

Other Views

Claim the right to dust off your gun

In the wake of recent mass shootings, President Joe Biden managed to avoid being blown over by a gentle breeze in the White House Rose Garden to announce several marginal executive actions on gun control that were met with tepid applause from the left and bulging forehead veins on the right.

My intention here is not to wade into the brain-eating-amoeba-infested waters of the gun control debate, but, instead, share a few anecdotes related to my own embarrassing history with the Second Amendment.



JASE GRAVES
HUMOR COLUMNIST

My earliest memorable encounter with a “firearm” was in the 1970s when I was creeping around in the backyard hunting birds and squirrels with my Daisy BB rifle — while strategically camouflaging myself in a pair of Sears Toughskins jeans and a Muppet Show T-shirt. The soil of the surrounding area is still contaminated by the thousands of BBs from my missed shots, but I did occasionally hit my mark and bring down a specimen of the fierce and deadly East Texas house sparrow. I may or may not have cried every time I killed one.

Speaking of hitting my mark, as a kid with crooked, Coke bottle glasses, I wasn’t exactly the Doc Holliday of prepubescent dweebs — more like a myopic Barney Fife. However, I did experience one surprising victory in the world of sharpshooting when my dad took me to local hardware store that was holding an annual turkey shoot for youngsters. I remember being a little disappointed that there were no actual turkeys there to shoot (or pet), but I did somehow hit a paper target with the accuracy required to take home some Grade A frozen poultry. (I’m pretty sure I sneezed when I pulled the trigger.)

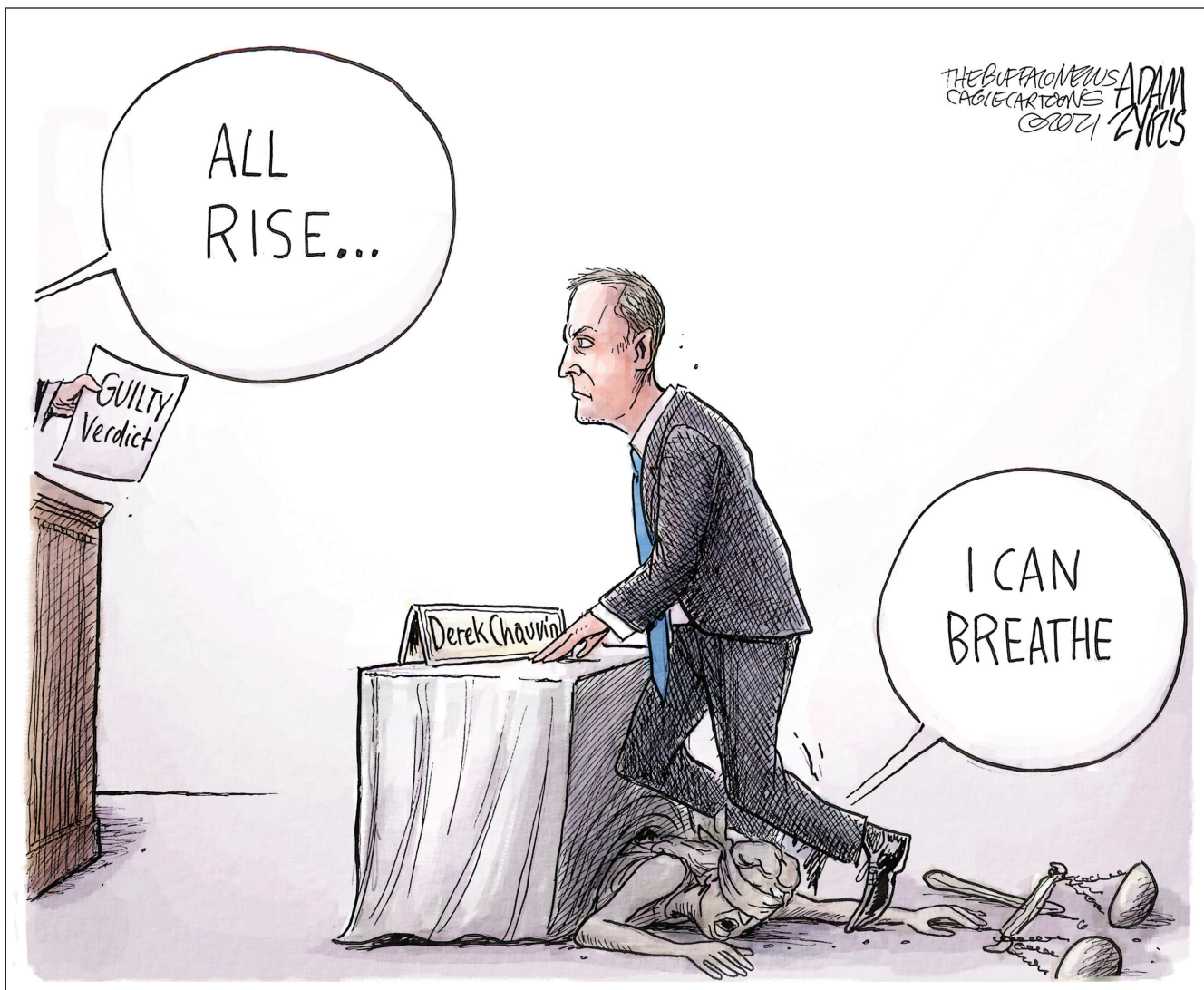
My feelings of triumph were cut short, however, when I confidently challenged my big brother to a backyard BB-gun duel. (What could possibly go wrong?) After we positioned ourselves behind a couple of small bales of hay, the contest lasted for exactly five seconds and consisted of one volley from my crack-shot brother that landed dead center on my partially exposed right love handle. My wails of anguish were only slightly eclipsed by my brother’s repeated desperate pleas that I “Don’t tell Mom!” Despite his appeals and my own fear of punishment, I did bravely confess the incident to our parents — shortly after I turned 30.

