

Quick takes

Statue decorations

There are much bigger problems in the world. It's completely harmless. It's a lifeless object. I'm pretty sure the statue could care less.

— Jennifer Bush

If it was your ancestor would you still be amused? Have some respect. The statues were erected to honor these icons that made history at the world-renowned Pendleton Round-Up. Show the statues the well deserved respect they earned.

— Etta Conner

Apparently no one in Pendleton has a sense of humor? It's done in good spirit — not to be malicious. They're costumes, they're taken down after a holiday. No one's tagging it or causing permanent damage.

— Alex C. Thompson

My kids love seeing it decorated! They get a good giggle every time.

— Chantell Reid

People should leave the statues alone. First impression is it's tacky and tasteless.

— Stephenie Barkley

It is vandalism and vandalism is illegal. This is defacement of public property.

— W.d. Coe

If offended then go take it off. I'm Native and I wore green decorations, lol!

— Rhonda Scott

Why not dress up the madam? She may enjoy it.

— Flora Estrada-Urias

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.

A manifesto can set you free

By ALEX CARR JOHNSON
Writers on the Range

This past fall, my friend Lauren asked me to speak to an English class she teaches at a small alternative school in western Colorado. She was encouraging these juniors and seniors to write a personal manifesto, and after hearing that I had created one myself a few years ago, she thought I'd be a perfect guest lecturer.

But here's the thing: My manifesto challenges assumptions of sexuality and gender and what passes for normal, and Lauren and I live in a rural town that, rumor has it, once had the world record for the highest number of churches per capita. It's the kind of place where some people mine coal while others grow hay, and a lot of people hunt elk and wear cowboy boots.

I try not to stereotype people based on their appearance. I wear flannel and have a big beard and wear cowboy boots, too. But I know this community, and large segments of it are conservative and overwhelmingly Republican. One of the most prominent signs as you enter town is actually a trailer spray-painted with "Frack Obama."

The class consisted of six stone-faced teenage boys, some wearing camouflage, others cross-armed behind hoodies. I started the class with a writing prompt:

"Why are you angry? All the reasons big and small — why are you angry? Make a list or not. Offer an explanation, or not. Why are you angry?"

After five minutes, during which they wrote furiously, I then asked:

"If you had total power — superhero power — choose one thing you are mad about and explain how you would change it, and why."

After another five minutes, I stopped them and said: "This is a frustrating task, I know. You and I know that we don't live

in a world where we have total power. We never will. So what's the point of thinking about the 'if'?' It seems pointless to even contemplate.

"But even though we will never be superheroes," I went on, "we still have power to change the world. You can transform your anger into something that can convince people to make the change you wish to see. Convincing isn't enough, though. You must also inspire people, too."

"That is your manifesto."

We spent the next 15 minutes talking about two manifestos, with one being the collective works of Subcomandante Marcos, the public voice for the Zapatista indigenous rights movement of southern Mexico. For the last 20 years, Marcos has been informing the larger global audience about the struggles of the Zapatistas and the reasons why they continue to insist on autonomy from the Mexican government. The Zapatistas offer many lessons for largely peaceful social change movements, but Marcos, in particular, offers an example of someone writing from a place of immense anger in an elegant and even entertaining way. He convinces and inspires people who live far away as well as people already part of the Zapatista movement.

The second manifesto I offered as an example was Larry Kramer's "1,112 and Counting." Kramer was a gay man living in New York City during the height of the AIDS epidemic. He saw his friends and family die all around him, while the city, state and nation did nothing to halt the

