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OUR VIEW

Contributed photo

The Speth family survey the aftermath of the Canyon Creek Complex fire that destroyed their home south of Canyon City.

Hearts and homes open to fire victims

The stories around John Day will remain long after the destructive fires

NANCY MCCARTHY
Comment

As fire roared through Canyon Creek and over the hills just south of John Day, those who were ordered to evacuate recall details they probably never will forget.

Dean Elliott, who lost his home of 53 years, remembers the sound of the wind. It was like a locomotive, he said.

His wife, Betty, recalls how the oxygen was sucked out of the air and she could hardly breathe.

Mike Mannell, who was woken by a friend, tells how he ran through the smoke to put a sprinkler on his Harley Davidson and another sprinkler on his neighbor's house.

If his friend hadn't woken him that morning, said Mannell, whose cabin that he had been building for six years burned to the ground, "I probably would have perished in that fire."

And with tears in his eyes, the neighbor, Bryan Nelson, whose home Mannell saved, called Mannell a "hero."

These stories abound in the canyon. They are told and retold to friends, relatives, restaurant waitresses, store clerks. They are told because people in this community know each other, and most importantly, they care about one another.

For two weeks, *Blue Mountain Eagle* staffers Cheryl Hoefler and Angel Carpenter have been keeping a running list of all the donations, services, offers of homes and other resources available to those who were affected by the fire. Response has been pouring into the *Eagle's* Facebook page from those both in the area and throughout the region, asking how they can help.

That's what you do in a crisis.

Where I live — on the North Oregon Coast — we are a small community, too. Most all of us have ties to each other — through family, work, volunteer activities, civic duties or friendship.

We also have emergencies. Usually, it's flooding or windstorms in the winter because it rains so much along the coast, where we live on a narrow strip of land between forest and ocean.

Our largest, overriding concern, however, is the potential Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake that is expected to occur 50 to 75 miles offshore and trigger a tsunami that would wipe our communities off the map.

It seems that, no matter where you live, some sort of disaster looms, threatening to destroy all we hold dear.

The difference between the North Coast and Eastern Oregon, however, is that the Cascadia earthquake happens every 300 years, and fires are a real possibility here every 300 days.

We are constantly in the emergency planning mode on the coast. We worry about where we would evacuate to escape the wall of water heading toward us 15 minutes after the earthquake drops the ground out from under us. We gather "go bags" — backpacks filled with emergency supplies; we test out evacuation routes leading toward ground higher than 80 feet; and we organize Community Emergency Response Teams to help us deal with the immediate crises that will occur when people finally reach pre-established gathering spots.

After observing and reporting on how John Day and Canyon City area residents and emergency crews are responding to this crisis, I have hope that we will do just as well when disaster hits us on the coast.

The local fire departments, U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Department of Forestry, Grant County Sheriff's Office and Red Cross all began working together to fend off the fire and keep us informed. In only a day or two, when it was obvious the fire couldn't be controlled locally, nearly 1,000 firefighters from throughout the region responded, and two incident commanders trained to supervise massive wildfires took charge.

Meanwhile, local volunteers opened their hearts, wallets and homes to those who needed immediate help.

Where I live, they say not to count on outside help being able to reach us for several weeks — or even months. We will be on our own to cope.

This experience, in this small community, shows me that it can be done.

The details of our potential crisis will be different. We will have different stories to tell. Instead of a wall of fire, we may be fleeing a wall of water. Instead of fire consuming our homes, it will be an enormous ocean wave.

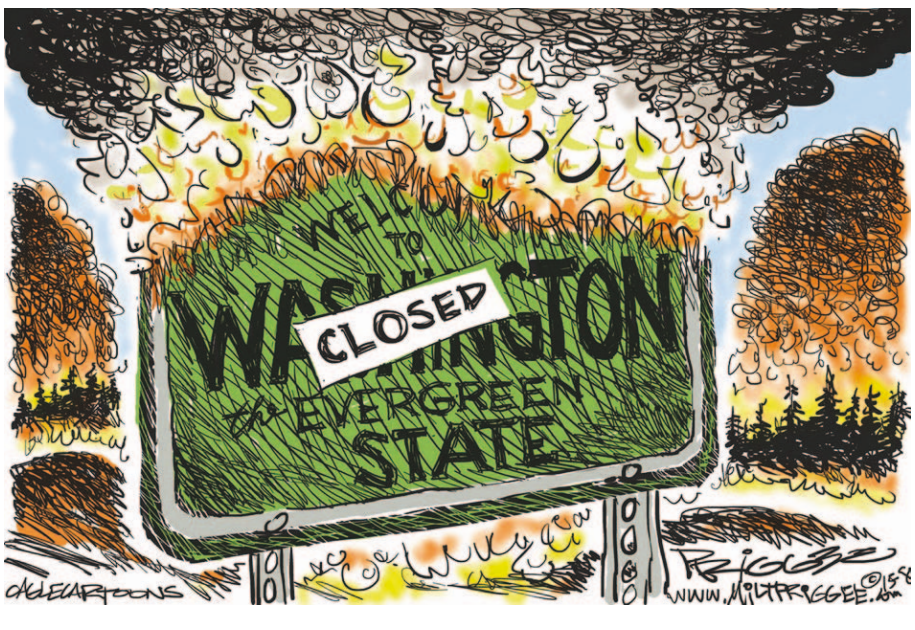
But I hope — and expect — the community response will be the same. We will take care of each other.

