

# The 6 things wrong with the America I love

British expatriate offers a report card on his adopted country



By **PATRICK WEBB**  
For *The Daily Astorian*

There is a line in the movie “Revenge of the Nerds” where ginger-haired Poindexter, lacking small talk, asks his Omega Mu sorority date, “Would you rather live in the ascension of a civilization or its decline?”

I love America. But I fear it has tipped toward decline — far too early for this young, clever experiment in democracy.

I am a first-generation, legal immigrant who joined a white-collar tide from the mother ship in 1980, seeking escape after a year of grim reality, aka Margaret Thatcher.

Instead, I endured first the failed celluloid unreality of Ronald Reagan then the consistently disappointing leadership that followed.

Thirty-five years after I stepped off that Pan-American plane, I have paid my dues. I’ve stayed silent for years, maintaining that awkward persona of an impartial observer, a guest tolerating his host’s foibles.

I cannot do so any longer. As we Britons say, America is going to the dogs. It needs rescuing.

So, as nothing gets read these days unless it promises a list, here’s mine.

The six things wrong about the America I love.

## No 1. Civility

First is the lack of civility. I realize my background, as a white privileged Englishman, gives me a reputation for avoiding rudeness. We are a polite tribe, even with our bayonets. Am I alone in thinking that this shrill cacophony of abuse in modern America is simply sickening? The people who raise their voices the loudest and are the rudest are not necessarily those who should be heard or heeded. When will this nation realize that civility is not a form of weakness? In my view, it is a sign of a tolerance we seem to be lacking. People laughed at Drew Herzog when he made this point before joining the Astoria City Council. Who is laughing now?

## No 2. Violence

There have been 239 documented school and college campus shootings since I emigrated.

We all know why. But no one wants to do

anything about it. “A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.”

The Second Amendment could not be clearer.

• Does anyone really believe that the two teenagers who massacred kids at Columbine High School hoarded guns so they could drill daily to be “a well-regulated militia.”

• How about the racist who massacred nine Americans in church in Charleston, S.C.?

• Or, how about the jihadist who just massacred the U.S. Marines at Chattanooga, Tenn.?

The kerfuffle over the Confederate flag that followed the Charleston deaths was asking the wrong question. The over-riding question shouldn’t be about an historical piece of colored cloth. The First Amendment quite properly gives that a free pass, just as it does the abhorrent Nazi swastika, and the Union Jack, which once ruled over Eastern Standard Time. The people who greeted President Barack Obama waving the stars and bars have a constitutionally guaranteed right to do so. Just like the people who cheer him or any other president.

The more relevant question is the one the rest of the world asks after every one of those shootings. With all these avoidable tragedies, why do we allow improper people such unbridled access to lethal weapons?

There is one firearm for every person in the United States of America. Based on this proclivity, I am inclined to wonder, is this nation home to the best-regulated militia in the world? It certainly ought to be. Yet, when it was truly needed for its peacetime mission during Hurricane Katrina, much of our true, well-regulated militia was away killing brown foreigners in places most Americans couldn’t find on a map. And all based on a lie.

## No 3. Leadership

How has politician become a dirty word? I wonder, was it always? I look around at people like Deb Boone, diligently serving our community in the Oregon Legislature with few rewards and even fewer pats-on-the-back, and wonder why on Earth she does it. Certainly

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not for the \$23,000 a year. And don’t tell me she works “part time,” because that’s a crock of you-know-what. She seems exceptional.

Nationally, I look at the burgeoning field of Democratic and Republican suits wanting to lead us into the next disaster, and I see little difference between them. Just about all have sold out to monied special interests. It is not an original thought, but I agree they should be required to wear sponsor logos on their suits just like NASCAR drivers. And don’t get me started on Donald Trump. His comedic excesses make some of the GOP candidates appear halfway civilized.

## No 4. Taxes

America loves winning. Our national psyche says we must be No. 1. We are. We are topping league tables in poverty, hunger and homelessness. The same country that put a man on the moon has citizens living in their cars and on its streets. Yet this is the most affluent, advanced, supposedly civilized country in the world.

And too few people are standing up and saying what needs to be said. This truth hurts. If we are going to create and maintain a truly supportive society, one that helps our most vulnerable neighbors, we need to cut spending on guns and bombs. And we need to gather more tax revenue to pay for important services — like mental health — that are not properly funded. That means more people paying their fair share of taxes. Yes, that might mean more taxes for everyone.

