

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

20 years after an Oregon tragedy

Before Columbine, there was Thurston.

It seems like only yesterday that 15-year-old Kip Kinkel shocked the conscience of Oregon — indeed, the world — by gunning down classmates at Thurston High School in Springfield after ambushing his parents at home.

But it's been 20 years. Kinkel is 35 and imprisoned. The Oregon Supreme Court recently upheld his prison sentence of nearly 112 years with no possibility of parole.

Experts at his sentencing had testified that his extreme psychosis was treatable but incurable.

It was May 21, 1998, when Kipland Philip Kinkel fatally shot two students, wounded 25 others and later tried to stab a police officer. The previous day at Thurston High, he had bought a stolen pistol from a friend, been arrested and — supposedly worried about what his parents would think about his arrest — shot and killed them.

Twenty years. Columbine and Virginia Tech. Sandy Hook and Fort Hood. Clackamas Town Center and Umpqua Community College. Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida and the Route 91 Harvest country music festival in Las Vegas.

As a state and as a nation, we have suffered much and learned some.

“Active shooter” is now ingrained in our vocabulary. Schools, law enforcement and medical units con-

duct drills. Protocols have been rewritten so first responders — thank God for their courage and training — confront the shooter as quickly as possible instead of awaiting SWAT's arrival.

Threats and indicators of potential violence are taken seriously ... much of the time. SafeOregon.com has been created specifically for schoolchildren to report threats, replacing the Oregon State Police tip line launched after Thurston and then dropped for lack of funding.

Laws — including Oregon's new extreme-risk protection order — have been passed allowing courts and law enforcement to intervene if someone is deemed psychologically at risk of harming self or others.

Yet in many ways, we seemingly have made little progress.

Access to mental health care is the No. 1 concern of Oregon high school students in a recent survey.

Deadly violence, whether by firearms or other means, still plagues American society at levels far above those of most industrialized countries. We still don't know what drives one irrational person to kill, but many more not to.



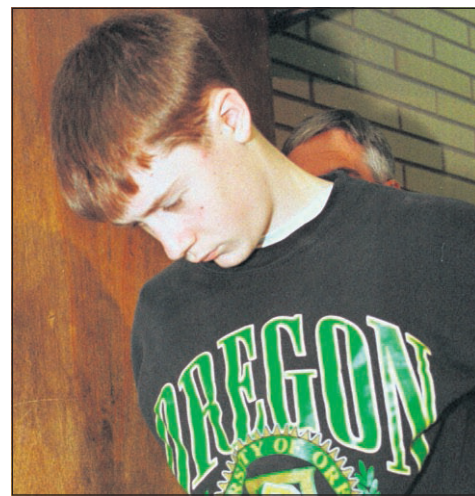
AP Photo/Don Ryan

Kip Kinkel, middle, is led into the Marion County Courthouse in Salem in 2007.

We have squandered an incalculable number of dollars, days and brain cells arguing over whom to blame — mental illness, firearms, our culture — instead of finding common ground and community solutions. The resulting “opportunity cost” — what we could have achieved if we had pursued a different course — is profound.

Kip Kinkel came from a good home. His parents did their best, seeking both accountability and treatment for Kip.

We owe it to them, to the Thurston students — and to all the other families — to find that common ground and those collaborative solutions.



AP Photo/Don Ryan

Thurston High School student Kip Kinkel, 15, is led to his arraignment in Eugene in 1998.

WHERE TO WRITE

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LETTERS

County commissioners should comply with rules

A serious problem is revealed in The Daily Astorian's coverage of the current kerfuffle going on between Clatsop County Manager Cameron Moore and the Board of Commissioners. The stories mention that Clatsop County has seen nine different managers over the past 16 years (“Clatsop County manager defends himself in return to commission meeting,” May 10).

The average tenure for county managers, according to the International City/County Management Association, ranges from five to eight years. Micromanagement of county staff by commissioners is apparently a huge issue.

Moore's comment that “I have been asking, begging, pleading and demanding that these commissioners acquaint themselves with the rules that govern them and consistently comply with them” also speaks volumes (“Clatsop County manager apologizes for skipping meetings,” The Daily Astorian, May 1).

