

Quick takes

Spout Springs for sale

Where myself, and hundreds of others first learned to ski. Love that place. I leased the lodge for a couple winters and had a cross country ski shop (Kreutz Sporthaus based in Richland), overnight lodging and groomed 25 kilometers of ski trails.

— Dennis Kreutz

Skied there as a kid. Sad it has fallen into disrepair. I loved that huge St. Bernard that would wander around there.

— Beth Gibson

My dad took me there in the ‘50s to watch the ski jumping trials. Then I learned to ski there.

— John Vixie

Undersheriff wins lottery

Congratulations. I’m so excited to know someone so deserving and right here in Boardman win.

— Debbie Radie

I remember him from my fire department days. Glad it happened to such a nice person. Have fun with it!

— Jennifer Hamlin

So happy that an underpaid public servant can win big sometime.

— Marge Walton

Now he’s the Ubersheriff.

— Scott Sheridan

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.

Salem isn’t working for Rural Oregon

Umatilla County Elections Supervisor Kim Lindell and County Clerk Dan Lonai collectively worry about the county’s low voter turnout — 33 percent of registered voters in the May election.

In the last general election, 61 percent of the county’s registered voters cast their ballots. Governor Kate Brown, who as secretary of state championed the motor-voter bill that automatically adds to the rolls many of those who have not previously registered, believes adding yet more voters will enhance participation.

In truth, the move is more likely to add thousands of dollars in new budget burdens for Oregon’s counties than it is to up the percentage of participants. And, although funds to mitigate the impact of the motor-voter bill were promised, none have materialized. The estimated price tag on the bill in Umatilla County is \$35,000.

Voter apathy in rural Oregon may well be a product of disenfranchisement rather than a lack of interest.

An analysis of the work of the 2015 Legislature serves as a prime example of why rural Oregonians see themselves as a forgotten minority. Fueled by Democratic majorities, the Legislature has steamrolled through the current session with reckless abandon when it comes to the interests, well-being, and values of rural citizens.

This month, the *Oregonian* noted the 2015 legislative session is destined to go down as one that disproportionately benefits parts of the state that need the least help. The paper goes on to note the negative implications of the 2015 session can be found both in legislation that has passed or is expected to pass and



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legislation that has been buried. Noted the *Oregonian*, this session has been defined by Democratic dominance and that translates to an urban agenda.

Members of the Republican caucus have lamented the difficulty of going to work every day just to find they are trying to scale a stone wall of partisanship. Good government is always about civility and consideration of diverse thought, needs, and ideas. This Legislative majority doesn’t place a premium on any of those concepts.

Oregon is a state of haves and have nots — both economically and politically. Politically, there are essentially only a half dozen counties that make a difference. That leaves 30 counties on the sidelines.

And as far as the house leadership goes, what’s good for Portland is good for Burns, Jordan Valley, Lakeview, and Heppner, even though it doesn’t work that way. This week, the Capital Insider reports that with current Legislative leaders running for statewide office in the next election, the positions they leave behind will likely be filled by two more Portlanders.

Had the Legislative bully pulpit come and gone, rural Oregonians could breathe a little easier. But there are still proposals on the table such as the minimum wage implementation and sick leave that can wreak havoc in distressed rural communities. For those towns, the debate isn’t about fair wages or benefits, it is about the ability to provide jobs at all and keep the doors open. Whether we like it or not, economics dictate wage levels.

The headline this week is that the speaker is proposing a \$13 minimum wage

and at the same time noting it is probably too low. Perhaps before leaping into trying to keep up with other major cities — which is her focus — it might be well to hear from individuals in Oregon who are or have actually met a payroll.

With the sudden departure of Governor John Kitzhaber there was brief optimism some things might change. At the moment, however, it appears we have largely the same cast of consummate insiders performing in slightly different costumes.

History has shown that such an approach cannot go on forever. A recent article noted that great societies generally last about 200 years. At that point, a growing pattern of entitlement tips the scales to such a degree the system loses its capacity to function. Oregon is a microcosm of a problem becoming endemic across America.

This state prides itself for its liberal views on euthanasia. Perhaps the 2015 Legislature should take heed and put itself out of its misery, in a literal sense, before it does any further damage. It is already too late for death with dignity, but not too late to avoid a deeper hole from which the Democratic majority will ultimately have to emerge once the error of their ways comes home to roost.

And with regard to getting more rural Oregonians out to vote, it isn’t about reducing the already minuscule effort it takes to register, it’s about the powers that be in Salem demonstrating they actually care about rural Oregon and giving the people who live here reason to believe their vote counts for something.

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George Murdock is a former editor and publisher of the East Oregonian and a current Umatilla County commissioner.