It has always puzzled me that IRS agents are demonized. Doesn’t everyone believe their neighbor should pay at least as much tax as they do? That means fewer loopholes and more IRS agents to pursue the people who don’t pay.

## No 5 Religion

It is way past time to restore government, as those revered Founding Fathers intended it, back into a religion-free zone. How many more needless deaths will the Religion(s) of Love cause? When we talk about “Christian values,” are

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we talking about the Klan or Westboro Baptist Church? No, you say, but ...

“Inventing a Christian America: The Myth of the Religious Founding,” by Steven K. Green from Willamette University in Salem, should be required reading in grade schools, an antidote to the myth preservers.

Let’s let religion be a matter of personal choice or conscience, not an area where one zealot and his brainwashed followers’ biases become public policy. There is only One True Religion and that is mine. Except for yours, and the bloke down the street. How about we agree to disagree — and move ahead?

## No. 6. Protest

There is far too much civil obedience in this country. Too many are silent. Americans have swallowed the bread and circuses they are fed. Even demonstrators, who show enough cajones to put their feet on the pavement, are voluntarily allowing themselves to be penned behind police lines. The Occupy movement offered a timely message, but was hijacked by anarchists. However, it said the unsaid: the class war is alive and well.

Speaking of police, I think we are lucky on the North Coast to have dedicated officers who take their “serve-and-protect” oath seriously.

But we read almost daily of cops around the nation shooting unarmed black men who are minding their own business. It’s bad enough that they do it. But most seem to get away with it, with little or no sanction. Am I alone in thinking this has to stop?

It is time to stand up, America.

Today’s wonderful rainbow of poorly rewarded veterans, gay Lutherans, agnostic Seahawks fans, long-suffering soccer moms, and even “old hung-up, Mr. Normal” from “Tommy,” needs to say one word.

Enough!

This is our country.

We must take it back and reshape it. Properly. Venceremos!

North Coast writer Patrick Webb is former managing editor of *The Daily Astorian*.

## Open forum

### Slow down!

Regarding the deaths on U.S. Highways 30 and 101 in Clatsop County (“Deadliest roads,” *The Daily Astorian*, July 31): Go the speed limit, people. I have been commuting since May from Portland to the Long Beach (Wash.) Peninsula, and 95 percent of the vehicles that pass me when I am going the speed limit are four-wheel drive pickups or SUVs.

I always drive the speed limit, but these vehicles pass carelessly doing 10-20 miles over the speed limit on Highway 30 just to be stopped at the Safety light in Astoria. So many vehicles pass on the Astoria/Washington bridge, also, just to be one car ahead, and then are stopped for bridge construction, or are one car ahead of you at the light.

It’s insane. It is really bad on the Pacific Highway, Sandridge Road and Highway 101 on the Washington side, heading to Ocean Park. Just yesterday, I saw two close calls. People are passing on solid yellow lines, also.

I have been driving in California for the last four years and never saw anything like this. What’s the hurry?

CHRISTI DANOWSKI  
Vancouver, Wash.

### Bernie for president

On Wednesday, July 29, I drove to Astoria from Nehalem to attend a “Bernie for President” meeting. There were an estimated 100,000 supporters at more than 3,500 organized meetings all over this country on this day.

In American politics there are two primary sources of power: Organized people and organized money. Organized money has been buying our federal government and our state governments for years, and look where we are: Broken economy, crumbling infrastructure, unfair tax codes, and the people we elect vote in favor of Spe-

cial interests instead of our interests.

At the rate we are going, our children and grandchildren are going to be in big trouble. College is all but unaffordable. Most loans have fees besides interest. The Federal Student Aid website (<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types/loans/interest-rates>) says that interest rates range from over 4.29 to over 6.84 percent, fees range from 1.073 to 4.272 percent. Average college costs range from \$10,000 to \$35,000 per year. When our kids graduate from college with these big debts, will there be jobs?

According to [www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com), our overall unemployment rate is over 10 percent, and that doesn’t count the thousands who lost their jobs and received no unemployment, and those in their 40s and 50s who just simply can’t find work today. White kids entering the job market have an unemployment rate of 33 percent, Hispanic kids 36 percent and black kids 51 percent.

Bernie Sanders makes it plain that most changes occur from grassroots organizing, and it will take most of us doing something to change the downward path we are on. I know this is true. Thats why I went.

