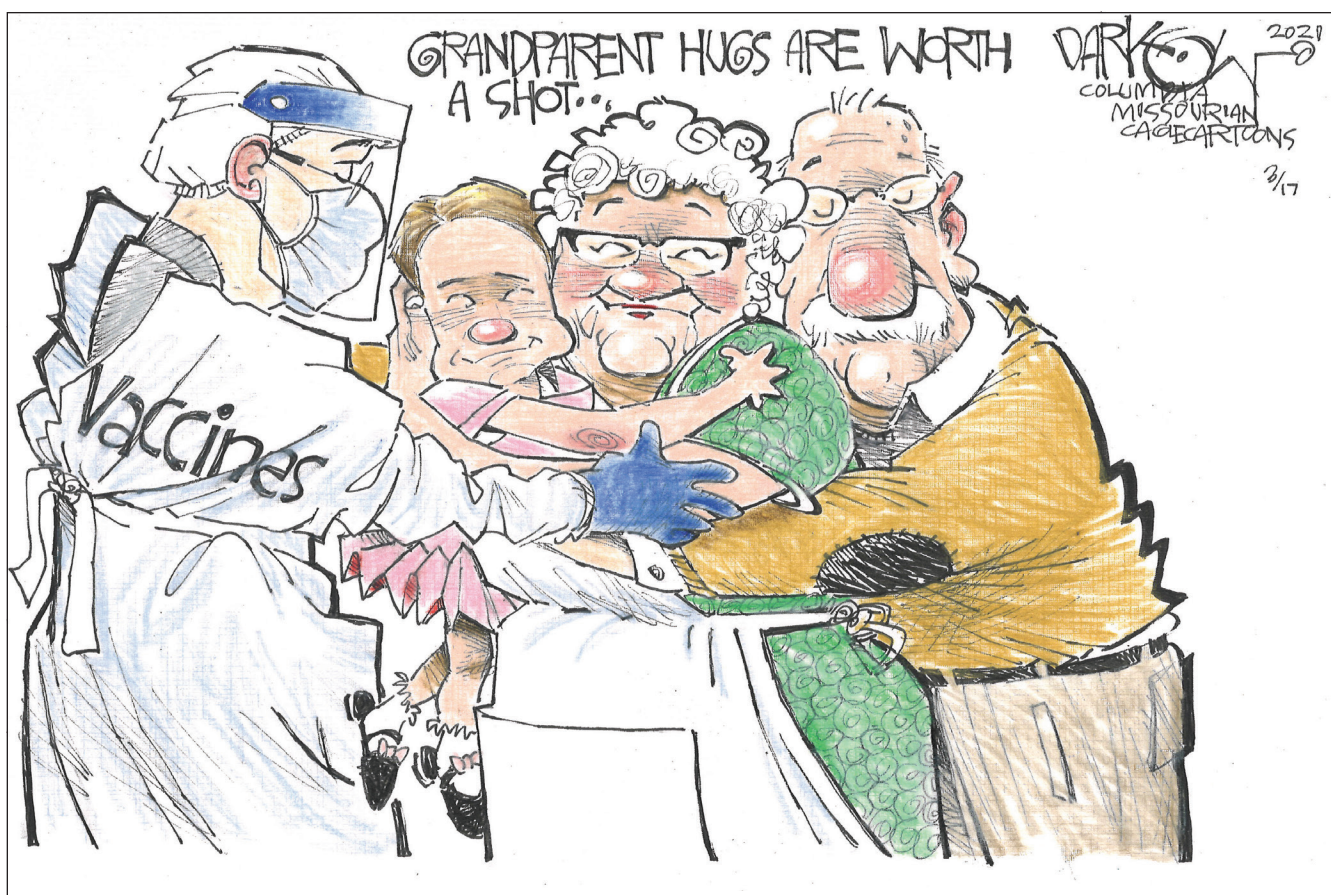
I deal with students every day who will submit what they think is a news story that, in reality, is nothing more than an opinion column. Why? Because what's being marketed by news outlets and what's being consumed is often an amalgam of news, commentary, analysis and predetermined narrative. Is it any wonder an 18-year-old doesn't know the difference?

