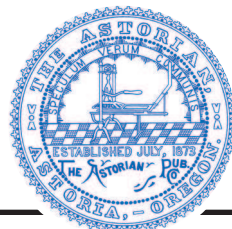


OPINION



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

World in torment cries out for kindness

America is sick. How are we going to heal it? That's the premise of this column. If you are not prepared to be part of the solution, then don't bother to read on.

Three years ago, I penned a column in this newspaper headlined, "The six things wrong with the America I love."

I addressed civility (missing), violence (far too much), leadership (lacking), taxes (too low), religion (not sufficiently separate from state) and protest (insufficient).

I thought it would garner reaction, spirited discussion, maybe even action. Reactions were generally favorable,

though disappointingly few and muted.

One reply came from a friend of a former news colleague who reached out with clarity and forcefulness: "You know, if you don't like the way we are here in the USA, don't try to change us (your country tried in 1776 and failed). Wouldn't it be easier for you to just go back to England?"

At least it was polite hate mail!

In case you haven't noticed, my native England is rather messed up too. It would take too long to explain why; in short, the kingdom is not united.

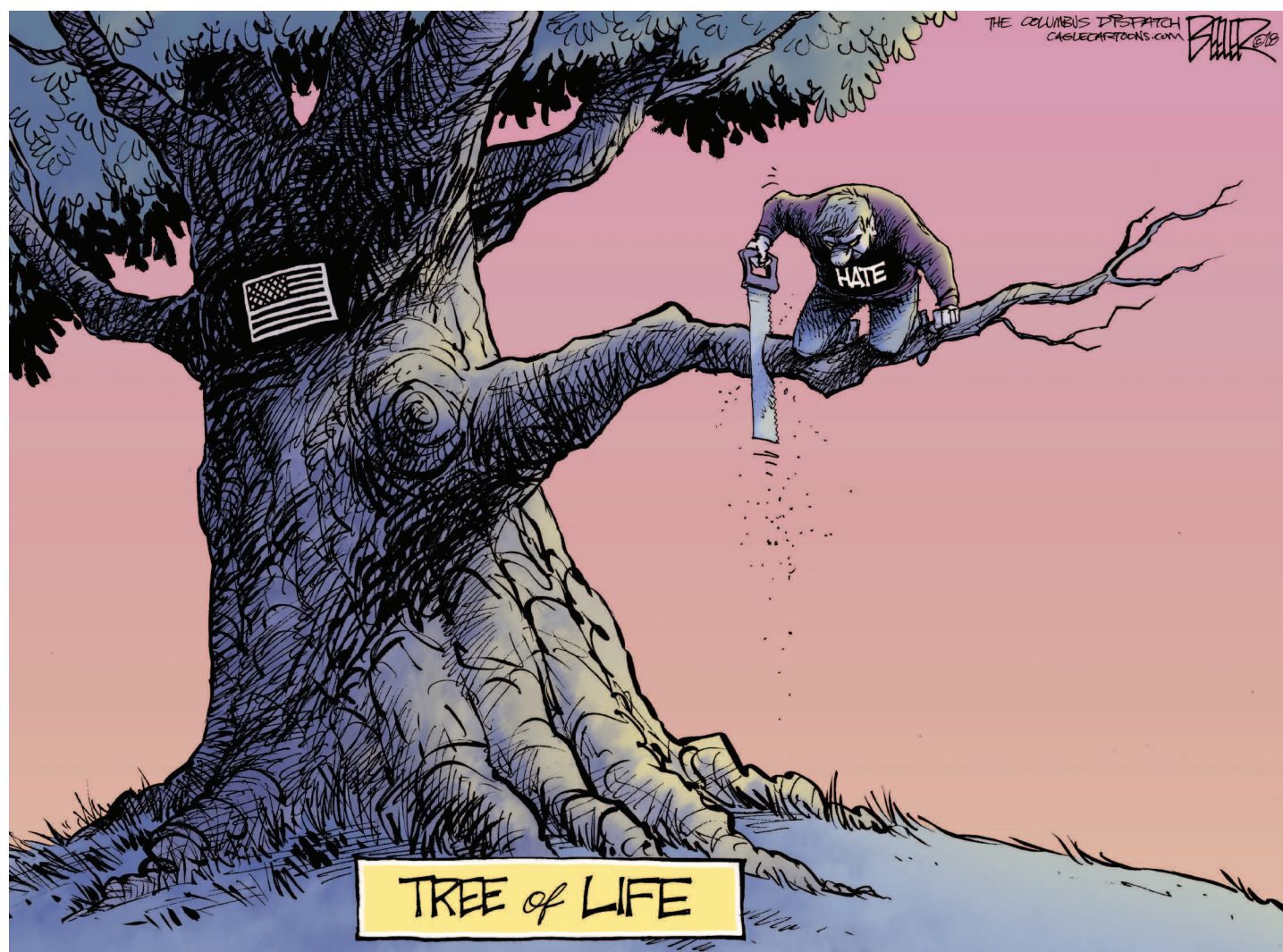
So, America, you are stuck with me, for better for worse. I feel an obligation to try to make our world a better place. And, as a first-generation immigrant, the United States has been my home for the past 38 years.

