

OUR VIEW

Anti-American or very American?

Nobody can really be surprised if school officials get uncomfortable when parents and others start asking questions about curriculum.

Nobody can really be surprised if school officials deflect rather than explain when someone brings up critical race theory.

School officials can fear they are going to get dragged into a shouting match. And we all know why. That's the trajectory where some people want to take it: loud, combative disapproval. Their mind is made up that what the schools are doing is wrong.

It puts people who want to learn more about what is being taught in the middle of a kind of intersection where any way you look it says "do not enter." So we did some digging.

We tracked down instructional standards for the state. Within those, we looked at ethnic studies. The Oregon Legislature directed in 2017 with House Bill 2845 that ethnic studies instruction be created for K-12 students. In 2019, there was a follow-up bill, HB 2023.

What are the ethnic studies standards? Are there required texts? Nothing specific. It doesn't say teachers must teach this book or follow this lesson plan. It does give direction.

The state Department of Education tries in its documents to tackle head-on some of the criticisms about this new line of study. It asks: "Are the ethnic studies anti-American?" Here's part of how it answers that question: "In recent years, ethnic studies courses or curriculum have become a flashpoint in political debates. Some detractors of ethnic studies programs have utilized passages from a specific reading or an example of a lesson to suggest that students are only being taught a negative view of the United States or white people. As a local control state, Oregon allows school districts to select materials that best support their students in achieving the learning required by the standards. Oregon is not requiring any text or curriculum for the teaching of any social science standards including ethnic studies."

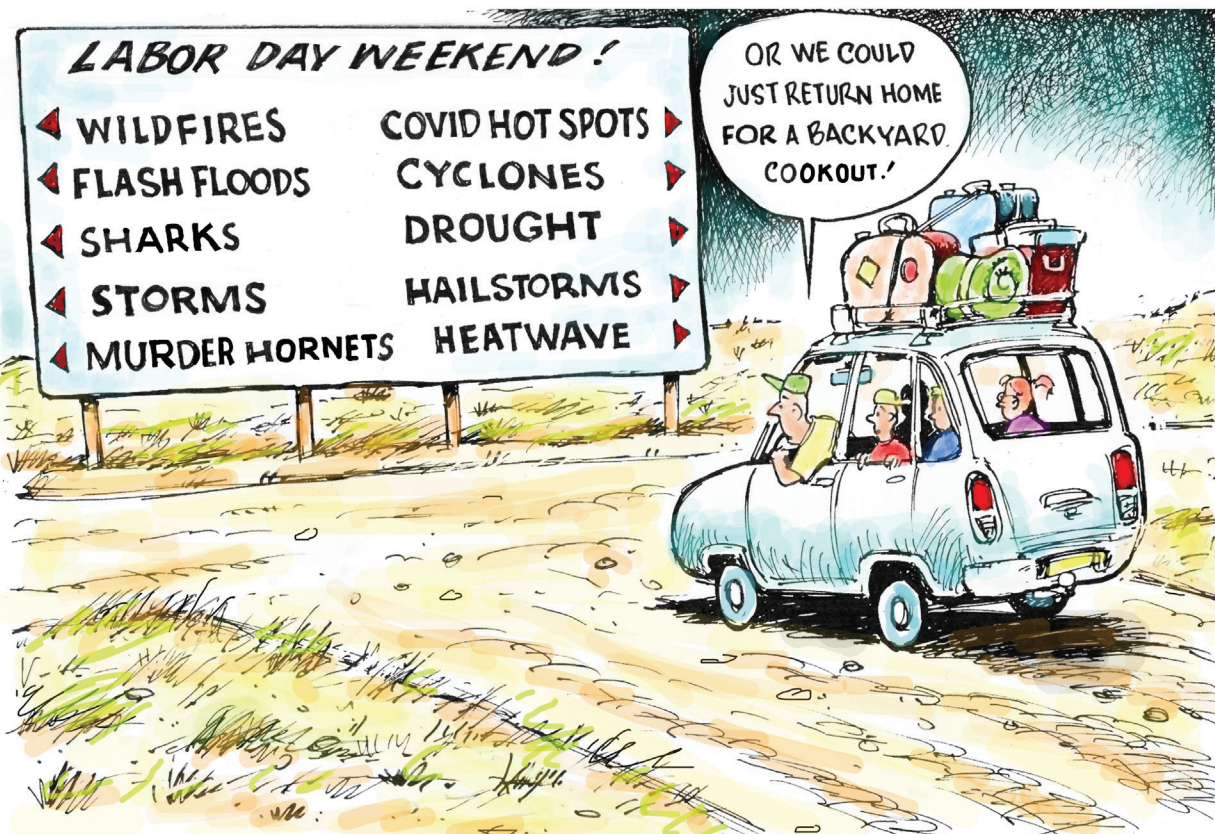
So the question becomes "what materials do or will schools use?" There is a list of recommendations provided by the state here: tinyurl.com/ORTexts. Browse it for yourself. We have read some of the books and, frankly, were pleased to see them on the list.

Among the offerings, there's also a free PDF of a book: "Racism in America." It has a compelling collection of excerpts from other books. And there is a "Racial Justice Text Tool." It is meant to be a guide to help teachers decide if a text or book would be an appropriate teaching tool. It stresses allowing people of color to tell their own stories, decentering whiteness and challenging "the Eurocentric Narrative."

