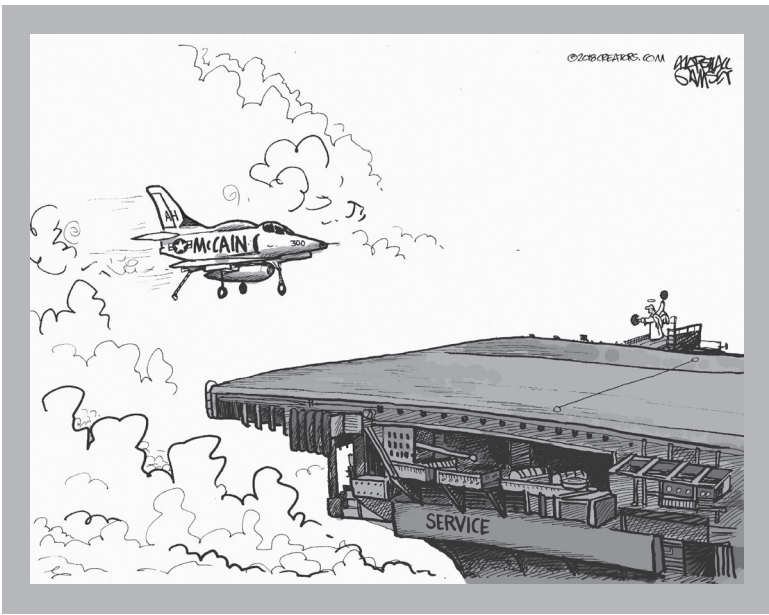


Opinion



One too many

Learning that Keizer was the site of a hate crime earlier this year will likely come as a surprise to some, others were probably waiting for it to happen, still others might offer to pay court costs for the assailant.

None of those responses is acceptable.

In February, a Hispanic man was punched in the face by a neighbor while standing outside his apartment and waiting for his son so they could go to work. The victim's offense? His assailant believed he was in the United States illegally.

We do not know the legal status of the victim, but it doesn't matter. One act of this kind is one too many, and every resident should be confronting the harmful stereotypes and prejudices that result in physical violence at every opportunity.

Hate for others is not something we are born with, but neither is love. Both must be carefully taught. The lessons — both helpful and harmful — are fused into our being through daily interactions with others. But when we choose to self-segregate for reasons of race, creed, sexual identity, or national origin, we cut ourselves off from the essential that helps us grow.

The hate crime that took place in Keizer is an example of how ignorance, propaganda, and segregation can forge hatred that erupts in moments of violence. In all likelihood, the accused man is not a member of a hate group but someone worn down by time and toil into thinking he is losing something that, in fact, never belonged solely to him.

Stemming the tide of such hate will not occur overnight and it's going to take all of us to do it. Working to be less biased and less prejudicial in our thoughts is where it starts. Applying those practices to our interactions with others in the community is the next step. But,

some of the most significant changes must occur at the institutional level through changing laws and workplace policies. It is here where the City of Keizer needs to step up.

A request for the city to adopt an inclusivity resolution — a statement declaring the city a safe and welcoming space for everyone regardless of race, creed, national origin, gender identity, and sexual identity — has languished at

the city council for more than a year. Opponents to the notion wasted little time in voicing their concerns about providing cover for undocumented residents, but there can be no exceptions. There will never be a better time for the council to act on this request and waiting only prolongs the environment where hate festers.

Unfortunately, that is not the only stumbling block for Keizer. In 1993, residents of the city voted to revise the city charter to marginalize those whose sexual identity doesn't conform to traditional Christian values. Doing so was wrong in 1993 and the longer the language remains part of the city's founding documents, the worse it makes the city look. It will require another vote of residents to change it, but the cost is minimal in relation to the quiet harm being done to LGBTQ+ residents.

The people of this country have proven time and again that we can remake ourselves into something better. But it's on all of us to educate ignorance out of ourselves and our children, reach out to those who live on the edges of society and disrupt hateful ideologies when opportunities arise.

To live in any community as an accepted part of it is a privilege, but it comes with the responsibility to stand up for the most vulnerable.

— Editorial Board

our
opinion

CHANGES: Resurgence in hate nothing new

(Continued from Page A1)

In the early 2000s, as Oregon started to claim its reputation as a progressive place, the internet became a ubiquitous part of American life, the first African American president was elected into office, and the public conversation shifted. Public tolerance for white nationalist groups in the mainstream may have lessened, but they didn't go away — they moved online.

"As Oregon became more diverse and progressive, the radical right finds a home on the internet. It becomes more decentralized," Blazak said.

