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OUR VIEW

Why do state lines matter?

One man’s idea to make Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington part of Idaho makes cultural sense. Politically and constitutionally, however, the scheme is unlikely. But the discussion generated by Ken Parsons, a La Grande farmer, is useful. Jade McDowell described his concept in a story two weeks ago that became a hot topic of conversation in the days following.

What Parsons proposes is similar to the State of Jefferson, which a Port Orford man proposed in 1941. Counties in Southern Oregon and Northern California would become that new state. Jefferson Public Radio, headquartered in Ashland, is a vestige of that movement. The radio station has a far-reaching signal whose footprint mirrors the region proposed as a new state.

The secession movement is also a spin-off of the regularly discussed idea of simply breaking Eastern Oregon off from the rest of the state, and maybe joining up with Eastern Washington if they’re game.

There is a large element of truth in these reconfiguration proposals. They recognize the geography of kinship. The most extensive attempt to grasp this was Joel Garreau’s 1981 book “The Nine Nations of North America.” Garreau got his idea from years of reading news stories while a reporter and copy editor at *The Washington Post*.

Garreau’s attempt to reckon with the geography of cultural kinship takes in the U.S. and Canada, including Alaska and Hawaii. Garreau links coastal Oregon with coastal California, Washington

and British Columbia in a region called Ecotopia. Eastern Oregon and Washington are part of a vast region extending into the Midwest and a broad swath of Canada. It is called the Empty Quarter.

Behind the La Grande farmer’s proposal is real sentiment — the resentment of feeling like an outsider in one’s own state. Through modern travel we’re connected by a matter of hours to the state’s population hub of Portland, but the cultural differences are great.

For instance, the \$15 minimum wage looks much different in small towns than it does in the city. It would push a broad mass of small and even medium-sized businesses to the margins of insolvency. A business can’t spend money it doesn’t have.

And then there’s environmental policies, which are seen by many to be forced down the throats of rural Oregonians by the urban rulemakers who don’t know what it’s really like to live out here and have no interest in finding out.

While state lines are arbitrary constructs — born of the political necessities of a century or more ago — these borders often define real differences. Moving from Oregon into Washington, one quickly sees the absence of statewide land use planning, especially in the highly populated areas. Washington has not preserved farm land. That has allowed cities such as Vancouver to steadily consume arable, productive agricultural soil.

Salem would do well to grasp the alienation behind the new separatist sentiments in Eastern Oregon.

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.

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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.

EO’s Round-Up coverage commendable

I would like to commend the *East Oregonian* and their photography department for the fine coverage of the Round-Up finals. The articles about each winner were very interesting and informative. And the nice pictures of each winner was a great finish.

Margaret McLaughlin
Pendleton

Planned Parenthood videos shed important light

In response to the letter published Wednesday claiming that the infamous Planned Parenthood videos “were doctored, are frauds,” I simply must say this: Shame on you. The website you referred to minced words, finding technical faults with a statement made by GOP candidate Carly Fiorina. This is a tactic commonly employed in politics, where overall issues are completely ignored while the party defending themselves resorts to nitpicking details.

Your complete argument against the original poster boiled down to an Internet website. I see liberals doing this all the time, insisting they are correct and backing their belief by faulty, humanist data, as well as illogical fallacies. When videos are edited for pertinence, liberals use loaded words to insinuate that there contains deception within these videos.

Truth be said, there was a level of deception. Brave activists had to play the role of monsters to lull these peddlers of gore into comfort so the world could know the truth. Whomever truly cares about women’s health care won’t support this kind of evil liberal society pushes on vulnerable women. We deserve to know the truth, for the sake of those baby angels who never even had a chance. As for Planned Parenthood, I say throw them all in jail.

Carlin Sacco
Pendleton

Or Walden could say this ...

The *East Oregonian* editorial from Sept. 29 was an example of sensational opportunism more than it was anything else. The piece implied that only Republicans oppose the Gang of Eight immigration amnesty. It also assumed that Rep. Walden has never voiced concern about the H-2A guest worker program to his colleagues. Additionally, it implies that the only solution to the labor situation for small growers is a blanket amnesty.