I didn’t have many experiences with firearms during my teen years, other than my parents (and my girlfriends’ parents) fantasizing about putting me out of their misery. But when I began dating my wife, my future father-in-law introduced me to the wonderful world of sitting out in the woods at dawn and trying to avoid ticks — otherwise known as deer hunting. It only took two outings of sleeping in a rickety aluminum lawn chair and being driven out into the wilderness on a four-wheeler at 5 a.m. to be left for dead for me to prove that I just wasn’t hunting (or fishing or camping) material, and that he’d have to find some other way to get rid of me.

Today, I possess two firearms, a .38 Special and a .22 rifle, both on loan from my dad — out of pity, I think. And I only get them out to brandish around my teenage daughters’ boyfriends, who usually ask why they’re so dusty. I should probably take the guns down to the firing range and see whether they still work — if I can figure out how to get the safety off.

Who knows where the American gun control debate will take us in the next few years? I tend to think that gun violence is as much a matter of the heart and soul as it is a matter of the law, but what do I know? For now, I’ll stick to watching “Tomestone” and reruns of “The Andy Griffith Show.”

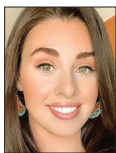
Jase Graves is an award-winning humor columnist from East Texas. His columns have been featured in Texas Escapes magazine, The Shreveport Times, The Longview News Journal, and The Kilgore News Herald. Contact Graves at susanjase@sbcglobal.net.



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Other Views

There and back again: Where are we headed?



ALEX HOBBS
IRRIGON

In J.R.R. Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings,” Khazad-dûm is an ancient dwarven stronghold used to mine Mithril: a precious metal renowned for its strength and beauty. Unfortunately, the dwarves dug too greedily, and from the depths of Moria rose the Balrog.

What awaits the villages of Eastern Oregon when they dig too deep? When all that remains are concrete bunkers, with their incessant technological whirl and perpetual illumination? When all the treasure to be found sits beneath the talons of the Dragon in Seattle?

Let’s leave the Shire and find out. The first smell to hit you will be the camphor and terpenoids of sagebrush. Perhaps you will be lucky enough to experience its intense fragrance after rainfall.

Next, and if your immune system can handle it, you’ll smell the Russian olives. Though not in bloom until August, their sweet scent is unmistakable, their khaki-green leaves a juxtaposition upon a brown horizon.

