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**OUR VIEW**

# Filling niche needs

We at the *EO* are fans of the United Way, and especially our local chapter. That's why it was disturbing to find out the organization will likely have to cut funding entirely to the Salvation Army and four other local nonprofits this year.

If you've heard the name but don't know how it works, the United Way collects donations from individuals and distributes them to local nonprofits. While it may seem like a middle man, the foundation is valuable for many reasons.

For one, executive director Cricket Nicholson goes business to business and event to event talking about the good work charities are doing in Eastern Oregon. That means the Salvation Army, Pendleton Animal Welfare Shelter, the Agape House and scores of other local groups don't have to each find time to make their pitch at every event, but those interested in helping fund them have an easy avenue to do so.

The United Way also checks up on nonprofits, making sure they are legitimate before sending money their way. And they offer training on how to apply for grants and get the message of their work out in the community.

When you sign up to give money to the United Way, you can either decide where it goes or allow them to decide. That general fund has shrunk so much that United Way has had to cut back where the dollars go.

The numbers are alarming. In 2005, before the recession, the United Way's campaign raised

\$352,921 in Eastern Oregon. At the end of the recession in 2011, it was down to \$306,732. The last couple of years it has hovered around \$200,000 and this year's campaign has compiled just \$137,000.

## The local United Way general fund has shrunk so much that United Way had to cut back where the dollars go.

The Salvation Army's lunch program is a highly visible casualty. Last year the organization served over 17,000 meals to those in need. Unless that money comes from somewhere else, the lunch hall will close.

Americans aren't giving less in general. According to a study by the National Philanthropic Trust,

about 95 percent of households give money to charities, and the average annual donation is around \$3,000. That amounts to more than \$241 billion, eclipsing corporate donations which totaled a little less than \$17 billion.

After a dip during the recession, giving has trended upward again. When adjusted for inflation, it's higher now than it was any time before 2000.

So it's not that we're being stingier with our wallets. In this case, however, we seem to have shifted our priorities. Maybe you have opted to support more national or international causes. Or maybe your charity dollars have gone to a hyper-local case — a co-worker with huge medical bills or a church mission project.

Whatever the case, it's important to remember the in-betweens, the causes in our community that affect the people we see every day but don't know by name.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

**OTHER VIEWS**

## Small fixes needed to perfect gun sale background checks bill

The (Eugene) Register-Guard

The dismaying failure of Congress to approve common-sense gun controls in the wake of recent mass shootings, including the 2012 slaughter of 20 children and six educators in Newtown, Conn., has shifted the battle for reform to state capitals and ballot boxes across the nation.

With a Legislature controlled in recent years by Democrats and a Democratic governor, Oregon should have joined Connecticut, New York, Delaware, Washington and other states that have approved tougher gun laws.

That didn't happen in the last two sessions when Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, introduced promising packages of gun measures, including proposals to expand Oregon's limited background check requirements.

The prospects are hearteningly improved this year as a result of last fall's election, which increased Democratic majorities in the Legislature and should enable Democrats to withstand fierce lobbying by gun-rights groups, possible Democratic defections and the lockstep opposition of Republicans.

Prozanski's proposal would close a loophole in current state law, which bars

felons and some others with criminal backgrounds, people with outstanding warrants, and some people with a history of severe mental illness from buying a gun.

The existing law requires background checks for sales of guns by federally licensed dealers, such as retail stores, and at gun shows, but not for person-to-person or private online sales.

Senate Bill 941 would expand background check requirements to gun transfers between private individuals, whether through the Internet or personal contact. It would also allow judges to bar patients receiving court-ordered outpatient mental health treatment from buying a gun.

These are all needed reforms, and Prozanski has been careful to include specific language and reasonable exemptions. That won't keep critics from waging an all-out fight, but it might prevent Democratic defections and, possibly, snag a GOP vote or two.

Polls show that a majority of Oregon voters want expanded background checks. They understand, despite gun-right groups' claims, that universal background checks are the most effective way to keep guns out of the wrong hands.

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**OTHER VIEWS**



## Religious liberty and equality

Over the past few decades the United States has engaged in a great struggle to balance civil rights and religious liberty.

On the one hand, there is a growing consensus that straight, gay and lesbian people deserve full equality with each other. We are to be judged by how we love, not by whom we love. If denying gays and lesbians their full civil rights and dignity is not wrong, then nothing is wrong. Gays and lesbians should not only be permitted to marry and live as they want, but be honored for doing so.

On the other hand, this was a nation founded on religious tolerance. The ways of the Lord are mysterious and are understood differently by different traditions. At their best, Americans have always believed that people should have the widest possible latitude to exercise their faith as they see fit or not exercise any faith. While there are many bigots, there are also many wise and deeply humane people whose most deeply held religious beliefs contain heterosexual definitions of marriage. These people are worthy of tolerance, respect and gentle persuasion.

At its best, the gay rights movement has promoted its cause while carefully respecting religious liberty and the traditional pillars of U.S. society. The cause has focused on marriage and military service. It has not staged a frontal assault on the exercise of faith.

The 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which was supported by Sen. Ted Kennedy and a wide posse of progressives, sidestepped the abstract and polarizing theological argument. It focused on the concrete facts of specific cases. The act basically holds that government sometimes has to infringe on religious freedom in order to pursue equality and other goods, but, when it does, it should have a compelling reason and should infringe in the least intrusive way possible.

This moderate, grounded, incremental strategy has produced amazing results. Fewer people have to face the horror of bigotry, isolation, marginalization and prejudice.

Yet I wonder if this phenomenal achievement is going off the rails. Indiana has passed a state law like the 1993 federal act, and sparked an incredible firestorm.

If the opponents of that law were arguing that the Indiana statute tightens the federal standards a notch too far, that would be compelling. But that's not the argument the opponents are making.

Instead, the argument seems to be that the federal act's concrete case-by-case approach is wrong. The opponents seem to be saying there is no valid tension between religious pluralism and equality. Claims of religious liberty are



**DAVID BROOKS**  
Comment

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covers for anti-gay bigotry.

This deviation seems unwise both as a matter of pragmatics and as a matter of principle. In the first place, if there is no attempt to balance religious liberty and civil rights, the cause of gay rights will be associated with coercion, not liberation. Some people have lost their jobs for expressing opposition to gay marriage. There are too many stories like the Oregon bakery that may have to pay a \$150,000 fine because it preferred

not to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex ceremony. A movement that stands for tolerance does not want to be on the side of a government that compels a photographer who is an evangelical Christian to shoot a same-sex wedding that he would rather avoid.

Furthermore, the evangelical movement is evolving. Many young evangelicals understand that their faith should not be defined by this issue. If orthodox Christians are suddenly written out of polite society as modern-day Bull Connors, this would only halt progress, polarize the debate and lead to a bloody war of all against all.

As a matter of principle, it is simply the case that religious liberty is a value deserving our deepest respect, even in cases where it leads to disagreements as fundamental as the definition of marriage.

Morality is a politeness of the soul. Deep politeness means we make accommodations. Certain basic truths are inalienable. Discrimination is always wrong. In cases of actual bigotry, the hammer comes down. But as neighbors in a pluralistic society we try to turn philosophic clashes (about right and wrong) into neighborly problems in which different people are given space to have different lanes to lead lives. In cases where people with different values disagree, we seek a creative accommodation.

In the Jewish community, conservative Jews are generally polite toward Orthodox Jews who wouldn't use their cutlery. Men are generally polite to Orthodox women who would prefer not to shake their hands. In the larger community, this respectful politeness works best.

The movement to champion gay rights is now in a position where it can afford to offer this respect, at a point where steady pressure works better than compulsion.

It's always easier to take an absolutist position. But, in a clash of values like the one between religious pluralism and equality, that absolutism is neither pragmatic, virtuous nor true.

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

**YOUR VIEWS**

### Hermiston officers will use park ordinance for city benefit

Justification for existence? Once again smells that way, editorial staff at the *East Oregonian*. It is ironic none of the "editors" were even present during the discussion from the last council meeting yet they are quick to give their customary jaded opinion.

Normally I would not waste my time or energy giving you a response, but the citizens of Hermiston are tired of one-sided stories filled with extreme drama and speculation. Look in the mirror and question your motive and intent before being quick to sling mud this way.

Does the Hermiston Police Department have better things to do you ask? Yes, but the police also have a goal of impacting the livability of the citizens they serve. From their website: "Focus on those issues which impact the livability of the citizens we serve will be a high priority. This includes noise complaints, animal complaints, drug enforcement, and all code issues including areas of blight."

Youths not in school and choosing to urinate and defecate inside the Rotary cook shack sure sounds like a livability issue to me, *EO* editor. As a retired police officer, it's not as simple as you portray. Officers must have a legal reason to stop and talk with someone. Unless we have unlimited resources we cannot expect the police department to post an officer in every park 24/7 to catch a person in one of the acts mentioned above.

This is nothing more than a tool for the

police to legally contact a person. Chief Edmiston spoke that night about discretionary authority and how supervisors will be involved to ensure the ordinance is not overused or abused as he clearly recognizes something as small as this does provide immense power to those who serve.

Shame on the *EO*. You question the integrity and intelligence of every police officer by posting the picture of people praying inside the cook shack in remembrance of 9/11 as an example of what the police might enforce against. First responders lost their lives that day.

Give our officers some credit. Yes, the prior chief was heavy handed and caused a lot of damage, but it is the integrity of those officers who wear the uniform that have kept the department going and now they have an administration that clearly supports them.

The *EO* deserves a huge wallop kick in the pants and I hope to see your apology.

**Timothy Best**  
Hermiston

### Eastern Oregon should help BMCC by passing bond

Vote yes on the BMCC bond.

Wally McCrae would say it is good for our kids, our community and education. Andy McAnally wrote "We have a lot of good things going on in Eastern Oregon."

Let's keep it going. Let's pass this bond.

**Dean Fouquette**  
Pendleton

**LETTERS POLICY**

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.