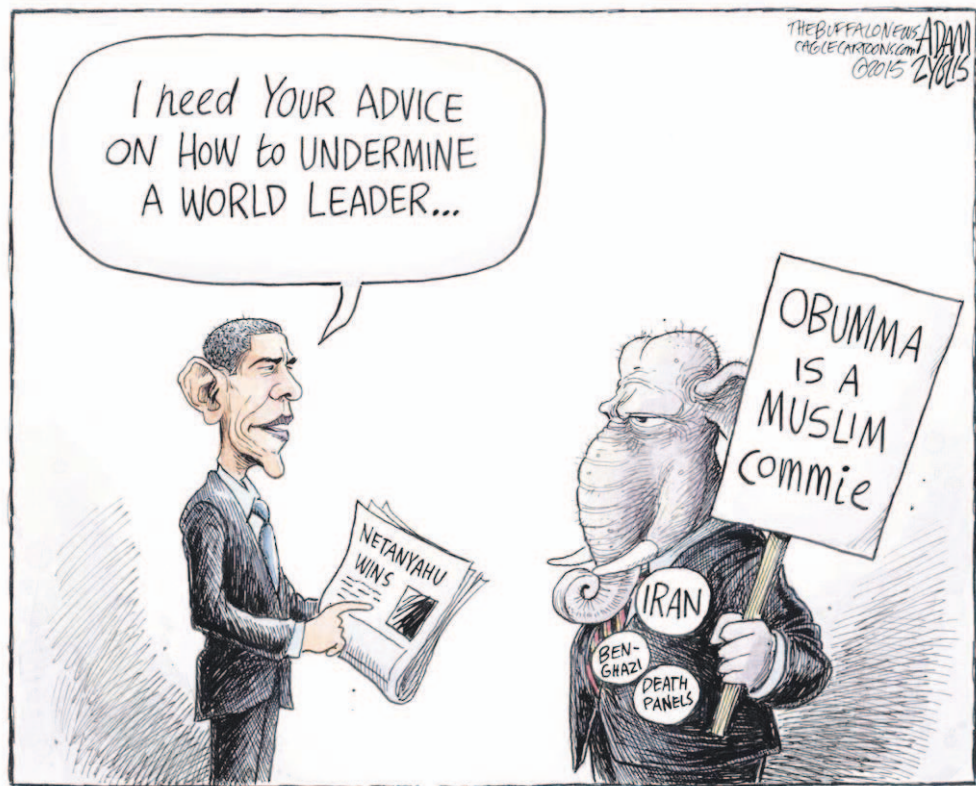
deaths. He transformed his anger into a biting critique published in a publication called the New York Native on March 14, 1983. It helped inspire the gay community to organize and fight back against the disease and a medical and political establishment that wasn't taking action fast enough.

With a few minutes left of class, I finally told the high school boys why I was angry. As an "out" gay man, I was angry that people claimed gay people were "unnatural." I stood at the center of the room and read my manifesto, "How to queer ecology," to the class. It talked about same-sex pair-bonded geese and the fluid sexual behavior of dolphins. And it also described how natural it feels for me to love another man. Despite being out for the last 12 years, and married for the last two, it's still just a little bit terrifying to say these things out loud.

At the end of the hour, I thanked them for letting me join them for the day. That's when Lauren and the boys began clapping. They clapped! And so, here's another thing about writing your manifesto: If you can muster the courage to look into the face of your anger and own it, and if you can then transform that anger into a story that can move other people, you will have found your voice, and you will know what you need to do.

Alex Carr Johnson is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a column service of High Country News. He is a freelance writer in western Colorado.

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Trillion-dollar fraudsters

By now it's a Republican Party Tradition: Every year the party produces a budget that allegedly slashes deficits but which turns out to contain a trillion-dollar "magic asterisk" — a line that promises huge spending cuts and/or revenue increases, but without explaining where the money is supposed to come from.

But the just-released budgets from the House and Senate majorities break new ground. Each contains not one but two trillion-dollar magic asterisks: one on spending, one on revenue. And that's actually an understatement. If either budget were to become law, it would leave the federal government several trillion dollars deeper in debt than claimed, and that's just in the first decade.

You might be tempted to shrug this off, since these budgets will not, in fact, become law. Or you might say that this is what all politicians do. But it isn't. The modern GOP's raw fiscal dishonesty is something new in American politics. And that's telling us something important about what has happened to half of our political spectrum.

So, about those budgets: Both claim drastic reductions in federal spending. Some of those spending reductions are specified: There would be savage cuts in food stamps, similarly savage cuts in Medicaid over and above reversing the recent expansion, and an end to Obamacare's health insurance subsidies. Rough estimates suggest that either plan would roughly double the number of Americans without health insurance. But both also claim more than a trillion dollars in further cuts to mandatory spending, which would almost surely have to come out of Medicare or Social Security. What form would these further cuts take? We get no hint.

It's very important to realize that this isn't normal political behavior. The George W. Bush administration was no slouch when it came to deceptive presentation of tax plans, but it was never this blatant. And the Obama administration has been remarkably scrupulous in its fiscal pronouncements.

OK, I can already hear the snickering, but it's the simple truth. Remember all the ridicule heaped on the spending projections



PAUL KRUGMAN
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in the Affordable Care Act? Actual spending is coming in well below expectations, and the Congressional Budget Office has marked its forecast for the next decade down by 20 percent. Remember the jeering when President Barack Obama declared that he would cut the deficit in half by the end of his first term? Well, a sluggish economy delayed things, but only by a year. The deficit in calendar 2013 was less than half its 2009 level, and it has continued to fall.

So, no, outrageous fiscal mendacity is neither historically normal nor bipartisan. It's a modern Republican thing. And the question we should ask is why.

