

OUR VIEW

Depravity of humanity knows no bounds

The depravity of humanity knows no bounds. Witness the carnage in Dayton, Ohio, and El Paso, Texas, this past weekend — and Gilroy, California, the previous weekend.

The mass shootings killed more than 30 people, including the Dayton gunman’s sister. Dozens more were wounded, and irreparable holes torn in families, friendships and communities.

Even the insurance industry recognizes the escalating number of mass shootings in the U.S., offering special insurance coverages for such attacks. Yet the United States remains paralyzed when it comes to solutions.

We invaded Afghanistan and embroiled the country in a still-endless 16-year war when almost 3,000 people were killed in the Sept. 11 attacks. But we shrugged when 300,000 people were killed by gun violence at home in the decade following Sept. 11, and continue to do nothing as more than 30,000 continue to die each year.

We know that our politicians, including President Donald Trump, will continue to take their blood money from the National Rifle Association and look the other way. So how can we collaboratively work on actual solutions to gun violence and recruit state and federal officials to support our efforts?

One priority should be to diagnose and confront the root causes of firearms violence. We are in a public health crisis, and the feel-good measures offered — including the omnibus gun control bill proposed by Oregon legislators this year — will do nothing to address the epidemic of violence.

We need substantial federal and state investments in trustworthy, bias-free research into the underlying factors for all kinds of gun vio-



AP Photo/Andres Leighton
Rene Aguilar and Jackie Flores pray at a makeshift memorial for the victims of Saturday’s mass shooting at a shopping complex in El Paso, Texas.

lence. Mass shootings, which have claimed 127 lives so far this year, make the headlines in America. But they are a small percentage of the firearm-related deaths and injuries that occur each year; indeed, each weekend.

We know that in Oregon, as generally is true in other states, most deaths by firearms are suicides involving handguns. Firearms are involved in more than 90 percent of murder-suicides and of gang-related homicides. Firearms are used in 65 percent of the deaths of intimate partners.

Those numbers are irrefutable. So is the reality that population-adjusted death rates are higher in much of rural Oregon, where firearms are a part of our culture. And so, our concerns about gun violence should be just as deep as anywhere in the

country.

Many of the violence-prevention ideas coming out of Salem are well-intentioned but would accomplish little and thus are a waste of time. But it is counterproductive, and wasteful as well, to spend our time vilifying those proposals and their advocates on social media.

We must end the stigma, especially among men, against getting counseling and other help in dealing with anger, depression and other aspects of behavioral health. Obtaining treatment for mental health should be just as normal — and needed — as getting treatment for a broken leg and other physical conditions.

An excellent example is the behavioral health forums for veterans that will be held throughout state in the coming weeks — from

Astoria to Baker City, from Portland to Pendleton and towns in-between. The Oregon Health Authority and the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs are to be commended for soliciting ideas from thousands of veterans and then launching the community forums, including in Astoria on Aug. 20.

We need to move as quickly as possible to take advantage of the funding that will be coming through the Oregon Student Success Act for behavioral health programs in our local schools. Students and legislators agreed that youth want and need much greater access to behavioral health services, including school counselors and therapists. Innovative models for providing those services, and for overcoming bullying and related destructive behaviors, exist around the state. We must seek out and build on those good ideas.

We must honor our rural culture and frontier heritage while helping people become better at handling handle disagreements instead of resorting to violence. Families, churches, schools and civic leaders all have a role in teaching and embracing such lessons instead of looking the other way. And we also must spread the word about programs that help people safely escape abusive households.

Without falling victim to fear amid the news coverage of mass shootings, we need practical training in dealing with security issues and whom to alert when we have concerns.

We must take all these steps not because national and state politicians say so, but because these are steps that make sense for our community. As neighbors, we must be willing to talk rationally with one another about violence, about firearms and about building a safer, healthier community.

LETTERS

Making a mark

The Lower Columbia Hispanic Council has been privileged to have had Jorge Gutierrez as our executive director for six years. As it happens with talented people, he is leaving the position for a great opportunity in Seattle.

The area Latino community, as well as the community at large, will feel the void. Jorge arrived when the Hispanic Council was struggling to survive. He came, and having had no experience with social work, completely turned the organization from a one-man show, a struggling board and a skimpy budget to a team of eight staff members and a full-functioning board of directors.

He wrote grants for programs related to the Oregon Health Plan, school programs for students and their parents, such as Abriendo Puertas and Juntos, Individual Development Account (IDA) programs through Court Appointed Special Advocates to match savings three to one to pursue higher education or to start a business, and La Cima leadership camp for youth, just to mention a few of the programs.

