

KeizerOpinion

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Don't legalize discrimination

The to do about Indiana's Gov. Mike Pence signing into law that state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act is well placed by those who will boycott the Hoosier state for what they call legalized discrimination.

The act says the government cannot burden a person's ability to follow their religious beliefs, unless it can prove a compelling interest in imposing that burden. A majority of people outside of Indiana think the gay and lesbian community is the target of the new law.

Oregon recently experienced its own discrimination case regarding a same-sex couple that ordered a cake from a Gresham bakery and were turned away. An administrative judge ruled that the owners of the bakery discriminated against the couple and the question of compensation is underway by the director of the state Bureau of Labor and Industries.

That case and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in Indiana highlight bedrock American ideals of freedom as well as our social compact. The price of living in a free country, whose citizens' personal rights are codified in our constitution, is allowing others to have their own lives and opinions. Discrimination at some level is part of the human condition; it is nigh impossible to legislate it out of existence.

Discrimination should not be helped along with legislation. Sponsors of the Indiana bill have said repeatedly that the new act does not allow discrimination against gays and lesbians. In media interviews

Gov. Pence, when asked if the act allows legal discrimination, dodged the question over and over. That says something right there.

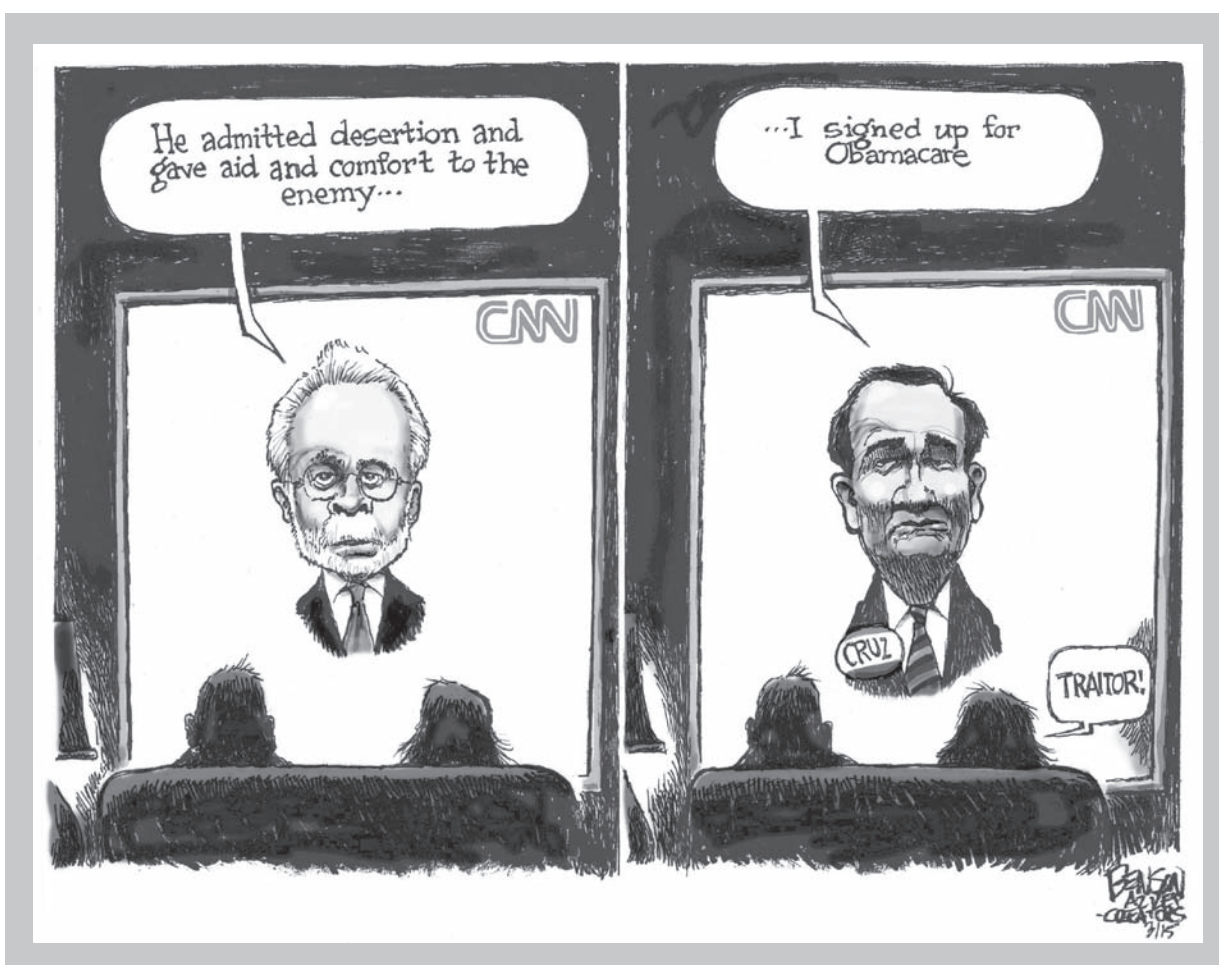
The Religious Freedom Restoration Act does not mention sexual orientation; it protects businesses who refuse to serve anybody if it's against their religious beliefs. It should not be just the gay and lesbian community and its supporters up in arms. People of a different religion or beliefs, regardless of sexual orientation, can potentially face a hostile business.

