

billion was spent, the most expensive yet, on a mid-term election. Some 74 percent of Americans are either too stupid or disillusioned to even vote. Compare this to Norway where elections are 74 percent government funded, political ads on TV and radio are banned and voter turnout is 81 percent. In Australia, voting is compulsory with a \$20 fine for not voting.

I have a few suggestions to improve our obviously broken system. Ban all political ads on TV and radio. Printed ads only allowed. Make all the FCC-controlled TV stations broadcast for free, in prime time, all final debates between all those running for Congress, Senate or president. All debates must not exclude any third party candidate.

It's time for American voters to become more informed and evolve beyond a 20-second sound bite.

Michael T. Hinojosa
Drain

POINTLESS NEWSPAPER

Sadly, in my 78th year, I am dropping my subscription to *The Oregonian*.

I have great memories, among them the journalism class at Portland State University in 1958-59 taught by *Oregonian* editorial writer Malcolm Bauer, a journalist in the highest and most honorable sense of the word, who firmly implanted in me the principles of truth and justice, and the role of the Fourth Estate as the watchdog of democracy.

I published my first essay, my first poem and my first short story in *The Oregonian's Northwest Magazine*. The essay was occasioned by the closing of Mayor Bud Clark's first tavern, the Spatenhaus, in 1967. Dozens of literary pieces followed, as well as scores of letters and a handful of op-eds. Toss in the news releases printed during my long career in public relations, and I've filled more column inches than I care to count.

I was pushed to the tipping point Saturday, Nov. 15, when I reached the Letters page and read yet another rant by right-wing fanatic Dave Luck of Lake Oswego. Leading up to it was yet another pointless front-page puff piece on Monica Wehby, accompanied by an enormous photo — yet

another outlandish and overblown attack on Gov. John Kitzhaber — and a shameless and unwarranted validation of Tea Party presidential wannabe Sen. Ted Cruz dissing net neutrality on the Business page.

Coupled with the booting of left-leaning editorial cartoonist Jack Ohman, the demotion of left-leaning columnist David Sarasohn from the editorial board, and all the steaming heaps of radical right rubbish that stain both news and editorial pages with increasing frequency, my reasons are abundantly clear.

As we ended our news stories in the good old days of manual typewriters and even-handed reporting: — 30 —.

David Hedges
West Linn

VIEWPOINT BY EDWARD T. MONKS

Us Against Them

POLICE SOLIDARITY THWARTS ACCOUNTABILITY

For nine years, the killing of 15-year-old Jason Michael Porter has haunted me. Jason was unarmed and operating a reportedly stolen vehicle when he was stopped after being pursued by a Springfield police officer. The officer approached Jason's car with gun drawn and fired a single shot into his face. The officer said he thought he saw Jason raising a gun. There was no gun. The Lane County district attorney, not waiting until the conclusion of the Oregon State Police investigation, quickly pronounced the killing "justified."

Over the years, I have periodically thought of what it was like for Jason's parents to get the telephone call early that morning, and then the hopelessness and emptiness they must have felt the next day when one of the officials with primary responsibility for legally protecting our community called the killing "justified." How could the killing of their unarmed child be of so little consequence to society?

My thoughts were re-stimulated by the recent *Register-Guard* article that described a lawsuit filed by former Springfield Police Sgt. John Umenhofer, who alleged that, prior to the killing, two Springfield officers reported to him that the police-officer shooter "seemed fixated on killing someone, and as a result, they did not want to work with or go on any calls with" him. I am in no position to evaluate the merits of that allegation, but the simple reported facts elicit deep skepticism about law enforcement's behavior in the matter. It was not surprising that the day after the Umenhofer lawsuit was filed, the current DA announced that a new investigation out of his office confirmed the prior DA's finding that the killing was justified.

These events say a great deal about the current state of law enforcement in our community — maybe everywhere. Consider the shooter's actions. He saw an object, a gun, that was not there (meeting the dictionary definition of a "hallucination"). He perceived a threat of being shot that did not exist. Then, based upon that hallucination and non-existent threat, he killed another human being. In virtually any line of employment, an employee who caused the

death of another person based upon an illusion and an imagined threat would be terminated immediately. Then one governmental agency or another would see to it that the employee was evaluated to determine if mental health care and/or commitment were necessary to prevent further harm to others. Yet the "justified" Springfield shooter was quickly back to work. In 2008, that officer participated in another killing, obliging an armed citizen apparently determined to commit "suicide by cop" by firing 13 shots at him. A total of 31 shots were fired by police — none by the deceased.

How could the killing of their unarmed child be of so little consequence to society?

Ideally, police officers should be respectful of the value of every human life — selfless, brave individuals concerned primarily with the welfare and safety of residents in the community to which they belong. Slogans like "Protect, Serve, Care" would be meaningful. I like to believe there are officers with that mindset. However, all too often, in practice, police officers act more like an occupying military force — their primary allegiance to each other accompanied by a quickness to define others as the "bad guys." Once labelled as "bad guys," those people become more readily expendable in the eyes of both police and the DA's office.

Although there are many examples over the last decade or so, just one more. As reported in the May 10, 2008 issue of *The Register-Guard*, a Eugene police officer received a report that a 39-year-old male on the mall threatened to shoot one of four teenagers at 10th and Olive and displayed "what looked like the barrel of a gun." The responding officer located the man and, after a verbal confrontation, Tasered him. There was no gun. It turned out the man was armed with nothing more than "a cigar tube." The article contained numerous references to and quotes from Eugene Police Chief Pete Kerns. More than one

person whose opinions I value has said that Kerns is a decent guy who operates from a moral code. Yet, Kerns is quoted as saying the officer would have been "justified" to shoot and kill the unarmed suspect: "Kerns said that because (suspect) Devatili was thought to be armed and acting aggressively, (officer) Warden would have been justified in using lethal force." Kerns regarding the possible shooting of the suspect: "It would have been the righteous thing to do." Kerns was again quoted directly: "It's fortunate for the officer and it's very fortunate for the suspect that he didn't use the deadly force he was justified in using."

Righteous? Justified? Oxford defines "righteous" as "morally right, virtuous." What is it about police-thought that causes a police chief to refer to the potential killing of an unarmed man as righteous, as morally right and virtuous? A healthy response for the officer (and his chief) would be to go home, get on his knees and humbly thank God he had not killed an unarmed human being. Instead, the official response is to lecture the community on how lucky we are the citizen was not killed. But Kerns did not stop there — he warned us about a potential next time:

"It is unfair to our officers that they should use a Taser in lieu of deadly force ... It puts them in a more dangerous situation."

What is unfair is for members of the community to be afraid of those sworn and paid to protect them.

In 2004, Eugene police officer Roger Magaña was convicted of using his position to rape and sexually abuse 12 women over a five year period. As reported in *Eugene Weekly*, an attorney for one of his victims recounted that Magaña had a total of 45 victims and that 23 police officers had knowledge of 15 complaints made by 15 different women but did nothing. Members of the police fraternity find it very difficult to act against other members.

I understand that police work becomes more dangerous in a society where, because of an absurd absence of effective gun regulation, almost any person can obtain virtually any kind of gun at any time. But the law enforcement community, that is police and DA, are well past an understandable fear of people with guns. There is a solidarity, a similarity of perspective, an absence of concern for the defined "bad guys," and an us-against-them strain of thought that makes it almost impossible for police to police themselves or for a DA to prosecute a police officer for acts against civilians.

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