You would think that with approval ratings only slightly north of the local parking authority, news organizations would feel some sense of urgency to restore order.

There are excellent journalists doing wonderful work in news outlets throughout the country — from community newspapers to TV networks. But if the pendulum is ever going to swing back to objectivity, it's going to need a push from those who really value truth.

It will take some hard work and self-awareness for news organizations to admit that we're doing this wrong. On the other hand, it will take almost no effort to stay the course, cater to biases and tell us only what you think we should hear.

*Rich Manieri is a Philadelphia-born journalist and author. He is currently a professor of journalism at Asbury University in Kentucky. You can reach him at manieri2@gmail.com.*



Our View

# Legislative amendment would be a sucker punch to Oregon businesses

Oregon Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden worked in the waning days of the Trump administration to ensure the federal government would not hammer struggling businesses that received Paycheck Protection Act loans.

Thanks in part to their work, it's been made clear: Forgiven PPP loans will not count as income on federal taxes. And even expenses paid with a PPP loan are deductible on federal taxes.

But Oregon legislators may do things differently. An amendment to House Bill 2457 seeks to tax the federally forgiven PPP loans. Congress designed PPP

loans to keep struggling businesses alive and their employees employed. It would be a sucker punch for the state to try to grab it. Why would that be OK? Haven't Oregon businesses suffered enough?

To make matters worse, it's not clear which legislator or legislators introduced this amendment. That is not identified in legislative documents. Why the secrecy? Oregonians need to be able to hold their legislators accountable. At least, legislators won't get away with hiding who votes for the amendment. We will be watching.

We should be clear the company that owns The Observer

received a PPP loan. So did thousands of other Oregon businesses. And the PPP program has received some criticism. It was put in place quickly. Some businesses who needed the help had trouble getting the help. It's been argued others that didn't deserve help got it.

But it's reprehensible the state would attempt to raid money intended to keep Oregonians employed and allow businesses to avoid collapse.

Oregon already taxes some businesses even if they don't make a profit under the state's corporate activity tax, so maybe some legislators think plundering the PPP is fair game. Do you?

Letters

**CHD vaccination a seamless experience**

We want to commend the Center for Human Development Inc. for the way they are handling the COVID-19 vaccinations in Union County. Since we had registered our email addresses, we knew when to sign up for a spot, but were nervous until the confirmation came saying we had a reserved time.

When we arrived at the Riviera Activity Center, La Grande, for the vaccinations, the process was amazing. Everyone working there was extremely helpful, caring and accommodating. The process and the facility both were extremely organized, leading to a seamless experience.

How ironic that people are anxious and willing to line up for a shot! Usually we put it off as long as possible. We remember as kids, lining up in school as the nurses gave us the polio vaccine; different times, but the same idea.

We appreciate the time the Center for Human Development put into planning and implementing this procedure.

Barbara L. Smutz  
La Grande

**Administration of local vaccination event was outstanding**

I just received my second shot of the Moderna vaccine and I want to acknowledge the Center for Human

Development Inc. for the excellent job they did in setting up the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Clearly, the planning involved great skill and professionalism. There were multiple tasks: the setting up of appointments; identifying a safe and convenient physical site; the actual arranging of the gym and collecting the equipment needed to furnish the gym; the identifying and selecting of skilled and compassionate professionals and volunteers to man the site. And, I am sure all this was arranged under significant time pressure.

I am grateful for the staff at CHD and volunteers for their outstanding work.

Hazel Sachie Spiegel  
La Grande

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50

You can save up to 55% off the single-copy price with home delivery. Call 800-781-3214 to subscribe.

Subscription rates:

Monthly Autopay .....\$10.75  
13 weeks.....\$37.00  
26 weeks.....\$71.00  
52 weeks.....\$135.00

# 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 © 2021

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 Brogotti Home delivery advisor.....Amanda Fredrick  
Regional circulation director.....Kelli Craft Advertising representative.....Juli Bloodgood  
Editor.....Phil Wright Advertising representative.....Amy Horn  
News clerk.....Lisa Lester Kelly National accounts coordinator.....Devi Mathson  
Reporter.....Dick Mason Graphic design supervisor.....Dorothy Kautz  
Multimedia journalist.....Alex Wittwer



A division of