Diversity of thought

One worldwide organization of which I am a local leader is considering its first social media guidelines for members in Washington, where I live. These will encourage civility among those who publicly identify as members. My knee-jerk reaction was that I don't want my "free speech" curtailed. Later, I embraced the wisdom behind guidelines, especially in a fraternity whose major tenets are tolerance and cementing the universal "brotherhood of man." Admittedly, I did wonder whether, before the guidelines are published, I should hurry to post again on my political views, but so far I have restrained myself.

Facebook is part of the problem, but such flexible and easy-to-access opinion-sharing options may prove to be a solution to unite us. I was cynical at first, but now enjoy its group-hug capability. It is a terrible way to learn about a death, but posting immediate tributes has a slight healing effect. I deliberately link with people whose political views differ from mine. I believe I can learn a lot. We must endure in some semblance of harmony.

I have "unfriended" three regional members of my club in recent months, turned off by their bigoted snarling. But generally I welcome diversity in



thought. One example is a favorite former colleague in the Midwest, one of three people on my "friends" list I consider a genius. He is a fervent right-to-lifer. It is educational to watch him argue his points, despite my view that all women should chose when or whether they have kids, which is diametrically opposed to his beliefs.

never voted into power (H. Clinton). False comparisons and backward finger-pointing are irrelevant.

I actually dislike these fictional postings a tad more than the ones from bigots who truly want to make America hate again. Progressives and conservatives are equally guilty. When I point these out as false — as we

How about speaking up when something is wrong or someone's behavior is inappropriate? Last summer, I found myself in a North Coast retail establishment when a gentleman I know was berating the counter clerk over prices. Looking back, I regret staying silent. What a coward I was!

How about some courtesy? Maybe it is time for us all to re-read "All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten" by Robert Fulghum.

I genuinely believe deep down, most share a common goal of making our communities a better place. How we get there should be the topic of civil, truthful discourse; it will be such a better journey if the tone is polite.

Unexpected kindness goes a long way. Two winters ago, Karen Harrell placed a rack in the covered alley outside Long Beach Pharmacy in Washington and invited residents to place coats and other warm clothing there — free for people in need. She did it again just before last Christmas. Some people abused this opportunity, taking multiple items, then selling them online, but I hope they were the minority. As the coats disappeared, residents kindly replenished the supplies. Actions like this signal fresh hope for our society.

Where do we go from here? Up! Who's with me?

Patrick Webb is the retired managing editor of *The Daily Astorian*.

SO, APART FROM CIVILITY, WHAT CAN INDIVIDUALS DO TO MAKE OUR WORLD A BETTER PLACE? ... HOW ABOUT SPEAKING UP WHEN SOMETHING IS WRONG OR SOMEONE'S BEHAVIOR IS INAPPROPRIATE?

'Well, it sounds true'

Despite Facebook's widespread cruelty, it offers many good things. It is refreshing to view parents of 4-H members describing their children's successes at the county fair. I don't own a pet, but I mostly find yours cute. Gretchen Allen's giant dogs are a true delight. I see some truly tasty meals on display, especially those created by Sergey Antonov, our beloved mountain-climbing cellist. But I also observe people — whom I otherwise like and respect — posting obvious lies about their political opponents, some of whom are no longer in power (B. Clinton, Bush, Obama) or were

should all feel obliged to do — the predominant response is, "well, it sounds true." These self-publishers wouldn't last one day as a newspaper "gatekeeper," an important fact-checking role that's been regrettably diminished in today's partisan world. During the McCarthy era, Arthur Miller wrote a play about the Puritan-era equivalent of untrue rumormongering in an evil place named Salem. It certainly resonates.

What to do?