There are 320 million Americans, holding a myriad of opinions and beliefs. At one time the United States was held up as the melting pot of the world, welcoming people from around the world, people who wanted to be of the American experiment. Most assimilated and became productive members of society.

Maintaining one's heritage and culture is important. By adhering to the values of our way of government—by the people, for the people, of the people, as Abraham Lincoln said, we live under an agreement that the freedom and liberty we enjoy needs to be enjoyed by all.

No one wants to impeded a person's freedom to observe the religion of their choice. By the same token we should tolerate the beliefs and gender identity of our fellow citizens. And least of all we should not make it easy to discriminate against those who are different from us.

—LAZ



Virtues of the smoke-filled room

By MICHAEL GERSON

The John Boehner/Nancy Pelosi agreement on Medicare doctors' payments—permanently easing up on scheduled cuts, funded (partially) by means testing—has been praised as an incremental gain and criticized as a small backward step. In either case, it is a rare bird: the result of a March 4 meeting between leaders in a metaphorical smoke-filled room (and, given Boehner's smoking habit, perhaps an actual one).

The broad acceptance of the compromise by House Republicans and Democrats is rooted in a shared interest. Both sides hate being nagged by doctors. This is not a motivation easily transferable to other issues. But the Medicare deal is a reminder of the way strong party leaders once regularly made law.

The suspicion about compromise should be surprising in a nation that resulted from the Great Compromise. But it reflects a broader trend that has reshaped the attitudes of both parties: polarization.

Political scientists disagree over the question of whether the ideological views of Americans have become more extreme over time. But they generally agree that America's two main political parties have become more sorted, both ideologically and geographically. And they tend to agree that the views of party adherents across a range of issues have become more ideologically predictable.

Ideological sorting has been growing since the 1970s, and involves the collapse both of southern Democratic conservatism and of northeastern Republican liberalism. For the first time (at least in the modern political

other views

constellation) America has a liberal party and a conservative party. (The Democratic coalition remains more ideologically

diverse, but it has recently been sorting at a faster rate.)

America has a liberal party and a conservative party. (The Democratic coalition remains more ideologically

diverse, but it has recently been sorting at a faster rate.) This large historical shift does not lend itself to a single structural explanation such as gerrymandering (since the phenomenon can also be seen in Senate and county elections, not just House races). Liberals tend to argue that the trend is an outworking of Civil Rights-era racial politics or of growing economic inequality. Conservatives contend there has been a long-term backlash against the policy failures of modern liberalism, resulting in the emergence of such figures as Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich.

Whatever the cause, ideological sorting has naturally encouraged division. Conservatives and liberals no longer see people who think the way they do in the other political party. And the disagreements are exaggerated by geographic clustering. There is evidence that some Americans are choosing where they live to maximize their ideological comfort—which increases their sense of belonging, as well as their partisan contempt.