Because that's what communities do in a crisis.

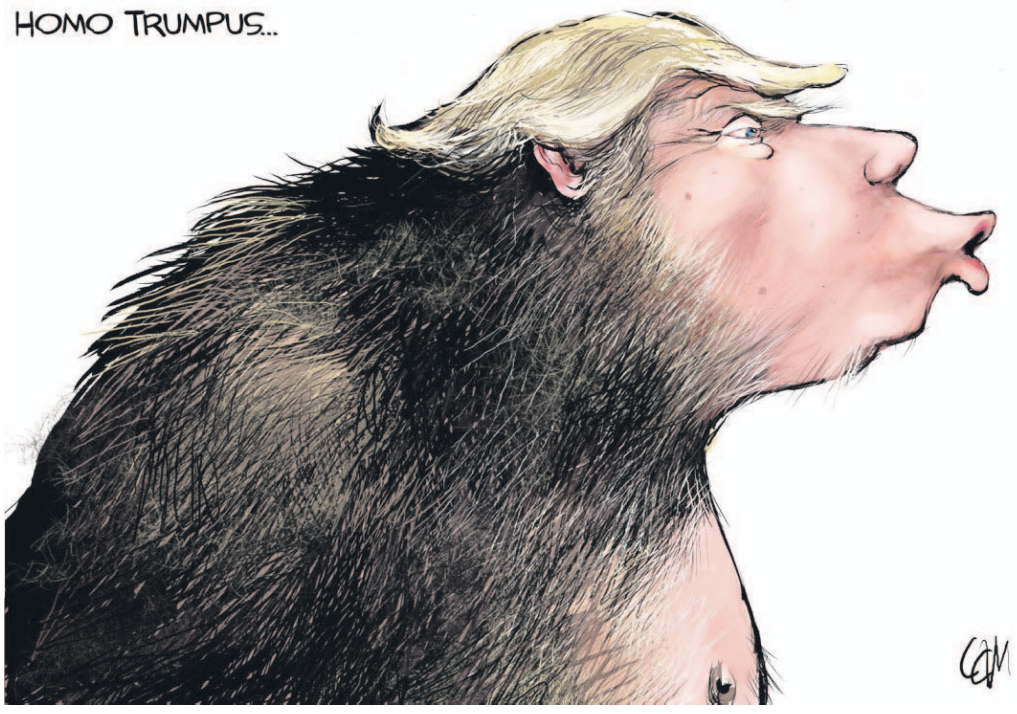
■

Nancy McCarthy has been working as interim editor of the Blue Mountain Eagle in John Day, a sister paper of the East Oregonian, for the past four weeks.

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



Trump-ward, Christian soldiers?

FRANK BRUNI
Comment

Let me get this straight. If I want the admiration and blessings of the most flamboyant, judgmental Christians in America, I should marry three times, do a queasy-making amount of sexual boasting, verbally degrade women, talk trash about pretty much everyone else while I'm at it, encourage gamblers to hemorrhage their savings in casinos bearing my name and crow incessantly about how much money I've amassed?

Seems to work for Donald Trump.

Polls show him to be the preferred candidate among not just all Republican voters but also the party's vocal evangelical subset.

He's more beloved than Mike Huckabee, a former evangelical pastor, or Ted Cruz, an evangelical pastor's son, or Scott Walker, who said during the recent Republican debate: "It's only by the blood of Jesus Christ that I've been redeemed."

When Trump mentions blood, it's less biblical, as Megyn Kelly can well attest.

No matter. The holy rollers are smiling upon the high roller. And they're proving, yet again, how selective and incoherent the religiosity of many in the party's God squad is.

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Usually the disconnect involves stern moralizing, especially on matters sexual, by showily devout public figures who are then exposed as adulterers or (gasp!) closet homosexuals. I'd list all the names, starting with Josh Duggar and working backward, but my column doesn't sprawl over an entire page of the newspaper.

Or the disconnect is between evangelists' panegyrics about Christ's penury and their hustle for funds to support less-than-penurious lifestyles. John Oliver, the host of HBO's "Last Week Tonight," has been making brilliant satirical fun of this by promoting his new tax-exempt church, Our Lady of Perpetual Exemption. Last Sunday he apologized to viewers that his wife, Wanda Jo, "cannot be with us this evening."