Going online did not mean hate groups became benign; it simply shifted their means of influence. People susceptible to racist ideologies, white nationalist ideologies, hateful ideologies of any kind, no longer had to join the Ku Klux Klan; they could stumble upon YouTube videos of leaders of hate groups espousing hateful rhetoric. The move to online communities meant hate groups no longer considered mainstream had a broader reach, but it also changed the equation. Of late, most acts of hate aren't committed by people who claim membership to these groups.

"The classic example of this is the Charleston church shooting" in 2015, Blazak said. "Dylann Roof was not a member of a hate group or going to meetings, but he read a lot about it online, got all jacked up on the feeling he was losing his country and his women and went into a church and killed nine people. Those people had nothing to do with what he was mad about."

Hateful rhetoric, Blazak added, is: "always centered around losing the country of white, cis-gendered, abled-bodied, straight men." The hatred comes from a sense of loss of their place in whatever hierarchy they perceive themselves as being at the top of.

"They believe if they don't take it back then they are lost," Blazak said. "In a sense they are right. Our country is getting browner, there are more women working than men. All these changes are happening, but it's about how you respond to it."

The response of those who felt ostracized by the changing demographics of America were, in some ways, relegated to the fringes of society during the Obama years. During those years, the messaging was recoded — birtherism, for example — then the campaign and election of Donald Trump opened a door for hate groups to reemerge.

"While it was online [the movement] mutates and then comes back onto the streets with the election of Donald Trump. The haircuts, the shirts, and the words are different, but it's essentially the same," Blazak said.

Blazak references the Proud Boys, who hosted an alt-right rally in Portland in early August. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) describes the New York-based Proud Boys as an alt-right hate group that denies its connection to the movement, while simultaneously espousing misogynistic, Islamophobic, and white nationalist rhetoric.

"The Proud Boys are a perfect example of this generation's hate movement. It always starts out as misogynistic and white male solutions to problems," Blazak said. Their approach, he said, "[is] classic scapegoat victim-blaming. They pick an enemy to rally against. The Proud Boys are very similar to the skinheads of the 1980s with better fashion sense."

According to the SPLC, Oregon is home to 18 hate groups or chapters of hate groups. Even more locally, this includes a branch of the National Socialist Movement, one of the largest neo-Nazi groups in the US, in Salem and Oregonians for Immigration Reform, an anti-immigrant hate group in McMinnville.

For those who do not align with hate groups or their ideologies, facing these circumstances can be daunting. But there are initiatives focused on combating hate. The Oregon Coalition Against Hate Crimes (CAHC), of which Blazak serves as chair, was founded in 1997 in response to the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, when Timothy McVeigh killed 168 people and injured hundreds more with a homemade explosive while trying to incite a race war.

Blazak and the CAHC also show up to rallies and protests, to support victims of hate activity and to outreach to members of hate groups in the hopes of breaking them

out of the groups' ideologies.

After all, Blazak said, members of hate groups "are not monsters."

"For the most part, they are average people who don't know how to make sense of a world that changed so quickly. As much as we hear about Antifa, I don't know any former Nazis who are going to change after being hit with a rock," he said. "That's not how it works."

In Keizer, there's no organization dedicated to working with either the victims of hate activity or with perpetrators of hate activity. However, in Salem, a city commission is dedicated to victim outreach: the Salem Human Rights Commission. The group was a response to the Civil Rights movement in 1967 and the city's stance on inclusivity was codified five years later in city ordinances. The commission is comprised of volunteer community members appointed by the Salem mayor who work alongside city staff and a liaison from the police department. Commission members train to work with victims of hate activity.

The commission is comprised of several task forces, including an LGBTQ+ task force tasked with collecting information about and understanding hate crimes and bias incidents committed against the LGBTQ+ community and implementing trainings for law enforcement who come into contact with LGBTQ+ victims and suspects of crimes in their work.

The task force that has been around the longest is the core response team.

"The core response team serves the people of Salem directly," Danielle Meyer, chair of the commission, said. "It is there to support victims of hate and bias crimes. ... If someone chooses, they can have members of the core response team go and talk with them. We'll have a one-on-one interview and we listen to what their needs are."

Because the commission deals with both hate crimes and bias incidents, there's not always a criminal charge to be made against the perpetrator of the discriminatory behavior, and sometimes the victim doesn't follow through out of fear of being re-victimized. However, there are often civil means of dealing with the kinds of bias incidents that are reported, and the commission helps people figure out what resources they can draw on to resolve the issue.

Gretchen Bennett, the Human Rights Commission's federal compliance manager, said even if the incident doesn't rise to the level of a crime, "it would still be something the HRC would want to help with, because it's still experienced as bias by the victim so we would want to offer support, try to problem-solve and offer solutions that aren't criminal in nature."

Often, the commission finds itself in a place to reaffirm the city's denunciation of discrimination, even if there isn't any action they can take to rectify the hateful activity.

Meyer recalled an incident from last year, when a member of the community was experiencing harassment because of their national origin.

