

Quick takes

Sufjan Stevens' Round-Up documentary released

More news about @SufjanStevens and his @PendletonRUP doc w/ live musical accompaniment. My Q&A w/singer coming soon.

— @Tim_Trainor

Ducks fall in season finale

I know right, we made it to the championship playoff. Nothing to be ashamed of there.

— Terrie Cannoy

They were off to such a good start. It was a sad ending, but they still rock!

— Roz Karson

Oregon might have had the win had their team members stayed off the green.

— Valerie Mull McCarthy

Such a bummer. When they gonna get that 'ship?

— Larry Beck

Crackdown on racist gang

Let the boys do their work ... get the methheads outta this town! A little vigilante justice is good for Pendleton, because the police don't scare anybody.

— RedmondDudeGuy

I really don't think anybody should confuse a white supremacist with a well meaning vigilante.

— E O Reader

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

Reimagine the world of public education

By STEVE BUCKSTEIN
Cascade Policy Institute

Imagine a world where we buy our groceries in government stores. We can only shop at the store nearest our house. If we want to shop somewhere else, we're forced to move our family into another neighborhood — if we can afford it.

In this imaginary world, we elect food boards to oversee our grocery stores. And many of us think the food is free. Well, not quite. We all pay taxes to the government, which then recycles those dollars to grocery store districts and eventually down to our neighborhood stores. We think we eat pretty well, although the government spends five dollars for a gallon of milk and six-fifty for a loaf of bread. The bread is often stale and the milk is often sour.

Each district has a central office staff of specialists and administrators who work hard designing store shelves, checkout lanes, and (most importantly) the nutritional content of every food item. Since we're a nation that separates Church and State, the big battles at food board meetings often revolve around whether stores can sell Christmas cookies.

Now, imagine that voters decide to give the government less money for the public food system. Suddenly, food stores find themselves in a crisis. There isn't enough tax money to keep food district central bureaucracies intact. Stores don't have enough money to keep all the clerks employed. Food superintendents are faced with the difficult task of eliminating some items from the shelves.

How could we possibly feed ourselves without the government taxing us, building big brick food buildings, and telling us where to shop?

If this imaginary world — and its problems — sounds familiar, you're way ahead of me. It's the world of our public school system. It's the world most of us grew up in. Our parents grew up in the same world, but children now are growing up in a different world.

We can no longer afford to dump more money into a system that isn't keeping pace with the progress all around us. Technology has opened limitless ways for students to gain knowledge and skills and to interact with their instructors and peers. The landscape of educational options centered on the needs and aspirations of individual students is far more diverse than it was even ten years ago. And many of these new options can actually save taxpayers real money.

Many advocate that we should lead the world in education spending. But you don't get to be the competitive leader in any industry by being the world's highest-cost producer. Don't you want to be the producer with the highest quality, but at an affordable cost? The driving force to achieve high quality, while keeping costs down, is the profit motive. But that's exactly the motive that doesn't exist in our public school system.

Why aren't we worried about a tax revolt decimating our local grocery store shelves? It's because our grocery stores are private. They're subject to intense competition, and each of us has virtually unlimited choices about where we shop.

For those who can't afford food, we don't build government food stores. We give them food stamps, and they shop in the same stores and for the same products that everyone else does. In essence, our public schools are the equivalent of the former Soviet Union's collective farms. Communism said government should own and run the food stores — and the farms. The result was a nation that couldn't feed itself.

We don't have to ask whether to replace our current public school system with a private one. We can simply let education

dollars be spent where the customers (parents) think they should go.

Please don't let the details of any specific "school choice" proposal stop you from accepting the concept. Instead, let's figure out why so many of our tax dollars don't reach the classroom — and why nearly half the people who work for our public school system don't teach. Let's look for ways to put the children first and the system second.

The only proven way to accomplish these things is through competition and parental choice. Spending more dollars in the current system will just get us more of the same. Many states are broke, preventing them from spending more money on public schools. And many parents are fed up, wondering why their kids are underperforming or unmotivated in K-12 schools and unprepared for their college courses and future careers.

School choice has entered a new world. Because Americans are increasingly vocal about providing parents at every income level with the ability to choose their children's schools, states are adopting broad-based school choice initiatives. Every child who drops out of school, or who graduates functionally illiterate, is being tossed into the sea without a lifeboat. If you think rearranging the deck chairs on this ship will save those children, think again. The way of the future is to put the power of educational choice back into the hands of parents, where it belongs.