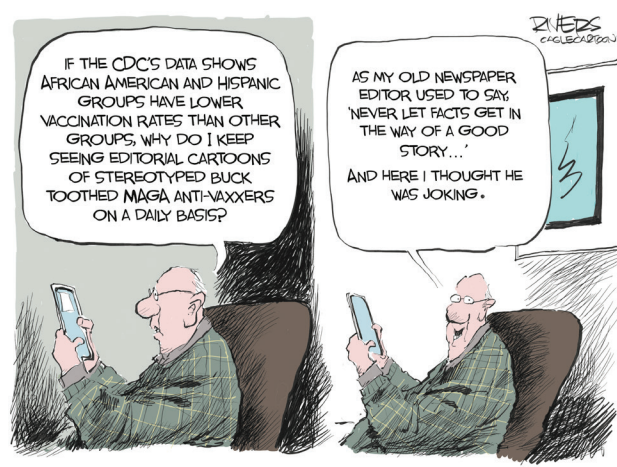
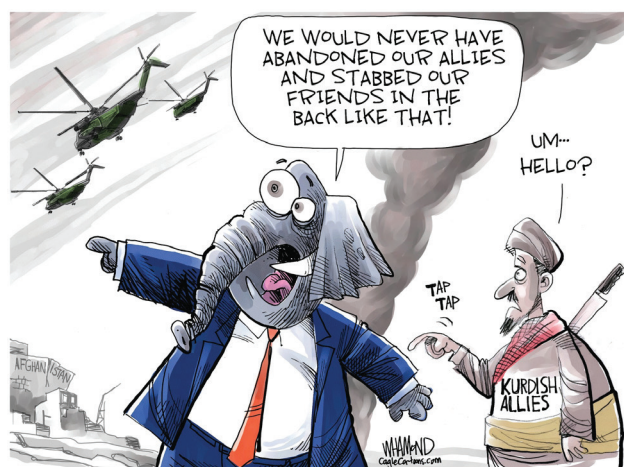
Some people will look at the material and, for them, it will confirm the worst: that Oregon's educational system is herding students into a critical race theory worldview that rewards some and punishes others based on race. In the hands of some teachers, maybe that is what would happen. To think that's what will always happen or regularly happen is simplistic.

Rigorous lessons and time constraints have always meant teachers made difficult choices about what they do teach. If Oregon teachers are being asked to reassess what they do use as their teaching tools, yes, parents are right to wonder what they choose. But pushing teachers to reevaluate their choices forces them to confront how to teach better.

And isn't that very American?



DAVE GRANLUND © POLITICALCARTOONS.COM



Sheriff's letter reveals lack of maturity, leadership experience



DAVID ARNOLD
OTHER VIEWS

I read Sheriff Cody Bowen's letter to Gov. Brown regard local masking issues. By way of disclaimer, I did not vote for Cody Bowen because I preferred a candidate who would bring to the position of sheriff a good deal more leadership experience and maturity, both of which come with time in a job. I was willing to give Mr. Bowen the benefit of the doubt and assumed, over time, he would indeed become a candidate I would vote for.

While I did read his letter in its entirety, I did not have to go further than the first introductory sentence to have questions in my own mind as to both his level of maturity for the position of sheriff as well as the type of leadership experience needed for this position.

In just one sentence he claimed to desire a dialogue with the governor but by the end of that sentence had made it clear, in so many words,

that no one is going to tell him or the citizens of his county what to do. A striking contradiction in motives and certainly a disingenuous letter at best. Unfortunately, this letter did nothing to create conditions for a dialogue around safety measures designed to slow and eventually stop this virus.

The office of sheriff is, by being an elected position, a political one, and often popular candidates are elected by popular vote but not necessarily elected based on who is best qualified. As the popular choice (not discounting other qualifications he may have), I wonder if Mr. Bowen is trying to be the voice of the people who elected him by saying what he thinks they want to hear or want him to say. If so, then his assumption that he speaks for all citizens of Union County is dead wrong.

The obvious governor blaming and inflammatory language contained in this letter is highly biased and slanted toward a particular conservative point of view regarding masking and other safety recommendations and, as such, is extremely divisive and not at all helpful in

establishing any possibility of a constructive conversation. It only further polarizes already divided opinions on these extremely life and death issues.

Mature communicators and problem solvers know full well there are never only two sides to an issue or just one individual or point of view to blame. The lazy and certainly not thoughtful or responsible approach is to find a scapegoat on which to put all the fault for the problem allowing for the solution to be all wrapped up in a nice neat package without actually getting to the root of the issues.

Mr. Bowen does not speak for me in his letter. I am embarrassed to be associated by region with anything he had to say. Hopefully, he is at least mature enough to listen and learn and work harder to establish a true dialogue even if his efforts may not be popular with some citizens. Then I will know he is willing to grow as a leader.

David Arnold, of La Grande, is the former director of counseling and health services at George Fox University.

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

U.S. PRESIDENT

Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500
Comments: 202-456-1111

U.S. SENATORS

Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5244
La Grande office: 541-962-7691

Jeff Merkley
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3753
Pendleton office: 541-278-1129

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

Cliff Bentz
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6730
Medford office: 541-776-4646

GOVERNOR

Kate Brown
160 State Capitol
900 Court St.
Salem, OR 97301-4047
503-378-4582

REPRESENTATIVES

Bobby Levy, District 58
900 Court St. NE, H-376
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1458
Rep.BobbyLevy@state.or.us

Greg Smith, District 57
900 Court St. NE, H-482
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1457
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

SENATOR

Bill Hansell, District 29
900 Court St. NE, S-415
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1729
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

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
Regional circulation director..... Kelli Craft
Interim editor..... Andrew Cutler
News clerk..... Lisa Lester Kelly
Reporter..... Dick Mason
Reporter..... Davis Carbaugh
Multimedia journalist..... Alex Wittwer
Home delivery advisor..... Amanda Fredrick
Advertising representative..... Juli Bloodgood
Advertising representative..... Amy Horn
National accounts coordinator..... Devi Mathson
Graphic design..... Dorothy Kautz
Page design..... Martha Allen