Voting patterns have become polarized over time. More issues (from abortion to climate disruption) have become high-stakes, zero-sum ideological battles. The normal processes of budgeting and handling appoint-

ments have been disrupted. A long period of relative political parity between the parties has encouraged the belief that the next election might bring a victory so complete that compromise will no longer be necessary.

But this is only part of the story. At the same time we have experienced ideological sorting, we have also seen a technological and communications revolution that has encouraged political fragmentation. Backbenchers such as Sen. Ted Cruz (or, potentially, Sen. Elizabeth Warren) have avenues of influence and fundraising entirely outside the parties—and ideological PACs, talk radio hosts and bloggers have agendas very different from party leaders. This is part of a larger, accelerating social trend in which big, consolidated institutions—big business, big labor, big media—are giving way to smaller, decentralized networks. In politics, this decentralization has debilitated the legislative branch, which works through consensus. (The executive branch, being more unitary, has been relatively strengthened.)

We are left with highly ideological parties, headed by weakened legislative leaders—a recipe for bitterness and gridlock. And so the solution to the deep division between parties must (in a seeming paradox) involve stronger parties. It is parties that eventually have an interest in creating a broadly accepted public image (in the current Republican case, of reform conservatism) particularly after they lose the presidency a few times.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

Government vs. religion

To the Editor:

There's been a lot of news about Indiana passing a freedom of religion law.

Both sides in favor or against the law have voiced their opinions. My personal feeling is people who have strong religion reasons for not providing services should have rights under certain conditions. If there were only one baker in a town then that baker should relent and provide a service. If there were many bakers locally then that person should have the right to use their religious beliefs in not providing services. It is not a matter of life or death. It may hurt someone's feelings, so get over it. The same thing is true for a pharmacist who will not dispense birth control medications. If there were many pharmacies readily available then I believe that pharmacist has the right to follow his or her religious belief and not provide a service.

Most business people want to do the correct thing. They wish to make a living and respect the rights of others until it is an offense against their religious beliefs. I do not feel

letters

government has the right to override religion beliefs

and throw the Bible or Koran in the trash. The next step for government is to outlaw the sign "No shirt, no shoes, no service."

Bill Quinn
Keizer

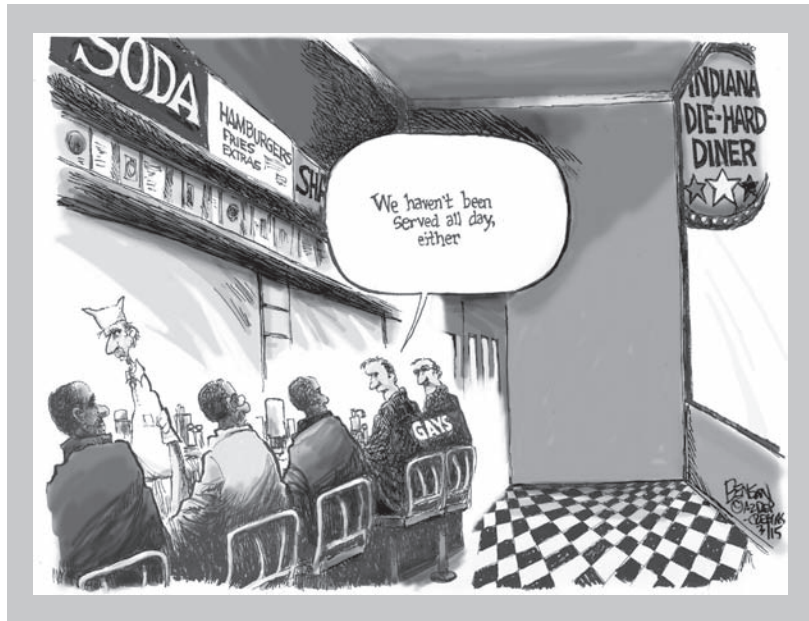
Fire board election

To the Editor:

I am supporting Betty Hart for the Keizer Fire District board. Betty has demonstrated her dedication to community service by years of effort on boards of various organizations such as Girl Scouts. She manifests her high sense of responsibility by attending required meetings and community involvement ventures, and assisting with organization of such. Due to her background in finance she can interpret a balance sheet.

