

KeizerOpinion

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Divergent paths

Sixty is the new forty. Sixty-eight is not. It's just old. I am still younger than our newly elected President. It is a time for introspection. How is it that Donald Trump became a self-professed billionaire president instead of me?

It is petty of me to point out that he had a several million dollar head start. As last born of my parents' four children they had without complaint taken on three jobs between them by the time I was judged old enough not to do dangerously stupid things, left unsupervised. That enabled us to enjoy a princely lower middle class existence.

That I started with less cannot be used as an excuse. We all know that America is the land of opportunity and anyone with a good idea, a will to work hard, and total disregard for other's welfare can become fabulously wealthy. It can't be helped that thousands of people must be content to work at the poverty level in order to support each millionaire's lifestyle. I accept that.

Mr. Trump and I each had the chance to go to college. I only lasted the first year at University of Washington before the siren call of wannabe rock and roll hero drew me away. Another strike against me—he is well educated and I learned that I was not rock and roll star material. Well, it was really fun.

We each had some business setbacks. As a partner I contributed much toward bankrupting a restaurant in Spokane. Again I am just a piker in the business failure arena when compared with Donald Trump. Nobody would ever have extended to me loans necessary to accumulating a billion dollars in debt. It's not easy to become too big to fail.

Mr. Trump has turned his name into a brand that sells board games,

steaks, cologne, vodka, furniture, menswear, hotels, beauty pageants, and even a university. I have yet to create any branded product boasting my name. Maybe it's not too late for me to seek funding for Vowell Cheese Spread or Vowell budget motels. Or I could, with hostility, take over the Oregon Dairy Princess Pageant and jazz it up a little. Onstage milking contest and cow trivia. If I understood Twitter I could then mock the losers. And the winners.

Like Mr. Trump I came late to the political battleground. He clearly had far more of the strength and savvy needed to run a successful campaign. In my failed campaigns to become your mayor I had the mistaken notion that it would be bad to say something that wasn't true. I may have even admitted that I was demonstrably less qualified than the candidates I ran against. I deserved the losses.

Mr. Trump has revolutionized America's election process. Born with more cash than working class Americans will earn in a lifetime of labor, he has sold himself as their champion. Carrying that logic to its inevitable extreme, he has appointed a Cabinet full of billionaires who, having read that some citizens are not billionaires, are ready to fight for working class Americans. You should get flotation devices now for all the trickling down that their increasing wealth must surely produce.

I am sixty-eight. Is it too late for me to be a billionaire President? It doesn't matter. I like living here in Keizer. It is enough to have a really great column which is read in print and online by more Americans than any other column ever in the history of earth.

(Don Vowell gets on his soapbox regularly in the *Keizertimes*.)

a box of soap

Protect Medicare Advantage

To the Editor:

I am writing to you as an Oregonian and senior. I am one of over 348,000 Oregonians that benefit from having a Medicare Advantage health care plan. While many people have heard of Medicare and Medicaid, not as many people have heard about Medicare Advantage or know just how beneficial it is for seniors.

For myself and every senior on Medicare Advantage, the health plan provides many more options to live a healthy lifestyle, including preventative screenings, routine checkups, the Silver & Fit and Silver & Strong fitness programs, and a gym membership among others. These aspects, which are not often available under traditional Medicare, truly have been a tremendous blessing for me. The program further helps encourage an

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active lifestyle, leading to a better overall quality of life.

Despite this, almost every year Congress proposes new cuts to Medicare Advantage, threatening the very programs that help take care of and promote healthy lifestyles for 348,000 Oregon seniors. More and more seniors are relying on the program, yet it continues to face possible budget cuts at the hands of our legislators.

I am so grateful for the support Reps. Greg Walden, Kurt Schrader and Earl Blumenauer, who have already voiced for the program and sincerely urge Oregon's other members of Congress, and the other seniors relying on Medicare Advantage, to stand up to Congress, let them know how valuable the program is, and tell them to stop cutting funding to Medicare Advantage.