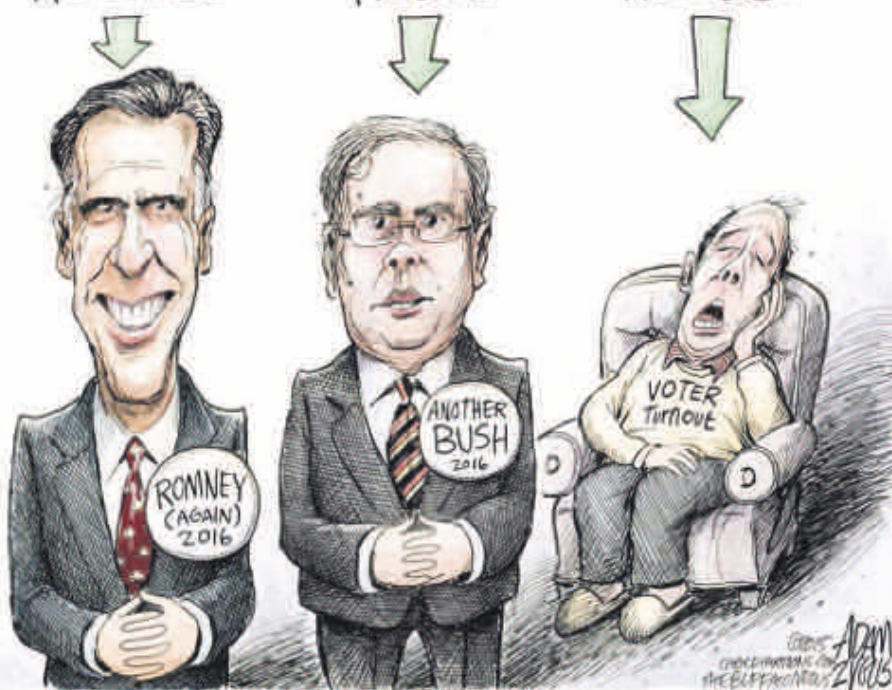
Steve Buckstein is founder and senior policy analyst at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.

Next week is National School Choice Week, an annual public awareness effort in support of expanding education options.

Selfie: The World's Great Religions.



RECYCLE REUSE REDUCE



An Islamic reformer, lashed

As one group of Islamic militants was waging war in Paris, another was slaughtering vast numbers of civilians in Baga in northern Nigeria — as many as 2,000, according to Amnesty International; "only" 150, according to the Nigerian government.

Meanwhile, al-Qaida has blown up scores of people in Yemen, and the Pakistan Taliban murdered 150 people at a school. Libyan extremists blew up a Foreign Ministry building last month because an official wished people "Merry Christmas."

These spasms of terrorism cry out for a conversation among Muslims about faith and tolerance. Islamic reformers could point out that the Quran prescribes no punishment at all for blasphemers other than telling others to keep their distance from them. The holy book that decrees death for blasphemy is the Bible (Leviticus 24:16).

Fortunately, a Saudi liberal, Raif Badawi, has kick-started a public discussion about Islam and modernity on his blog. Good for Saudi Arabia for promoting this kind of debate!

Well, no. Actually, our Saudi allies sentenced Badawi to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes for "insulting Islam." The first 50 lashes were delivered in a public flogging on Friday, and Badawi is scheduled to receive 50 more every Friday until he reaches 1,000.

"Raif raised his head toward the sky, closing his eyes and arching his back," Amnesty International quoted a witness as saying.

There is a difference between murdering cartoonists and flogging bloggers. But still! Saudi Arabia could play a leadership role in Islam. In the mid-20th century, King Abdul Aziz al-Saud overcame traditionalists who opposed cars, radio and the telegraph as non-Islamic by having the Quran read aloud on the radio.

Yet since then Saudi elites have retreated. Saudi Arabia does not allow Christian churches and sometimes has confiscated Bibles. The kingdom oppresses Shiites, funds extremist Wahhabi madrassas across the Islamic world and last month referred two women to its anti-terrorism courts — for driving cars.

Pakistani officials play a similar game. Pakistan was once a tolerant country whose first foreign minister was a member of the Ahmadi sect. Now Ahmadis are persecuted.



NICHOLAS KRISTOF
Comment

and a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, is on death row in a preposterous blasphemy case after drinking water said to be for Muslims only.

(Bravo to *Dawn*, a Pakistani newspaper, for daring to publish online an article this week by Arafat Mazhar using Islamic legal reasoning to protest the sentence against Asia Bibi. That's exactly what we need more of.)

One risk is that the West will respond to Islamic terror with Islamophobia and intolerance that aggravates religious tensions — just what the terrorists hope to provoke. The French nationalist Marine Le Pen has gained ground, and we've seen suggestions from Rupert Murdoch and others that all 1.6 billion Muslims are somehow to blame for Islamic terrorism. After I wrote last week that the world should resist that impulse to smear all Muslims, I was denounced by Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity on Fox News and called an "ink-stained coward" by *The Weekly Standard*.