For integrity, commitment to excellence and dedication to service, vote for Betty Hart.

Elaine Orr
Keizer



Is CETC overpromising what it can do?

Once a local person like me learns that there will be established here in the Salem-Keizer School District attendance area a public-private venture whose published purpose is to develop academic proficiency and technical skills, I am compelled to ask why are we doing that which will cost many more tax-supported dollars when our schools should have been offering instruction in these kinds of learnings for all its past years. There may be several answers; however, it's suggested that at least one answer has not been and will not be discussed.

There are a whole lot of high school age youth who find little or no value, interest or advantage in attending one of Salem-Keizer Schools' conventional public high schools: They see nothing for them there and find nothing that will help them get a job. They are often viewed as "troublemakers" while attempts are made by the teachers, school counselors and administrators to minimize the challenges they create.

To retain the district's finance-providing FTEs, something must be done with them and it usually adds up to a waste of time to try to cajole them into what's considered good school citizenship. So, they're essentially warehoused while they're in school, or, more likely, before they drop out. Now, it's surmised, these kids will be encouraged to apply to attend the Career and Technical Education Center (CTEC).

It is truly more than ambitious to believe that going to the CETC will enable these students to pick up enough training and knowledge in construction know-how and manufacturing skills (and the other areas to

gene h. mcintyre

be added later) to go out and secure a "high-demand, high-paying" job. Things like securing employment in skill areas just don't

happen that way nowadays.

What leads me to such a cynical state of mind on this subject has to do with the way in which the CETC is going about putting itself together. American high school principals are not very often education leaders even in their schools, setting a good example for behaviors we want our youth to emulate.

Take a long, hard look at the two principals who will head up CETC. They are experienced at keeping order not leading innovative education efforts. Further, with the two guys holding court at what's now an empty warehouse, we find a twosome who, it's guessed, have never swung a hammer except maybe to hang a picture on a wall while they've not faced the rigor of 10 hours on an assembly line.

What's needed are accomplished persons with strong backgrounds in education and the trades who can establish and maintain direct, sustaining ties with business and industry and offer a relevant curriculum with on-the-job apprenticeships. Those who've worked as carpenters or machine operators, and managed such enterprises, who know from personal experience what a person must learn to be seriously considered for hire in construction and manufacturing. If you want to see what works, visit vocational-technical education schools in Fin-

land, Germany and other success stories in northern European nations where education and training are no farce.

Then there's the matter of duplication. Oregon's taxpayers have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the state's community colleges. If our education leaders in this community were more resourceful they'd have gotten the Salem-Keizer School District and Chemeketa Community College lead persons together and worked out mutually-beneficial student education arrangements, whether academic, career-technical, more suited to community college material and human resources, or both. Obviously they have not done so or we wouldn't be facing the prospect of more tax dollars for more duplication on Portland Road.

The CETC as now conceptualized is mock preparation for work and a real job, a mere dabbling of sorts that will accomplish no more than keeping some youth in school who are led to believe they're attendance provides them real prospects for future jobs. To make a real difference you'd have to establish a new and separate curriculum for vocational-technical education. It will do little good to the youth who participate if they go for an hour or two a day, now and again to the CETC, and then back to a conventional curriculum at their home high school where the classes are traditional high school and hit or miss altogether learning needed to do the kind of work they're promised if they "graduate" from CETC.

(Gene H. McIntyre's column appears weekly in the Keizertimes.)

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Wheatland Publishing Corp. • 142 Chemawa Road N. • Keizer, Oregon 97303
phone: 503.390.1051 • web: www.keizertimes.com • email: kt@keizertimes.com



EDITOR & PUBLISHER
Lyndon A. Zaitz
publisher@keizertimes.com

NEWS EDITOR
Craig Murphy
editor@keizertimes.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Eric A. Howard
news@keizertimes.com

ADVERTISING
Paula Moseley
advertising@keizertimes.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Andrew Jackson
graphics@keizertimes.com

BUSINESS MANAGER
Laurie Painter
billing@keizertimes.com

OFFICE INTERN
Allie Kehret

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legals@keizertimes.com

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