I honestly don't know whether Moore is a good manager or not. But clearly, the county Board of Commissioners has a problem. Nine managers in 16 years. Think about it.

As a taxpayer, I demand that any candidates for commissioners' seats, as well as the electing commissioners who are not up for re-election, “acquaint themselves with the rules that govern them” and then demonstrate that they understand, and will “consistently comply with them.”

If they don't like the manager, for whatever reason, they have recourse to deal with that within those rules, and without engaging in a ridiculous dog and pony show like the one we have now.

Otherwise, we, the taxpayers of Clatsop County, are headed for a very expensive legal

disaster, and, unfortunately, the negative impact of constant turnover in the county manager's office.

BILL GRAFFIUS
Gearhart

The ever-changing version of truth

Truth has recently been buffeted by severe crosswinds. It has been assailed most severely by persons in the highest ranks of our government, and their revolving coterie of lawyers. Our president has shuffled his legal team so deftly that even the most astute observers have difficulty staying abreast of what that might portend.

The most recent addition to the president's legal team has, even for the president's most ardent supporters, created a certain crisis of certainty.

While he identifies members of the FBI as “storm troopers,” he also makes a liar out of his president by telling his interviewer that the president, who has repeatedly denied having a stormy affair with a certain porn star, paid off the lawyer who provided the woman \$130,000 in hush money. Both can't be telling the truth, as their assertions clash head-on.

The chief prevaricator continues to feed the media more than just “fake” news. But what can we expect from someone who claimed for years that Obama was not a born U.S. citizen, even though the U.S. Supreme Court said he was?

The most incredible fact remains that many Americans continue to support President Donald Trump and his ever-changing version of truth.

ELFI GROSS
Astoria

Kujala will keep us informed as commissioner

Congratulations newly elected Commissioner Mark Kujala. It was a joy for me to see how you so handily won your race for the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners (District 1). As a former Warrenton mayor, one thing for sure I know is that you will keep us informed.

We here in Warrenton (especially us seniors) are delighted that you will be an advocate for us and our growing city. I believe Warrenton is the fastest-growing city in our county, and a lot of credit for that goes to Mark.

One thing I especially remember when you were mayor, Mark, is how you kept us informed through your mayor column in The Columbia Press. We always knew what was going on. Your descriptive abilities go unmatched.

Thanks for all the hard work you went to as you fought for the not-easy task of representing us. Hope it turns out to be a privilege. Congratulations, Mark.

EMMA EDWARDS
Warrenton

Trump presidency bad news for democracy

I am not qualified to comment on what may be happening with our federal justice system, but when Kentucky Sen. Mitch McConnell stonewalled Barack Obama's nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, I formed a few partisan opinions of my own.

The letter “What's happening with federal justice system?” (The Daily Astorian), published May 16, left me convinced there was nothing the writer and I could agree on, until I read his parting comment: “But what's happening today to the presidency is bad news for American

democracy.”

I could not agree more, nor could I have said it better. Thanks.

GARY DURHEIM
Seaside

We have devalued process of voting

Having been a candidate for local office in Columbia County through four election cycles, I've knocked on thousands of doors, put signs up, torn signs down, accepted contributions, and worked hard to comply with election laws while running a business.

I learned what it was to “value the voter.” Twice I lost by less than 1 percent. One forced a recount.

In 1998, Oregon became the first state in the union to offer vote by mail. Then in 2016, Oregon passed the motor-voter law, coupling drivers' licenses to voter registration, with the apparent result of almost 500,000 new voters since 2014. So explaining Oregon's abysmal 33.6 percent turnout in the May 15 primary is a head-scratcher.

What's stranger, politically active Portland — that's Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas counties — saw turnouts of 32.9 percent, 30.8 percent, and 28.1 percent, respectively.

I'd suggest by reducing the steps, effort, and identification required of one to become a voter, we created the unintended, but very real consequence of devaluing the process of voting.

When one takes the time to fill out and mail in the paperwork, read up on the issues and candidates, then drive to the polls, making it there by 8 p.m., he hasn't just voted. He's invested in America.

WAYNE MAYO
Scappoose