"The family didn't want to bring any attention to themselves, so they didn't want to make a report. They didn't want to have a big thing happen," Meyer said. "The core response team drafted a letter that we sent to the individual that had experienced it, saying this does not represent the City of Salem, this is not right, and we're so sorry that you had to deal with this."

The letter was signed by Meyer, the commission chair, and the Salem mayor.

"The family reported back to us that that letter meant so much to them," Meyer continues, her voice catching. "It makes me tear up a little, thinking about that, because apparently they carried that letter around with them for quite a while. I really like that story. All it was was kind words, because that's all we could do."

The commission's mission feels particularly urgent in the current time and place, but Meyer points out it's important to recognize that current levels of hate in America are not date-stamped with November 8, 2016.

"I think one of the things that we need to keep in mind, when we're looking at the discrimination, when we're looking at the hate: we're not looking at something that has risen since the election. We're not looking at something that was quiet in the 1990s and got louder, or something that used to be loud in the 1960s," Meyer said. "We're looking at something that's been a part of humanity forever. ... We have to always be present here to combat that discrimination and hate, but it's always going to be there and it's going to be in all aspects of society in one form or another."

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INCLUSIVE, continued from Page A1

they would look into forming a committee and have more work sessions to discuss it."

Swaney realizes that an inclusivity resolution would not put an end to acts rising out of bias and hatred, but such statements are also more than words.

Randy Blazak has been studying hate groups and ways to counteract their messages for the past three decades and said inclusivity resolutions are one way to do it.

"Institutional changes are important in moving the ball forward toward equity, but they are also important to the people served by that institution. We know that someone can be marginalized by a neighbor calling them names, but we can also be marginalized by the institutions that are supposed to serve us, whether it's a government, bank, or the airline that you fly," Blazak said. "If you are a person that is a target of that marginalization, any movement toward equity can be incredibly helpful and it means those people can work at their full potential. There was a study that came out last year that found when people can be their true selves, they will work four times as hard and be more involved in the institutions. These [inclusivity] statements ultimately help all of us in that way."

Earlier this year, a Hispanic Keizer resident was assaulted by another man who lived in his neighborhood. While the crime appeared to rise out of racial bias, the case is still working its way through the justice system. If the victim lived in Salem — which has far-reaching inclusivity language in its adopted statutes and

ordinances and a volunteer Human Rights Commission to assist victims — he might have had some reassurance that his assailant didn't represent the community as a whole.

Danielle Meyer, who chairs the Salem Human Rights Commission, said even though it can only provide reassurances in many cases, the words still matter.

"Sometimes all we can do is be there to listen and say we're sorry that happened, but people really appreciate hearing that. It means a lot to them," Meyer said.

As it stands, the only statements regarding inclusivity and diversity in Keizer's city charter are ones marginalizing people with non-mainstream sexual and gender identities. City residents approved the changes to the city charter — the founding document of the city — with 55 percent of the vote in 1993. (See chart on Page A1 for the differences in language.)

City Councilor Roland Herrera, the sole Latino voice on the Keizer city council, said some recent efforts like Keizer Police Chief John Teague visiting the city's predominantly Latino church improve relations between Latino residents and Keizer public safety officials, but there is always room to grow within that relationship and other spaces.

In recent years, he's been employed as a mentor at Kennedy Elementary School and a parent recently reported that, when she was asking about school enrollment on Facebook, someone commented telling her to "go back to Mexico."

"She was in shock. She had never heard anything like that and didn't know how to respond. I tell people about incidents like that and they will say that it can't happen in Keizer, but it does, sometimes," Herrera

said in an interview last week. "I want people to be aware that it does exist for some people."

He added that it's incumbent on everyone to "get out of their comfort zones because that's how you grow."

Herrera bristled at the idea of an inclusivity resolution being tagged as a maneuver to provide cover for undocumented residents.

"We just want people to be open-minded. If someone is wearing clothing that's a little bit different, be open-minded and welcoming. I don't think an [inclusivity resolution] answers everything, but it would be helpful," Herrera said.

Swaney said support among the group that requested consideration of the inclusivity resolution has not diminished, but actions at the federal and state level (the ending of DACA and the emergence of an Oregon ballot measure to repeal a statewide sanctuary state law) have shifted priorities up the chain of governance. She, for one, is not giving up the cause precisely because she's seen how lives and minds can be changed by taking a stance on inclusivity issues.

When Swaney taught at Claggett Creek Middle School, she handled an incident when members of the school's leadership team were found drawing a swastika on a binder during a school project.

"It was white privilege thing and they didn't understand. Some people wanted them off the leadership team and I advocated to teach them about what the symbol was and what it represents. In the end, they were put on probation I think were able to do some positive education."

(Keizertimes intern Random Pendragon contributed to reporting of this story.)

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