The delusions of Dolezal

Rachel Dolezal, a woman with no known black heritage, has apparently, through an elaborate scheme of deception and denial, claimed for years to be a product of black heritage.

This has sparked a national conversation about how race is constructed and enforced, to what extent it is cultural and experiential, and whether it is mutable and adoptable.

If this were simply a matter of a person appreciating, emulating or even appropriating the presentation and performance of a race other than the one society prescribes to her based simply on her appearance, it wouldn’t be a story.

But this isn’t simply that. This is about privilege, deceitful performance and a tortured attempt to avoid truth and confession by co-opting the language of struggle, infusing labyrinthine logic with the authority of the academy, and coat-tailing very real struggles of transgender people and transracial adoptees to defend one’s deception.

This is a spectacular exercise in hubris, narcissism and deflection.

And we have been distracted from real conversation about real things in order to try to contextualize a false life based on a false premise. For a moment, blackface seemed to matter more than actual black lives.

On this issue of appearance, Ezra Dolezal, her adopted brother, has described her transformation as a form of “blackface.” When Matt Lauer asked, “Have you done something to darken your complexion?” she responded, “I certainly don’t stay out of the sun.”

Dolezal added: “This is not some freak ‘Birth of a Nation’ mockery blackface performance. This is on a very real, connected level.”

Full stop. Let’s just marvel at the efficient catchphrase saturation in those sentences. She takes the whole universe of possible attacks and issues them in her own tongue as a method of neutralizing them. It is a clever, if calculated, bit of argumentation, the kind that one might practice in a mirror.

But Dolezal didn’t stop there. She also told the MSNBC host Melissa Harris-Perry, “I have really gone there with the experience, in terms of being a mother of two black sons and really owning what it means to experience and live blackness.”

Yes, but she did so by choice and with a trap door. She was always aware that she could remove her weave and stop tanning (assuming that’s true) and return to what society registers as whiteness. People of actual black heritage don’t have that option. Her sons don’t have that option. And make no mistake: Having that option is a privilege.

The whole notion of “transracial” as it has been applied to Dolezal is flawed in part because it isn’t equally available to all.

Whiteness in this country has historically been incredibly narrowly drawn to protect its purity, and this was not simply enforced by social mores, but also by law. Conversely, blackness was broadly drawn, serving as something of a collecting pool for anyone with even the most minute detectable Negro ancestry. If you weren’t 100 percent white, you were black.

This meant that society became accustomed to blackness presenting visually in an infinite spectrum of possibilities, from pass-for-white lightness to obsidian darkness lacking all ambiguity.

This means that the way Dolezal was able to convincingly present and perform blackness as a light-skinned black woman is a form of one-directional privilege that simply isn’t available to a black person starting at the other end of the melanin



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spectrum.

Racial passing has been a societal feature probably for as long as race has been a societal construct. But it was more often practiced by a person who was not purely white by heritage passing herself or himself off as such. In some ways, this may have been understandable, even if distasteful, as these people identified as white in a society that privileged whiteness and devalued, diminished or attempted to destroy — both spiritually and physically — others.

Choosing a life of privilege over one of oppression must have seemed particularly attractive to some, particularly to those whose parents are different races and who, one could argue, could make the most compelling case to identify with whichever parent’s heritage they chose.

But Dolezal wasn’t passing in that sense. She was commandeering and concocting a biography of burden to obscure the shift and lay claim to authenticity.

According to a report in *The Washington Post*, however, the transracial-adoption (“when a child of one race is adopted by the family of another”) community has not taken kindly to being linked to Dolezal’s deception. Kimberly McKee, the assistant director of the Korean-American Adoptee Adoptive Parent Network and a professor at Grand Valley State University where she studies transracial adoption, told *The Post*, “You’re turning something that is a historical experience into something that’s almost being made a joke.”

A letter signed by McKee and 21 other scholars and advocates made the point even more forcefully: “We find the misuse of ‘transracial,’ describing the phenomenon of a white woman assuming perceived markers of ‘blackness’ in order to pass as ‘black,’ to be erroneous, ahistorical, and dangerous.”

Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find scientific support for transracialism, as it is being applied for Dolezal’s deception and identity, as a legitimate area of serious inquiry beyond a sociological phenomenon.

How can one be born discordant with a racial identity if race is a more socialized construct than rigid, biological demarcation and determinism? In other words, how can one be born discordant with an experience one has yet to have?

At best, this appears to be an issue of having an affinity for a culture that grows around a social construct. That is because, to my sense of it, cultural race identity has more scientific grounding than biological race identity, and those cultures of racial identity are in fact a response to the structure itself. Some people perform in response to their privilege and others to their lack thereof.

