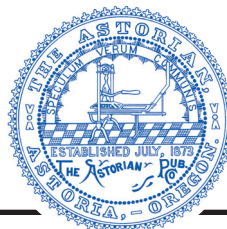


OPINION



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GUEST COLUMN

Unity and strength through diversity

For the second year in a row, Memorial Day observances in communities, organizations and even within family groups will look very different later this month because of the COVID pandemic.

The parades, large ceremonies and other occasions, which I and so many others in the Oregon veteran community have always found moving and meaningful, have not yet been able to safely return in many places.



KELLY FITZPATRICK

Yet, the importance of this day — and the emotions and memories that it brings — have not changed.

For countless families across our communities, our state and our nation, Memorial Day is a stark and, often, painful reminder of those loved ones who went to serve their country and never came home.

Whether they volunteered during a time of war, stood guard over our peace or never expected to wear the uniform until their draft card arrived — their service and selfless sacrifice represent the best and highest ideals that America has to offer.

We continue to feel their loss today.

In recent months, and particularly as we have approached this year's Memorial Day holiday, I have found myself reflecting on the themes of unity and strength in diversity.

It was just before the Korean War, in 1948, that President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 — abolishing discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin in the U.S. armed forces. When war broke out in 1950, our country entered the fray with a fully integrated and desegregated military.

I believe those who have served our nation in uniform know the meaning — and the value — of unity more than almost anyone else. We were trained to protect those on our right and those on our left — and to trust that they would do the same for us.

Every day in service, all that mattered was that someone had your six, and was there to offer a hand when you stumbled. Their color, nation of origin, religion or sexual orientation were not part of the equation.

After service, the diversity of our veteran community is a source of immense pride and strength. We are Black, white, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, men, women, transgender and nonbinary, young and old, urban and rural, of every race, religion and creed — unified through our shared service and sacrifice.

The honored ranks of the fallen include Sgt. John Noble Holcomb, who was born in Baker. John was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his extraordinary courage and sacrifice



Associated Press

Many Memorial Day celebrations will be virtual again this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

MAY WE NEVER FORGET OUR FALLEN HEROES. THEY WERE THE BEST OUR COUNTRY HAD TO OFFER, AND THEIR MEMORY INSPIRES US TO BE BETTER. THEIR COURAGE MOVES US. THE WORLD IS A BETTER PLACE BECAUSE OF THEM, BECAUSE THEY LIVED AND BECAUSE THEY SERVED.

during the Vietnam War — where he single-handedly forced an enemy retreat, despite being mortally wounded, saving many American lives.

They include Erin McLyman, from Eugene, who proudly enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after recovering from a severe, years-long addiction to drugs and alcohol that began when she was in just her first year in high school. She later enlisted in the Oregon National Guard, and was eager to deploy to Iraq. She died March 13, 2010, in an enemy mortar attack.

They include the 100th Infantry Battalion — which became known unofficially as the “Purple Heart Battalion.” The unit was one of only two combat units during World War II that was comprised of second-generation Japanese Americans, known as “nisei,” who had briefly had their rifles stripped away due to prejudice following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

They would go on to fight bravely in Europe, even as their families remained in internment camps back in the United States. The men of the 100th Infantry

Battalion earned recognition as the most decorated American unit of its size and length of service.

And the honored ranks of the fallen include Army Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe, who was the first Black service member to receive the Medal of Honor for service in Iraq or Afghanistan for the heroism he displayed after his Bradley struck a roadside bomb.

The explosion ruptured the Bradley's fuel cell, engulfing both the vehicle and its occupants in flames. Enemy fire soon rained down on their position. But none of that stopped Sgt. Cashe from acting quickly to save his soldiers.

Drenched in fuel, he pulled the driver and five other soldiers from the burning vehicle — saving their lives, while suffering second- and third-degree burns over 72% of his own body. Despite this, he insisted on being the last person on a medical evacuation helicopter.

Cashe exhibited incredible courage during that attack. Despite the fact that both the vehicle and its occupants were engulfed in flames, and amid unrelenting

enemy fire, he acted quickly to save his soldiers.

Putting the welfare of his soldiers ahead of his own and ignoring the terrible burns, he insisted on being the last person on a medical evacuation helicopter.

Sgt. Cashe died 22 days later — on Nov. 8, 2005. He was only 35.

It is impossible to know exactly what was going through the minds of Sgt. Cashe, Sgt. Holcomb, Private McLyman, the members of the 100th Infantry Battalion and so many other heroes as they made the ultimate sacrifice. But we who have served know they were motivated by the rare courage and devotion that is common to those who have borne the battle — to protect our nation, our loved ones back home and our fellow servicemembers.

The harsh reality of war and conflict is that not everyone will make it home. Let us honor the memory of heroes no longer with us — not just on Memorial Day, but every day. And let us strive to live up to the incredible example they have set for all of us.

May we never forget our fallen heroes. They were the best our country had to offer, and their memory inspires us to be better. Their courage moves us. The world is a better place because of them, because they lived and because they served.

May we never forget what they sacrificed, and what their loved ones have lost.

Kelly Fitzpatrick is the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Misleading

Re: College tuition increase and COVID-19 surcharge: If there is any misleading going on about these topics, it's being done by David Oser (The Astorian, May 13). A reading of board minutes over the last 12 months will show that both were discussed as options by the board.