So, apart from civility, what can individuals do to make our world a better place?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thanks to Seaside Rotary for Christmas gifts

I'm writing to thank the Seaside Rotary and volunteers for their wonderful generosity to the children of Seaside this past Christmas. Those children, and their families, were given gifts donated by the community and coordinated into an event that will be remembered for many years to come.

This Christmas was better for so many because of the care and efforts of the Rotarians, an outstanding group of people. Thank you again.

BARB MILLER
Seaside

Nation heading for a train wreck

View the road ahead of our nation as if we are on a fast train, running down a steep grade, where at the bottom there are several hidden curves. Some on this ride are rapidly jettisoning most of our mores, which in the past had the effect of stabilizing us. Others could care less what happens, as long as they profit along the way. Unless some things change, I fear that we are in for a train wreck as the wheels come off. The possibility exists that we find ourselves falling into a chasm that engulfs us from engine to caboose.

"Oh," you say, "Some of these mores are evil, shouldn't they be rejected?" People being what they are, I would agree that things like bigotry and greed are sinful traits of man. But, to jettison the

good with the bad is what Martin Luther referred to as, "Throwing the baby out with the bath water."

What will end up replacing the teachings of Jesus Christ in western civilization? It will be the very thing that explorers and missionaries confronted when they discovered new peoples across the globe: paganism. Those who favor these "new" mores need to realize what comes next.

Yes, free sex and lots of it, but also such things as cannibalism, devil worship, child prostitution, wife subjugation, ritual human sacrifices, and many more evil practices like these. Is this what you desire for America? Just check out the book "Lords of the Earth" by Don Richardson on Amazon.

CARL YATES
Seaside

Stop smart meter extortion

Pacific Power is installing "smart" meters in Clatsop County, beginning in Astoria, presenting them as a necessary upgrade, whether we want them or not.

It seems choice is not an option, unless you've got \$432 extra (\$36 a month) to burn every year to keep your old meter; installing their new meter is free (bit.ly/2QrXsZI). This amounts to no choice at all. Take it or take it.

The Oregon Public Utility Commission is allowing Pacific Power to charge this exorbitant opt-out fee in direct violation of existing Oregon state laws, and we need to reverse them. California utility customers are charged \$10 a month for

the first three years only, with financial assistance available.

Why opt out? Fires in the U.K. have been caused by these meters (bit.ly/2RBT1jC), which have 160 times more cumulative whole body radiation exposure than cell phones (bit.ly/2C-3CdYZ), well-documented health problems from radiation in homes, businesses and schools, inaccuracy and overcharges, loss of local family-wage jobs and potential repair and power outage delays due to short-staffing — these are some reasons.

Because these meters monitor every "smart" device inside the building, your "smart" phone can turn your refrigerator on and off anytime, from anywhere. So can Pacific Power. Or a hacker.

For our health, jobs, basic freedoms and property rights, we need real choice without penalty: To opt out without prohibitive surcharges. Our city councils, our county commissioners and our state representatives should all support us in this basic right.

CHRISTOPHER PADDON
Astoria

Snarky cartoon

I see the snarky cartoon in the opinion section on Jan. 10 showed two little crosses stating that here are two little crosses for President Donald Trump's wall ("Another Brick in Trump's Wall" by Christopher Weyant). I guess we can fill in the rest of the wall with those killed by undocumented immigrants?

By the way, if parents in this country did that to those two poor little children,

they would be arrested for child neglect, not funded by a GoFundMe account.

GARY WILLIAMS
Warrenton

Politicians need to show leadership, courage

Our Coast Guard deserves representation by politicians with real leadership.

"Coast Guard families told they can have garage sales to cope with government shutdown." I read that headline in the Washington Post, and couldn't believe it. I have been a fisherman for years, and worked in the marine insurance industry. All mariners go to sea knowing that freak accidents and disasters can happen at any time. We go with the knowledge that highly trained Coast Guard men and women are standing watch and ready to respond to any hazardous situation.

These young men and women risk their lives every day to save American lives and property. They deserve better than an American government that tells them, "We can't pay you, but you have to stay on the job." Telling them that they can have garage sales, or get jobs as babysitters or dog walkers to make ends meet, is an embarrassment to me as an American, and our nation as a whole.

Our president and our Republican and Democratic members of Congress were elected to lead the nation. Lead. Stop the game playing. Show the leadership and the courage that the young men and women of the Coast Guard exhibit every day.

MIKE BECKER
Newport