In that regard, one cannot only like and want to emulate the look of another racial group (though, one must be ever-questioning of oneself as to what motivates this, making sure that it isn’t the outgrowth self-hatred), but one can even prefer the culture that developed around that look.

But changing appearance and even cross-cultural immersion doesn’t alter the architecture of race that gave birth to and reinforced those differences in the first place.

Dolezal’s performance of blackness may have been born of affinity, but it was based on a lie — one she has never sufficiently recanted — and her feeble attempts to use professorial language and faux-intellectual obfuscations only add insult to the cultural injury.

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Photo courtesy of Mat Wolf

An adolescent gives a tour of his tent city home in the Zaatari Syrian refugee camp in Mafraq Governorate, Jordan. August 2012.

The plight of millions

I have never scrambled in the dirt for food in a refugee camp. I’ve never wished for the coast while looking over the prow of an overcrowded boat on the Mediterranean. Nor have I hunkered down in a crumbling Ukrainian apartment complex, hoping the next bomb doesn’t land closer.

But because today, June 20, is the United Nations’ World Refugee Day, I want to talk about those who have.

A report released this week by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees showed conflict and persecution have ripped a record number of people from their homes. Worldwide, there are some 59.5 million refugees and internally displaced persons. (Refugees cross international borders, whereas internally displaced persons remain in-country.)

That number is enough to make anyone’s head spin. So let’s focus on two regions that have made headlines as of late: Ukraine and the Middle East.

A Ukrainian Odyssey
“Before the war, we lived a normal life,” said Nikita Gostev, a 20-year-old refugee now living in Bend. I spoke with him Friday over the phone, and he gave his account of fleeing Ukraine.

Pro-Russian soldiers stopped his father along the street one day, demanding to see his passport, he said. Because it was Ukrainian they “destroyed” it. His father was at one point kidnapped and beaten by the authorities, then left on the roadside to walk more than a mile home. There are now holes in their old home from shells that have pounded the city.

When the situation in Kramatorsk became unbearable, they moved further west, where pro-Western militants lived. But the Gostevs faced discrimination throughout Ukraine. The wandering family could not rent a house because they were from an eastern city. People would tell them, “You’re from the eastern part (of the country) — you support the Russians.”

They eventually wound up in a refugee camp in Odessa, a port city on the Black Sea. Gostev described the dwellings for displaced persons there as “old Soviet buildings,” sometimes with six people to a room. They were fed “kasha,” or roasted buckwheat.

A couple from Bend, Erin and Robert Kerley, had become close with the Gostevs. The Ukrainians helped them when they flew to the post-Soviet country to adopt two children in 2004.

During the new conflict, the Kerleys got wind of the situation of their old family friends and in March were able to bring them to the United States.

But the odyssey is far from over. The family is in Bend on a temporary travel visa, but they hope to gain official asylum in the



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United States.

Up to 70,000 refugees are allowed to resettle in the United States for the 2015 fiscal year, according to a presidential memorandum by President Obama.

Into Zaatari
Mat Wolf, a friend and fellow journalist, is now reporting on the Islamic State conflict in Iraqi Kurdistan. Wolf spent time in a Jordanian refugee camp called Zaatari in August of 2012, around the time it was being set up.

The camp was in open desert. Sandstorms that sometimes blotted out the sun frequently blew through. Dust was everywhere, there were no trees. Families crammed into United Nations tents, the interiors of which were sparse. Maybe a mattress or a tarp to keep families off the bare dirt floor.

Slow-moving trucks would drive through Zaatari delivering food and supplies needed for survival.

“They would go around with water trucks and food trucks. Basically, they’d try to keep the trucks moving, because they didn’t want crowds gathering ... and creating a scene or panic,” Wolf told me over Skype. We looked through reports online from the camp now, and it seems to have developed logistically since roughly three years ago when he was there.

Wolf is in a region where the toll of displaced persons runs high.

“The ongoing cross-border conflict in Iraq and Syria has created an estimated 12 million refugees and internally displaced persons between the two countries,” wrote Wolf, a University of Oregon alumnius, in a recent letter. “To put that in perspective, this would be like uprooting and making homeless the entire populations of Oregon, Washington and Idaho combined.”

How do we tackle this mammoth problem? Though volunteer opportunities exist — the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees even takes on interns — not everyone can drop everything to hop on a plane bound for a foreign country. Wolf suggests that if you’re going to donate money, do your homework first. There are always those willing steal through a charitable front.

The UNHCR operates almost completely on donations. The agency provides necessary data for policy-makers and the public alike and aid for displaced persons; so, money sent its way isn’t wasted.

Raising awareness itself stimulates change, too.

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