Perhaps in the distance, you’ll catch a whiff of a body of water. A pond that has long gone eutrophic. At its bottom, an organic alchemy you can practically feel smush between your toes. It is home to a dizzying assemblage of life.

Above you are stars. Millions of them. Constellations that bear little

resemblance to their namesake burst out of the sky’s inky fabric. They pulsate so vibrantly it becomes easy to forget the objects that tether us to life back home. Somewhere, the Milky Way greets you shyly like an old friend. Its gossamer belt of color still shimmers faintly in Eastern Oregon.

The click and flit of bats. The chirrup of the katydids. A silence and darkness not often found elsewhere. But the village leaders tell us this land is cheap and worthless. Crops can’t be grown here. After all, it’s just sagebrush. What better use for it than to tear it away. To build a monument to man’s ever-decreasing attention span.

They begin to rip the earth apart. Suddenly, a behemoth erupts from the ground like the cataclysmic lava flows that once carved this land. Hard and angular, bending the earth to its will. Its teeth bared and gnashing. Its black spikes, an armor around its stony perimeter. Its electric buzz is wholly unlike the hoot of a burrowing owl.

The monster comes under the guise of a gift. But its perfume is too strong, its smile too saccharine, and beneath it lingers something rotten. It is not like the sage, which offers us the gift of stars and sweetness. With hands outstretched, the inhuman monster offers the parched desert dwellers a long drink of water.

Some of the local village leaders drink heartily from those gnarled, cupped palms, their tongues lapping up the cool water greedily.

“I am smart,” they think. “I have water to drink while others go

thirsty.” And so the village leaders let the monster smash his way through a land that offers up other gifts. Gifts of mutuality. One by one, other monsters take root, like the noxious thistle, choking out the stars with their eternal illumination.

Soon the stars recede from their velvety home in the night sky. Dust rolls across the land, choking out the sun. Homes become inundated with the perpetual, electric din of the monster and all its progeny dredging up water from their poisoned wells.

But someday, the wells will run dry. The monsters will no longer have any cool water to offer the insatiable village leaders. Their tongues will cease lapping. Unlike the Balrog, who sits and waits, these monsters will uproot themselves in search of other village leaders to beguile.

In the end, the monsters will run out of room in Northeast Oregon. Their life source becomes cheaper elsewhere and eventually, they have to pay taxes. Above all else, the monsters loathe paying taxes.

The village leaders try to figure out what to do with the exoskeletons left behind by the monsters. But they are too vast. Within, the defunct internal organs begin to collect dust. Absent from this silence is the sound of wind rustling through the sage. In its stead, the sterile silence of absolute nothingness.

Alex Hobbs lives in Irrigon and is a former educator turned full-time homeschooling mom. She has a degree in political science from Oregon State University.

Letters

Citizens need to stand up for what we believe in

For those not familiar with the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, this is what is said: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

“That, to secure these

rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

Well, methinks that our leaders are all professional politicians. Not statesmen.

That being said, the pandemic is a tragedy. It has exposed issues in America that endanger the freedom and order that we take for granted: the extortion of power; unilateral decrees closing churches, restricting movement, closing businesses, directing behavior, suspending schools, and indefinitely stopping basic freedoms.

By the way, I spent 34 years on active and reserve time in the military. I once would give my life for this country for what I believed our country stood for. At this time, I will give my life to protect my family from what this United States has become.

I am not professing to overtake this country, but I am saying it is the time for all good men to stand up.
Roesch Kishpaugh Pendleton

Letters deadline for May 18 elections

The Observer does not run endorsements of more than 400 words.

The Observer will institute a deadline for letters to the editor, so we can be fair with all the letters we receive and allow for responses before Election Day, if necessary.

We run local letters of endorsement on a first-come,

first-served basis.

Please submit your endorsement letters to the editor by 5 p.m. Friday, May 7.

You can email them to letters@lagrandeobserver.com, or mail them to The Observer, c/o Phil Wright, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande OR 97850.

We will publish our last letters on Saturday, May 15. Any letters received after the deadline will not run. Election Day is May 18.

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