One answer you sometimes hear is that what Republicans really believe is that tax cuts for the rich would generate a huge boom and a surge in revenue, but they're afraid that the public won't find such claims credible. So magic asterisks are really stand-ins for their belief in the magic of supply-side economics, a belief that remains intact even though proponents in that doctrine have been wrong about everything for decades.

But I'm partial to a more cynical explanation. Think about what these budgets would do if you ignore the mysterious trillions in unspecified spending cuts and revenue enhancements. What you're left with is huge transfers of income from the poor and the working class, who would see severe benefit cuts, to the rich, who would see big tax cuts. And the simplest way to understand these budgets is surely to suppose that they are intended to do what they would, in fact, actually do: make the rich richer and ordinary families poorer.

But this is, of course, not a policy direction the public would support if it were clearly explained. So the budgets must be sold as courageous efforts to eliminate deficits and pay down debt — which means that they must include trillions in imaginary, unexplained savings.

Look, I know that it's hard to keep up the outrage after so many years of fiscal fraudulence. But please try. We're looking at an enormous, destructive con job, and you should be, very, very angry.

Paul Krugman joined The New York Times in 1999.

The zero-sum moment

National elections take place within a specific global moment. In the 1990s, there was a presumption that we were living in an age of rapid progress. Democracy was spreading. Tyranny was receding. Asia was booming. The European Union was building. Conflict in the Middle East was lessening. The world was cumulatively heading toward greater pluralism, individualism, prosperity and freedom.

Today it's harder to have faith in rapid progress. Democracy is receding. Autocrats like Vladimir Putin of Russia are marching. The European project is decaying. Economies are struggling. Reactionary forces like the Islamic State and Iran are winning. The Middle East is deteriorating.

In this climate, the tone and focus of politics changes. Politics is less about win-win situations and more about zero-sum situations.

It is less about reforms that will improve all lives and more about unadorned struggles for power. Who will control the ground in places like Ukraine and Syria? Will Iran get the bomb? Will the White House or Congress grab power over treaties and immigration policy?

At these moments, tough guys do well. Cooperative skills are less valued while confrontational skills are more valued. Benjamin Netanyahu wins re-election in Israel. The pugnacious Nicolas Sarkozy, of all people, is staging a comeback in France. Putin is in his element.

Barack Obama started out as a hope-and-change idealist, but he has had to toughen to fit the times. Angela Merkel is the paradigmatic leader of the age: shrewd, unemotional, nonidealistic, austere and interested in power. As John Kornblum, the former U.S. ambassador to Germany, told George Packer of The New Yorker: "If you cross her you end up dead. ... There's a whole list of alpha males who thought they would get her out of the way, and they're all now in other walks of life."

In these moments, right-leaning parties tend to do well and have a stronger story to tell on national security. They speak the language of nationalism and cultural cohesion. People who are economically insecure (and more likely to lean left) drop out of the political process.

Both parties, though, change shape to



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fit the zero-sum contours of the moment. Progressives emphasize compassion less and redistribution more. Conservatives emphasize entrepreneurial dynamism less and the threat of government elites more. Electorates get a little uglier when faith in progress declines. Voters across the spectrum get more cynical and distrustful. They are quicker to perceive threats from The Other.

It's rare to have major realignments at a moment like this. Everybody is hunkered down and risk averse. Voters in this battened-down frame of mind are willing to elect familiar faces (better the devil you know). The Israeli, American and European electorates have been remarkably stable over the past decade. In Israel, for example, the overall vote that went to right-wing parties was stable from this election to last; it's just that the Likud Party grabbed a big share of the nationalist electorate.

Still, you do see some shifts. Extreme parties rise, especially the ones that repel supposed interlopers and oppose elite global projects. We're seeing that across the globe with the Tea Party, UKIP in Britain, National Front on the right in France and Syriza on the left in Greece.

Extreme parties rarely take power, but they do influence politics because mainstream politicians have to co-opt them. Mainstream politicians have to fight two-front wars: the official one against their ideological opponents and the unofficial one to silence, co-opt and crush the extremists on their own side.

This is what Netanyahu did in Israel. He didn't literally renounce the idea of a two-state solution forevermore. He just said that it would be too dangerous in the near term as long as Islamism-style radicalism is on the march. (A defensible proposition.) Still, these comments and the ones on Israeli Arabs were blatant panders. He took Knesset seats away from parties to his right by becoming more like them.

In general, the power of the cultural moment shapes the candidates. But occasionally there is a leader who can turn a negative popular mood into a positive one. FDR and Reagan did this. But you have to be very, very good.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.