"She's at our summer parsonage in Hawaii," he continued, "for a week of spiritual introspection and occasional parasailing."

What's different and fascinating about the Trump worship is that he doesn't even try that hard for a righteous facade — for Potemkin piety. Sure, he speaks of enthusiastic churchgoing, and he's careful to curse Planned Parenthood and to insist that matrimony be reserved for heterosexuals as demonstrably inept at it as he is.

But beyond that? He just about runs the table on the seven deadly sins. He personifies greed, embodies pride, radiates lust. Wrath is covered by his anti-immigrant, anti-"losers" rants, and if we interpret gluttony to include big buildings and not just Big Macs, he's a glutton through and through. That leaves envy and sloth. I'm betting that he harbors plenty of the former, though I'll concede that he exhibits none of the latter.

In 2012, inexplicably, he was invited to Liberty University, where he digressed during his remarks to extol the prudence of prenuptial agreements. But all was forgiven: His host, Jerry Falwell, told audience members that Trump could be credited for "single-handedly" forcing President Barack Obama to release his birth certificate. Oh how they cheered, as if ugly, groundless partisan rumor-mongering were on a saintly par with washing lepers' feet.

Maybe it's Trump's jingoism they adore. They venerated Ronald Reagan though he'd divorced, remarried and spent much of his career in the godless clutch of Hollywood.

Maybe their fealty to Trump is payback for his donations to conservative religious groups.

Or maybe his pompadour has mesmerized them. It could, in the right wind, be mistaken for a halo.

I'm grasping at straws, because there's no sense in the fact that many of the people who most frequently espouse the Christian spirit then proceed to vilify immigrants, demonize minorities and line up behind a candidate who's a one-man master class in such misanthropy.

From Trump's Twitter account gushes an endless stream of un-Christian rudeness, and he was at it again on Monday night, retweeting someone else's denigration of Kelly as a "bimbo." Shouldn't he be turning the other cheek?

For politicians as for voters, devotion and grace can be fickle, convenient things. Courting the evangelical vote, Cruz used his own Twitter account last week to say that his "thoughts and prayers are with President Jimmy Carter," whose struggle with cancer was riveting the nation. But then Cruz pressed on with a speech that bemoaned the "misery, stagnation and malaise" of Carter's presidency. He couldn't have hit pause on the Carter bashing for a week or two?

Carter pressed on, too — with his usual weekend routine of teaching Sunday school, which he has long done with little fanfare. His own Christianity is not a bludgeon but a bridge.

As for Trump, I must not be watching the same campaign that his evangelical fans are, because I don't see someone interested in serving God. I see someone interested in being God.

■

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

YOUR VIEWS

Cuts to parks, recreation not the way to fix road problem

Rex Morehouse takes the easy road for street repair in his Aug. 17 letter to the *East Oregonian* by recommending cuts to the city park and recreation budget of 25 percent and eliminating over one-third of the chamber's revenue to fund the city streets.

The city budget is developed over several months by city staff then reviewed and acted upon by the budget committee (mayor, city council and nine private citizens). The meetings are open to the public. Mr. Morehouse attended many of these meetings and it's a pity that he did not make this recommendation where there was opportunity for discussion and to invite input from the decision makers.

Mr. Morehouse asserts that cutting the parks/recreation budget by 25 percent "puts us in line" with other cities of our size. I say: Show me. Where is the data to support this statement? I know of no resource giving guidelines for how much Oregon cities should spend on these types of activities. City budgets can be difficult to understand with differing methods and funds to account for income and expense. Trying to compare one city to another with differences in geography, history, and constituent base is like trying to compare one person to another — we are all different. We rely on the public to tell us what they want and I believe Pendletonians value our parks and recreation programs as they are. No new parks or programs have been added the past several years and now Mr. Morehouse is the only one saying we should reduce them by 25 percent. What services do you want to cut and what parks do you want closed?

Established by ordinance, 14 percent of the city room tax is used to support the chamber. The city also collects a fee of $1.50 per night per hotel room and 50 cents per night per RV space to support tourism (Tourism Promotion Assessment Charge). Fifty-five percent of the TPAC fee goes to the chamber as sole support for Travel Pendleton. The room tax and TPAC fee accounts for more than a third of the chamber budget.

Mr. Morehouse recommends these revenues go to roads and let chamber members make up the difference. The result? Double the cost of membership for local businesses and shut down Travel Pendleton, the city's tourism office that hired the "festival director" called for in Loree McKenna's Aug. 11 letter to the *EO* to promote Pendleton as a tourist destination town.

Tourism is a $1.3 billion industry in Oregon. Umatilla County sees $134 million of that, which supports 2,194 jobs. Mr. Morehouse's recommendations would devastate our local business and economy.

Chuck Wood
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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