Virginia Gates Brooks



A picture of American shame

By MICHAEL GERSON

The image of President Donald Trump, flanked by Vice President Mike Pence and Defense Secretary James Mattis, signing an executive order that (among other things) excludes Syrian refugees from America, is indelible. Three powerful American leaders, targeting and dehumanizing some of the most vulnerable people on earth. A picture of bullying. A picture of cruelty. A picture of national shame.

It sits in my head beside images of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, bewildered by the loss of their old lives, assets depleted, living (in some cases) eight to a room, exploited by human traffickers. Many families feel compelled to put their boys to work and their girls into early, forced marriages. "My home is all broken in Syria," a girl of 6 told me while coloring a kinetic picture of helicopters and bombs. Trump is a champion at punching down, but seldom this far.

This executive order is a security measure that very few actual security professionals would prioritize, given that refugees are some of the most carefully vetted people who enter the country. Meanwhile, the downside of (in effect) targeting foreigners by their religion is immediate and considerable—worrying American Muslims and embarrassing America's Muslim friends and allies in the world. When some radical cleric in, say, Central Asia, says, "The new American president hates Islam," he does not require a conspiracy theory to support his claim. And all of this may have been done with no security upside at all, given the utter incompetence with

which the order was drafted, and the likelihood that the courts will prevent its implementation.

Trump came to power promising that masterful leadership would replace the "stupid" kind. This action was malicious, counterproductive and inept—the half-baked work of amateurs who know little about security, little about immigration law, and nothing about compassion.

There is more systematic thought, however, behind Trump's attempt to recast America's global role—presumably the guiding influence of adviser Stephen Bannon. In his inaugural address, Trump asserted the "right of all nations to put their own interests first" and promised, "We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone." Trump's version of America is a normal nation, like Holland or Ghana, concerned with its own borders and business, and generally indifferent to the "way of life" chosen by others. Our national identity, like for other nations, is ethnic and cultural. Trump's America is vaguely Christian. Vaguely 1950s. Vividly white.

A number of policies emerge from these convictions: a walled country, a closed economy and highly restricted immigration. Traditional American commitments—to the special relationship with Britain, to a strong and growing NATO and European Union, to America's Pacific security umbrella—seem up for grabs. The trumpet always calls retreat.

Every American president since World War II has disagreed with the stunted and self-defeating view of the country now held by Trump. Over the last century the United States

has been a cheerfully abnormal nation. American identity (in this view) is not based mainly on blood or soil, but rather on the patriotic acceptance of a unifying creed. American leaders, Democratic and Republican, have believed that a world where the realm of freedom is growing is more prosperous and secure; a world where freedom is retreating is more dangerous. The reason is not mystical. Dictators tend to be belligerent. Governments accountable to their people are generally more peaceful.

It is the lesson of hard experience. America found that it could not avoid the bloody disorders of Europe by ignoring them. It found that a Pacific dominated by a single, hostile power is a direct threat to its economy and security. It found that Russian aggression in Europe is like Newton's First Law—moving until some force stops it.

And America has often accepted refugees, reflecting its deepest values and building reserves of trust and respect. The Soviet Union or Cuba under Fidel Castro were not working out unique and special "ways of life." They were producing fleeing victims who would be imprisoned or murdered at home. It is in America's nature to offer at least some of them a home and refuge. The same should be true for Bashar Assad's victims, including the children of a broken country.

This is the difference a creed can make: When Ronald Reagan spoke on foreign policy, tyrants sat uneasy on their thrones and dissidents and refugees took heart. When Donald Trump speaks on foreign policy, tyrants rest easier and dissidents and refugees lose hope.

(Washington Post Writers Group)

other views

Early impressions shaky

Granted, it's early to make conclusions about our new president and his cabinet. Nevertheless, there are a couple of serious concerns here that have already come up in the past two weeks.