A check of SAVECCC.COM will show that news of the budget committee's decision to not seek a tuition increase was posted May 12, the day after it was announced at a full board meeting, the day before Oser's letter, and is visible on every single page of the site. I have replaced references to a COVID surcharge with “fee increases,” raised again as a possibility by a board member at the most recent board meeting.

As to Oser's assertion that there are scholarships available to cover every potential student's tuition and living expenses, it is flat out false. The average community college student Pell Grant covers about two-thirds of tuition. Of course, one could always go into debt for the next 15 years via usurious, nondischargeable college loans.

CCC's current tuition may be negligible to someone of Oser's financial status, but it's a hell of a lot of money to everybody else.

TIM LYMAN
Warrenton

Who benefits?

Nothing to see here, folks. Nobody behind the curtain, certainly not U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, or Demo-

crat Gov. Kate Brown.

Simpson's floating a plan in Congress to breach the lower Snake River dams, integral to supplying Pacific Northwest electricity. We've invested billions of dollars over decades in these dams to support salmon population. You pay for this in your electricity bill, so breach the dams and it all goes down the drain.

A three-year, court-mandated scientific study released last year recommended retaining the four lower Snake River dams, with additional steps supporting salmon.

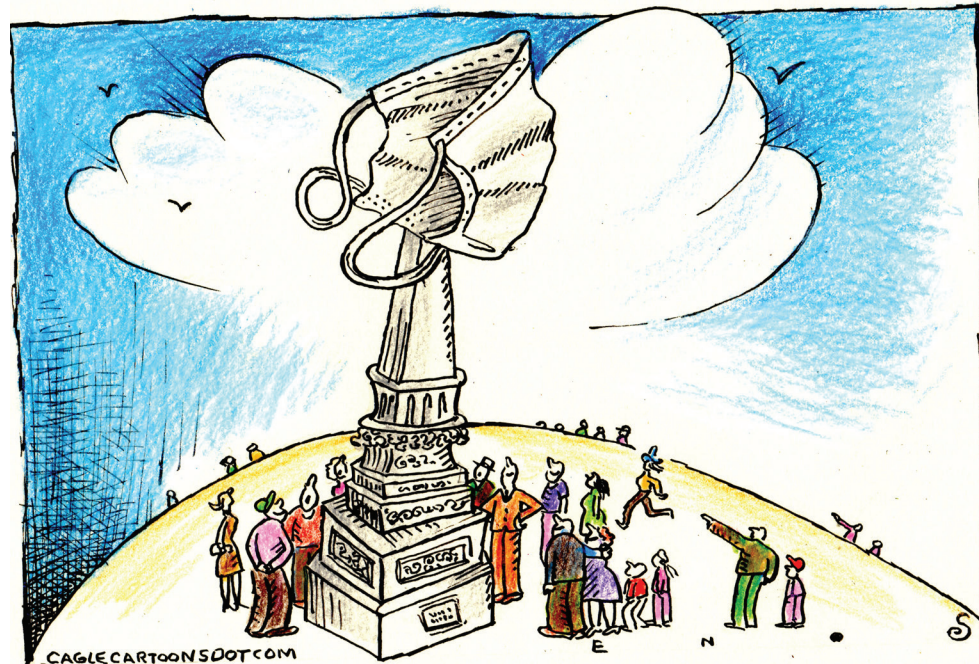
Meanwhile, Brown announced creation of a multistate group of stakeholders to develop a long-term agreement to combine resources, find solutions. Why on March 4, one week after the group first met, did Brown quietly sue the federal government to overturn their decision and breach the dams? Have you read about that?

U.S. Reps. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., and Cliff Bentz, R-Ore., issued a strongly worded statement regarding the collusion, upon learning of the hidden coordination between the offices of Simpson and Brown regarding the proposal to breach the four dams, condemning the lack of transparency and the undermining of four governors' agreement to work together.

Why, with no proven benefits to salmon population, are they colluding to remove a source of 100% renewable energy? Who benefits? Certainly not the salmon or the rate payers.

Collusion, definitely not collaboration.

ERIKA PALECK
Director, West Oregon Electric
Cooperative District 5
Vernonia



Assumes

In the May 11 edition of The Astorian, a letter titled “No one” assumes facts that aren't facts. The author, one Christina Buck, claims that those of us who've not been vaccinated are “solely responsible” for herd immunity to be absent from Clatsop County.

Buck has no way of knowing this. We may have reached herd immunity. She doesn't know. She further says, “Every single person must get vaccinated,” an absurd statement. Should infants be vaccinated? Trained medical professionals might disagree with her blanket assertion.

The fact — and actual facts regarding the virus and vaccines are in exceedingly short supply — is that, a year ago, the vaccines didn't exist.

It's also a fact that most healthy people have little to fear from the coronavirus. It makes no sense for healthy individuals to take a vaccine about which little is known, to combat a virus that probably won't harm or kill them and that they have excellent odds of recovering from, if they become infected.

It's been documented that individuals in certain demographic groups are subject to adverse, and even fatal, reactions due to the vaccines. Verified accounts of death related to the vaccines exist, although they're not publicized by the media, which is troubling.

Again, there's no way to know the vaccines are safe in the intermediate and long term. “No one” knows.

SCOTT AMES
Astoria