Maybe if these "journalists" left their bubble and actually talked to more Muslims, they wouldn't spew nonsense — such as that Birmingham, England, is entirely Muslim and a no-go area for Christians. That paranoid claim by a Fox News "expert," later retracted, led wags to suggest that the city rename itself Birming, since Muslims avoid ham.

Let's resist simplistic narratives on our side, for they've already done enough damage in the Islamic world, and in truth Islam is as complex and diverse as, say, "journalism." Muslims include the terrorist who murdered Jews in Paris and the Malian worker there who risked his life to save seven Jews.

In the past our overreaction to Islamism has sometimes been counterproductive: The Bush administration was so fearful of the Islamic Courts Union government in Somalia that it was complicit in an Ethiopian invasion in 2006 that led to the rise of the terrorist al-Shabab militia there.

Republicans have been honoring President Barack Obama for not sending a top official to Paris. They're right. But let's engage in more than symbolism and actually support the moderates in the Islamic world who are pushing for change — and, sometimes, being flogged for it. By our "allies."

Kristof won the Pulitzer Prize two times.

Rating the Republican contenders

If the Republican presidential campaign were "American Idol" or "The Voice," this would be the out-of-town auditions phase. Governors across the country are giving State of the State addresses, unveiling their visions. Let's spin the chairs and grade the contenders, to see who deserves a shot at the big show.

John Kasich: A.
The Ohio governor is easily the most underestimated Republican this year. He just won a landslide victory in the swingiest of the swing states. He carried 86 of Ohio's 88 counties. He won Cuyahoga County, which includes Cleveland, and which President Barack Obama won by 40 points in 2012.

Kasich is the Republican version of Jerry Brown: experienced but undisciplined in an honest, unvarnished way. If he shows he can raise money, and if voters want someone fresh but seasoned and managerial, he might be the guy.

The inaugural address he delivered Monday was a straight-up values speech. But it wasn't about values the way Pat Robertson used to define them. It was traditional values expressed in inclusive, largely secular form.

He built his speech around empathy, resilience, responsibility and other virtues: "You know why this happened? Too fixated on ourselves. It's all about me. And somehow we have lost the beautiful sound of our neighbors' voices. Moving beyond ourselves and trying to share in the experience of others helps us open our minds, allows us to grow as people. It helps us become less self-righteous. Did you ever find that in yourself? I do ... self-righteous."

Kasich has a long conservative record, but in his speech he celebrated government workers, like the woman who runs his job and family services department. He argued that economic growth is not an end, especially when it's not widely shared.

His mantra is, "When you die and get to the meeting with St. Peter, he's probably not going to ask you much about what you did about keeping government small, but he is going to ask you what you did for the poor."

Chris Christie: A-minus.
Bridgegate did some damage, but it clearly wasn't fatal. Whatever can be said about the New Jersey governor, he grabs



DAVID BROOKS
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attention in a crowded field.

Like all smart Republicans in the post-Romney era (yes, we're in it), Christie is working hard to prove he understands the everyday concerns of the poor and the middle class. He spent a good chunk of his address describing his efforts to work with the Democratic mayor of Camden to bring in jobs, fight poverty and reduce crime in that city. It was a bipartisan, government-efficiency pitch: "We terminated the city police

department and, partnering with the county, put a new metro division on the streets with 400 officers for the same price we were paying for 260. ... What are the results? Murder down 51 percent, in what was once called the most dangerous city in America."

Christie has hit on an essential theme for an era of growth but dissatisfaction.

Scott Walker and Mike Pence: B-plus.
The Wisconsin and Indiana governors are both versions of what used to be called working-class, Sam's Club Republicanism. Walker never graduated from college.

In their State of the State addresses, both boasted about the same sorts of accomplishments: dropping unemployment rates, state surpluses, rising graduation rates, lower taxes. Walker mentioned jobs programs for people with disabilities. Pence, who has devoted more effort to fighting poverty, touted his new pre-K education program. Both have good records, but neither speech had anything that was narratively or thematically innovative or of much interest to people outside their states.

At this stage in the race it's best to evaluate candidates the way you evaluate pitchers during the first week of spring training. Don't think about polls, donor gossip or who has the front-runner label. Ask who makes the catcher's glove pop loudest. Who has the stuff that makes you do a double take?

Among the governors, Kasich and Christie have shown they can take the values of religious conservatives and use them to inform Republican economic and domestic priorities. That's essential if the party is going to retain its business and religious base and also reach the struggling and disaffected.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* columnist in 2003.