If you don’t know who Bernie Sanders is, you should find out.

DIXIE GAINER  
Nehalem

### No clean jobs at LNG

There are people who favor the idea of having two liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in Oregon — one at Coos Bay and the other near Warrenton — because these massive projects offer “jobs.” But let’s ask ourselves, “What kinds of jobs?”

Are the Jordan Cove jobs promoting clean and renewable energy? Of course not. The Jordan Cove project will require 235 miles of 36-inch diameter pipeline to run through farm-

land, forest, streams, and wetlands. The export LNG facility at Coos Bay will perpetuate the use of fracking, and throughout the U.S. local communities are taking up the fight against the dangerous reliance on fracking to extract natural gas.

Once natural gas is refined it becomes methane, and methane is a more potent heat-trapping greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Methane is dangerous because it leaks during drilling, production, pipeline transmission, and while being liquefied into LNG. Finally, the Jordan Cove site is situated near the Cascadia Subduction Zone, and there is no guarantee that a 9.0 magnitude earthquake won’t strike within the lifespan of the plant.

The same principles apply to the Warrenton site, as well.

GREG JACOB, PH.D.  
Hillsboro

### Save the festival

If ever a town has received a love letter, it was Astoria. Sergey Antonov’s letter brought tears to my eyes, as often his music did (“Support the festival,” *The Daily Astorian*, July 30).

The first time he played here I wondered if anyone realized what a world class performance they were hearing. This year was not just outstanding, but to give us the time and talent you could find no place else, was breathtaking. He brought his friends, and they were everywhere.

In a world that is so messed up, to have this wonder here in Astoria give such soul food for the heart — the thought that anyone would let this festival fall apart is just unthinkable. Surely we can find a way to solve this problem. We’ve come too far to just walk away.

If I was 20 years younger and healthier, I would get on my white

horse and fly to the rescue. But as in the past, and now, I can contribute with a little money and support if given an organization to work with.

Please, I beg the people of Astoria, do not let the Astoria Music Festival slip away from us. It is the bright light of the year for many of us.

JO ROBINSON  
Astoria

### Reform democracy

Last week I listened in on a national conference call with U.S. Rep. John Delaney of Maryland who discussed the Open Our Democracy Act, HR 2655 (<http://1.usa.gov/ISB-GzLc>), which he recently introduced.

The call was convened and hosted by Jackie Salit, president of IndependentVoting.org, one of the largest associations of independent voters in the country, of which I’m a part. On the call, we got the inside scoop on this important legislation.

The bill does three things: enacts Top Two nonpartisan primaries for all Congressional elections in the U.S., makes Election Day a national holiday, and creates a road map whereby the practice of gerrymandering could be replaced with an independent redistricting process.

In other words, it’s a gridlock-fighting package of reform designed to empower voters and give our country some much needed breathing room from the partisanship that now over-determines every step of the political process.

Delaney said “Politicians always make the mistake of underestimating the American people; 300 million smart Americans are not going to let some 500 members of Congress stand in their way forever.” I couldn’t agree more.

Given the vested interests of politi-

cians in the status quo of the two-party system, it’s going to take a grassroots movement of voters to build the pressure to make these kinds of reform happen.

I’ve written to my representative, Peter DeFazio, and asked him to let all voters be heard in the election process. Keeping everyone included is the only way to have a government by the people and for the people. Please join me in writing your representatives. They need to hear from you.

KEMBERLY TODD  
Independent Voters of Oregon  
(IVOO)  
Roseburg

### Inhumane driver

I feel the need to comment about an accident that occurred on the road to Hammond coming from Warrenton on Sunday, Aug. 2, around 9 a.m. Someone struck a dog that was crossing the highway at around 17th Place. We did not see the accident directly. However, we did see the driver leave immediately after striking the dog, without even getting out to see if he could help the dog.

We do not doubt that this was probably an accident that could not be avoided. However, we are greatly disturbed that someone would strike a pet with an automobile and then drive away without even trying to see if the pet could be helped.

The dog died at the scene about 20 minutes after it was hit, and so the dog could not have been saved. However, it was not obvious to the people who went to help the dog that it might have been saved. Uncaring people who drive away from accidents are very close to be inhumane in my opinion, and I am greatly stressed that these things happen in this day and age.

SCOTT WIDDICOMBE  
Warrenton



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