The U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights and political traditions have established freedoms that have not been seen, even considered, in many parts of the world. They are (1) a free and fair vote and (2) a free and respected press. These are two premises upon which our American society, its values and standards, has been built and have endured the tests of time for more than two hundred years.

President Donald J. Trump now insists, regarding the last election, the one that elected him, that there were three to five million who voted illegally and, further, that these fraudulent voters cast their ballots for his opponent, Hillary Rodham Clinton: This proven would enable Trump—to claim the popular vote which every pertinent fact on the subject has denied him so far.

He demands that an investigation take place even though there is a total lack of evidence to back up his assertion while a universal conclusion has been reached that there was no fraud. When Trump makes charges of this kind he reinforces the prejudices of his true believers, who apparently believe, without question, everything he says, while, in doing so, they undermine confidence in our democracy which, as we know from history, is a fragile condition.

Another matter that confounds is Trump's assault on the free press. He calls reporters the most dishonest

people on earth and persons who lied about his inauguration turnout numbers. He also has made a huge effort to disagree with the numbers who showed up in cities all over the nation to advocate for the protection of women's rights and to denounce him as president.

Photos of the two events, the inauguration and march on Washington, D.C., and elsewhere, cannot lie but Trump says they do, causing one to wonder whether a reputable ophthalmologist should be brought in. Of course, America's press is human and has made mistakes; yet, to accuse all the press as willfully practicing mendacity is silly, sad and subversive.

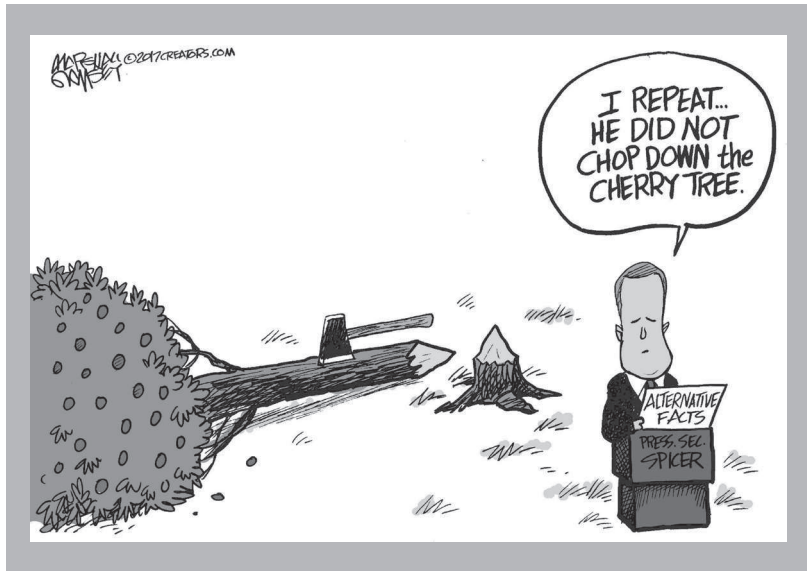
Though I want to know more about how he will ultimately deal with immigration, trade agreements and treaties, Social Security and Medi-

care, "the Wall," the Affordable Care Act's replacement, the appointment of a Supreme Court justice, voting rights, sanctions against the Russians, NATO, and other urgent and pressing domestic and foreign matters, my immediate concern is the effort on his part to deny voting rights and dictate what reporters write and say about him.

We want change that financially benefits all Americans, improves all facets of our infrastructure, and keeps us safe from harm as much as possible. However, to improve on some conditions of life in these United States does not mean one favors a totalitarian state, a dictatorship, tyranny or a fascist government to take the place of what we value, cherish and do not want to lose for the sake of any one man's vanity, a need to make himself larger at freedom's expense.

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

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Keizertimes

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SUBSCRIPTIONS
One year:
\$25 in Marion County,
\$33 outside Marion County,
\$45 outside Oregon

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY
Publication No: USPS 679-430

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
Keizertimes Circulation
142 Chemawa Road N.
Keizer, OR 97303

Periodical postage paid at
Salem, Oregon

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