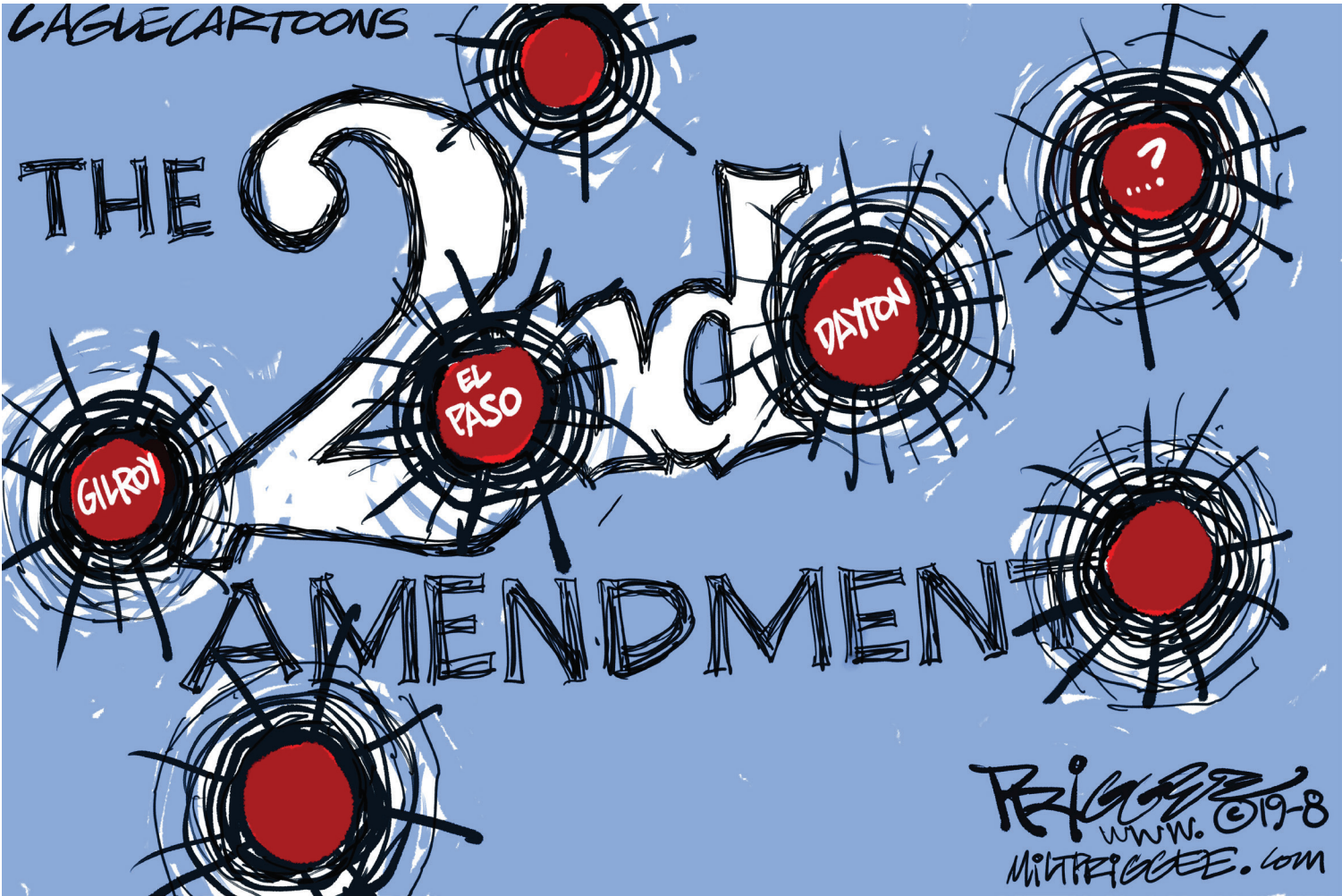
It is rare to find quality people willing to run a nonprofit organization in a rural area such as ours. Jorge has made a mark that will be impossible to erase, and we hope to be able to find someone that will continue what he did so well. ¡Gracias Jorge! ¡Te vamos a extrañar!

ROCIO LIZARRAGA SIMMONS
Astoria

Horrific shootings

Regarding the white nationalist massacres in Texas and Ohio: If anyone reading this is unsure of who inspired such a horrific action, you need only to go online. President Donald Trump’s racist remarks are well-documented. You can read them yourself. They are not fit for a family newspaper.

MARY TANGUAY WEBB
Astoria



Smooth sailing

Oftentimes in our daily lives we have persons who upset us. It may even be someone close, like our mate.

I know the other day my wife did something that ticked me off. But then I ate a piece of warm huckleberry pie she had just baked for me, and I thought, “Gosh, what a wonderful wife I have.”

It’s so easy to focus on the negative in a person or situation. But let’s face it, we’re all God’s children, not perfect, and subject to error.

It may take more than a piece of warm huckleberry pie, but our voyage through life will be much smoother if we focus on the good that is in all of us.

Smooth sailing to you.

JIM BERNARD
Warrenton

Leading us backward

It’s too bad that the Trump administration invited representatives of the Timber Unity movement to participate in its environmental leadership conference. It taints the movement by suggesting members want to move in the same direction on climate change as Trump — backward.

Timber Unity formed in opposition to the Oregon Legislature’s effort to pass a cap and trade bill. That bill was Oregon’s first attempt to get serious about slowing climate change. The main argument put forward by the timber industry, which led the opposition to the bill, and helped found Timber Unity, was their concern over rising fuel prices that might result if it passed.

A few dollars more in fuel costs seems to me a small price to pay, considering the

climate disaster the children and grandchildren of the Timber Unity folks will inherit if we fail to act soon to lessen its impact.

Fuel costs weren’t the real reason for the industry’s concern. Recent scientific research done at Oregon State University identifies the timber industry as the largest producer of greenhouse gases in the state. Doesn’t that make the industry and Timber Unity responsible for offering a solution to climate change, instead of obstructing?

While we are waiting for their solution, we should celebrate Timber Unity’s tree decal. It’s a great reminder that we need forest restoration, not more clearcuts. When you see a vehicle with the decal, show them some love. Give them a horn honk, a wave and a smile.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria