

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Backlash to Monsanto hubris ignores science

Monsanto CEO Hugh Grant last week attributed the public backlash to genetically modified crops in general, and to the company in particular, to Monsanto's "hubris" in promoting the technology.

"We did really cool science and we worked within global regulatory requirements,"

he told *The Independent*, a British newspaper. "From where we were the conversation with consumers was an abstract."

Grant's admission is decades late. But it is on point. The company did an excellent job in marketing to growers. But it was either oblivious to or it ignored the potential for downstream objections.

As a result, the advances in crop production already realized by the work of Monsanto and other biotech companies are under assault by critics who wield powerful emotional arguments that aren't backed by science.

Monsanto was an early pioneer in biotechnology. In the 1980s it began working on crop development, and in 1987 did its first field trials on biotech corn that is resistant to corn borers.

"Roundup Ready" soybeans were its first commercial crop, followed by varieties of corn, alfalfa, canola, sugarbeets, sorghum and cotton. All are popular with farmers, all are reviled by critics.

It is cool science. Growers were quick to adopt the technology because it made their farms more productive and profitable.

Monsanto applied equally impressive innovations to its business practices. And it is here the company's stormy relationship with the public probably took root.

Monsanto bought up established seed companies that had already developed traditional hybrids on which Monsanto could stack its

biotech traits.

It recognized early the value of patenting gene sequences that it could use in its own products and license to its competitors.

The licensing agreements restrict the traits produced by other biotech companies that may be stacked

with Monsanto's, limiting the market for its competitors while enlarging Monsanto's.

Monsanto aggressively protects its patents, requiring farmers who buy the seed to sign agreements barring them from saving seed from previous crops.

That rubs more traditional farmers used to saving seed the wrong way. Monsanto's enforcement was at

times heavy-handed. That behavior allowed critics to paint the company as a corporate behemoth that bullies small, family farmers.

Though far from the only biotech developer, Monsanto has become for critics the global symbol of an industry they say is driven by greed and that is destroying traditional agriculture without regard for the health of consumers and the environment.

But that brings us back to the science.

Genetically modified crops have been produced on a wide scale for more than 20 years without ill effect to the people who consume them. Far from producing calamity, biotechnology provides the best prospect for feeding the world's growing population with crops engineered to resist drought and disease.

Not all consumers want biotech products. But none of the alternative cropping methods promise to produce the required quantity of food.

It would be a tragic mistake to punish the world's hungry masses because of the hubris of one company.

**Monsanto's heavy-handed enforcement allowed critics to paint the company as a corporate behemoth that bullies family farmers.**

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.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Blue Mountain provides affordable education

We believe in education, making investments in our community and planning for future generations. We support the Blue Mountain Community College bond because it involves all these important things. The region's economic health depends on thriving business.

BMCC provides affordable education and workforce training opportunities. With a strong workforce, companies will consider expanding, relocating or growing here. Without a strong workforce, community economic health will suffer. A trained workforce is the hope for family-wage jobs. The workforce comes first, the jobs come next.

We are impressed with BMCC's resilience to return to voters after a failed initial effort. BMCC immediately went to the public to get input, decreased the bond amount by nearly \$5 million, and clearly communicated how the money will be spent and the difference it will make.

To us, this demonstrates BMCC's commitment, vision and sense of accountability. Consider attending one of the many community events where information about the bond will be presented.

Make an informed decision, one that will protect the investment those before us have made in BMCC. We will

be voting yes in May by returning our ballots by May 19.

**Dr. Andrew and Susan Bower Pendleton**

### BMCC bond won't cost much, will do much good

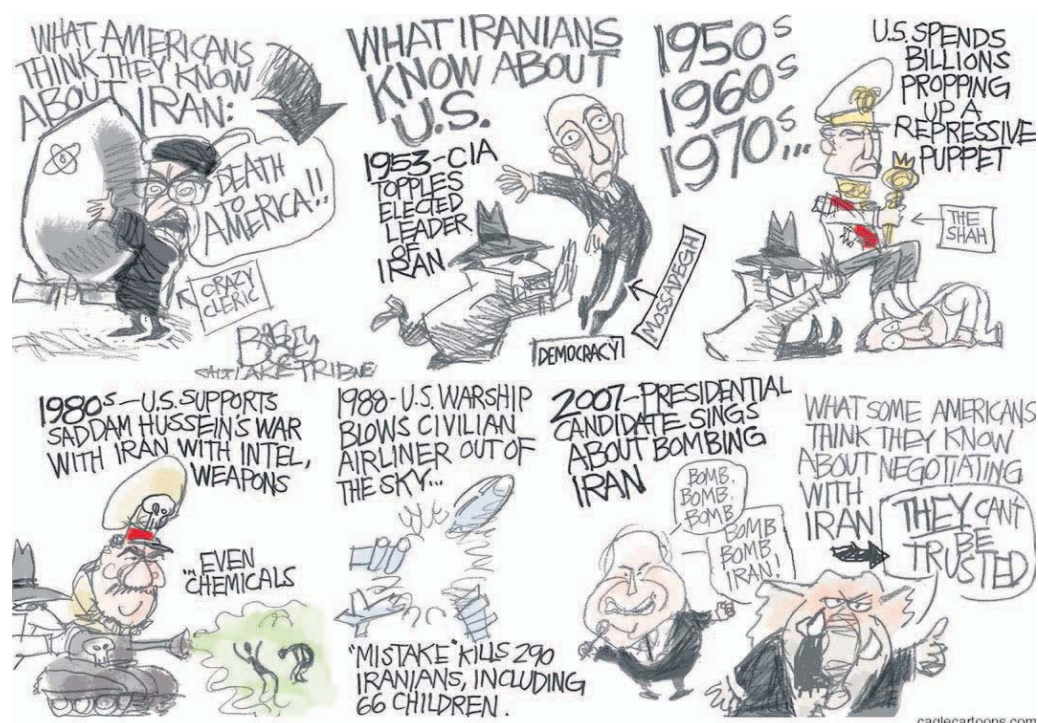
The following quote by T. H. White from "The Once and Future King" is one of the many reasons I am voting yes on the upcoming BMCC bond:

"The best thing for being sad ... is to learn something. That's the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then — to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the only thing for you. Look what a lot of things there are to learn."

I live in an average home. By my calculations the bond will cost about "a dime a day." That seems to be a bargain for the many benefits of having a vibrant community college in our region.

Please join me in passing the bond.

**Kim B. Puzey Hermiston**



## OTHER VIEWS

# Same-sex sinners?

The drama in Indiana last week and the larger debate over so-called religious freedom laws in other states portray homosexuality and devout Christianity as forces in fierce collision.

They're not — at least not in several prominent denominations, which have come to a new understanding of what the Bible does and doesn't decree, of what people can and cannot divine in regard to God's will.

And homosexuality and Christianity don't have to be in conflict in any church anywhere.

That many Christians regard them as incompatible is understandable, an example not so much of hatred's pull as of tradition's sway. Beliefs ossified over centuries aren't easily shaken.

But in the end, the continued view of gays, lesbians and bisexuals as sinners is a decision. It's a choice. It prioritizes scattered passages of ancient texts over all that has been learned since — as if time had stood still, as if the advances of science and knowledge meant nothing.

It disregards the degree to which all writings reflect the biases and blind spots of their authors, cultures and eras.

It ignores the extent to which interpretation is subjective, debatable.

And it elevates unthinking obeisance above intelligent observance, above the evidence in front of you, because to look honestly at gay, lesbian and bisexual people is to see that we're the same magnificent riddles as everyone else: no more or less flawed, no more or less dignified.

Most parents of gay children realize this. So do most children of gay parents. It's a truth less ambiguous than any Scripture, less complicated than any creed.

So our debate about religious freedom should include a conversation about freeing religions and religious people from prejudices that they needn't cling to and can indeed jettison, much as they've jettisoned other aspects of their faith's history, rightly bowing to the enlightenments of modernity.

"Human understanding of what is sinful has changed over time," said David Gushee, an evangelical Christian who teaches Christian ethics at Mercer University. He openly challenges his faith's censure of same-sex relationships, to which he no longer subscribes.

For a very long time, he noted, "Many Christians thought slavery wasn't sinful, until we finally concluded that it was.

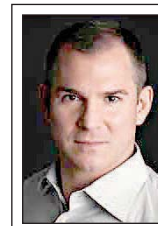
People thought contraception was sinful when it began to be developed, and now very few Protestants and not that many Catholics would say that." They hold an evolved sense of right and wrong, even though, he added, "You could find scriptural support for the idea that all sex should be procreative."

Christians have also moved far beyond Scripture when it comes to gender roles.

"In the United States, we have abandoned the idea that women are second-class, inferior and subordinate to men, but the Bible clearly teaches that," said Jimmy Creech, a former United Methodist pastor who was removed from ministry in the church after he performed a same-sex marriage ceremony in 1999. "We have said: That's a part of the culture and history of the Bible. That is not appropriate for us today."

And we could say the same about the idea that men and women in loving same-sex relationships are doing something wrong. In fact the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have said that. So have most American Catholics, in defiance of their church's teaching.

And it's a vital message because of something that Indiana demonstrated anew: Religion is going to be the final holdout and



**FRANK BRUNI**  
Comment

most stubborn refuge for homophobia. It will give license to discrimination. It will cause gay and lesbian teenagers in fundamentalist households to agonize needlessly: Am I broken? Am I damned?

"Conservative Christian religion is the last bulwark against full acceptance of LGBT people," Gushee said.

Polls back him up. A majority of Americans support marriage equality, including a majority of Catholics and most Jews. But a 2014 survey by the

Public Religion Research Institute showed that while 62 percent of white mainline Protestants favor same-sex marriages, only 38 percent of black Protestants, 35 percent of Hispanic Protestants and 28 percent of white evangelical Protestants do.

And as I've written before, these evangelical Protestants wield considerable

power in the Republican primaries, thus speaking in a loud voice on the political stage. It's no accident that none of the most prominent Republicans believed to be contending for the presidency favor same-sex marriage and that none of them joined the broad chorus of outrage over Indiana's discriminatory religious freedom law. They had the Iowa caucuses and the South Carolina primary to worry about.

Could this change?

There's a rapidly growing body of impressive, persuasive literature that looks at the very traditions and texts that inform many Christians' denunciation of same-sex relationships and demonstrates how easily those points of reference can be understood in a different way.

Gushee's take on the topic, "Changing Our Mind," was published late last year. It joined Jeff Chu's "Does Jesus Really Love Me?" published in 2013, and "Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships," by James Brownson, which was published in 2013.

Then there's the 2014 book "God and the Gay Christian," by Matthew Vines, who has garnered significant attention and drawn large audiences for his eloquent take on what the New Testament — which is what evangelicals

draw on and point to — really communicates.

Evaluating its sparse invocations of homosexuality, he notes that there wasn't any awareness back then that same-sex attraction could be a fundamental part of a person's identity, or that same-sex intimacy could be an expression of love within the context of a nurturing relationship.

"It was understood as a kind of excess, like drunkenness, that a person might engage in if they lost all control, not as a unique identity," Vines told me, adding that Paul's rejection of same-sex relations in Romans 1 was "akin to his rejection of drunkenness or his rejection of gluttony."

And Vines said that the New Testament, like the Old Testament, outlines bad and good behaviors that almost everyone deems archaic and irrelevant today. Why deem the descriptions of homosexual behavior any differently?

Creech and Mitchell Gold, a prominent furniture maker and gay philanthropist, founded an advocacy group, Faith in America, which aims to mitigate the damage done to LGBT people by what it calls "religion-based bigotry."

Gold told me that church leaders must be made "to take homosexuality off the sin list."

His commandment is worthy — and warranted. All of us, no matter our religious traditions, should know better than to tell gay people that they're an offense. And that's precisely what the florists and bakers who want to turn them away are saying to them.

Frank Bruni has been an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since June 2011.

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— David Gushee

Evangelical Christian and teacher of Christian ethics at Mercer University

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## 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.