Consider this proposed speech instead (with credit to Dan Stein of The Federation for American Immigration Reform):

“Mr. Speaker, you have one month remaining to leave a significant mark on our nation’s failed immigration policies. The so-called immigration reform bill in the last Congress failed because it served no identifiable public interest. It attracted a



A new way to tackle gun deaths

We’ve mourned too often, seen too many schools and colleges devastated by shootings, watched too many students get an education in grief. It’s time for a new approach to gun violence. We’re angry, but we also need to be smart. And frankly, liberal efforts, such as the assault weapons ban, were poorly designed and saved few lives, while brazen talk about banning guns just sparked a backlash that empowered the National Rifle Association.

What we need is an evidence-based public health approach — the same model we use to reduce deaths from other potentially dangerous things around us, from swimming pools to cigarettes. We’re not going to eliminate guns in America, so we need to figure out how to coexist with them.

First, we need to comprehend the scale of the problem: It’s not just occasional mass shootings like the one at an Oregon college on Thursday, but a continuous deluge of gun deaths, an average of 92 every day in America. Since 1970, more Americans have died from guns than died in all U.S. wars going back to the American Revolution.

When I reported a similar figure in the past, gun lobbyists insisted that it couldn’t possibly be true. But the numbers are unarguable: fewer than 1.4 million war deaths since 1775, more than half in the Civil War, versus about 1.45 million gun deaths since 1970 (including suicides, murders and accidents).

If that doesn’t make you flinch, consider this: In America, more preschoolers are shot dead each year (82 in 2013) than police officers are in the line of duty (27 in 2013), according to figures from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the FBI.

More than 60 percent of gun deaths are suicides, and most of the rest are homicides. Gun enthusiasts scoff at including suicides, saying that without guns people would kill themselves by other means. In many cases, though, that’s not true.

In Great Britain, people used to kill themselves by putting their heads in the oven and asphyxiating themselves with coal gas. This accounted for almost half of British suicides in the late 1950s, but Britain then began switching from coal gas to natural gas, which is much less lethal. Sticking one’s head in the oven was no longer a reliable way to kill oneself — and there was surprisingly little substitution of other methods. Suicide rates dropped, and they stayed at a lower level.

The British didn’t ban ovens, but they made them safer. We need to do the same with guns.

When I tweeted about the need to address gun violence after the college shooting in Roseburg, Oregon, a man named Bob pushed

back. “Check out car accident deaths,” he tweeted sarcastically. “Guess we should ban cars.”

Actually, cars exemplify the public health approach we need to apply to guns. We don’t ban cars, but we do require driver’s licenses, seat belts, air bags, padded dashboards, safety glass and collapsible steering columns. And we’ve reduced the auto fatality rate by 95 percent.

One problem is that the gun lobby has largely blocked research on making guns safer. Between 1973 and 2012, the National Institutes of Health awarded 89 grants for the study of rabies and 212 for cholera — and only three for firearms injuries.

Daniel Webster, a public health expert at Johns Hopkins University, notes that in 1999, the government listed the gun stores that had sold the most weapons later linked to crimes. The gun store at the top of the list was so embarrassed that it voluntarily took measures to reduce its use by criminals — and the rate at which new guns from the store were diverted to crime dropped 77 percent.

But in 2003, Congress barred the government from publishing such information.

Why is Congress enabling pipelines of guns to criminals?

Public health experts cite many ways we could live more safely with guns, and many of them have broad popular support.

A poll this year found that majorities even of gun owners favor universal background checks; tighter regulation of gun dealers; safe storage requirements in homes; and a 10-year prohibition on possessing guns for anyone convicted of domestic violence, assault or similar offenses.

We should also be investing in “smart gun” technology, such as weapons that fire only with a PIN or fingerprint. We should adopt microstamping that allows a bullet casing to be traced back to a particular gun. We can require liability insurance for guns, as we do for cars.

It’s not clear that these steps would have prevented the Oregon shooting. But Webster argues that smarter gun policies could reduce murder rates by up to 50 percent — and that’s thousands of lives a year. Right now, the passivity of politicians is simply enabling shooters.

The gun lobby argues that the problem isn’t firearms; it’s crazy people. Yes, America’s mental health system is a disgrace. But to me, it seems that we’re all crazy if we as a country can’t take modest steps to reduce the carnage that leaves America resembling a battlefield.

■
Nicholas D. Kristof, a columnist for The Times since 2001, is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who writes op-ed columns that appear twice a week.

YOUR VIEWS

political coalition by pandering to narrow partisan interests, while offering nothing of value to the vast majority of American citizens, whose interests our laws are supposed to serve. In fact, it betrayed those interests.

“As you exit the public stage, Mr. Speaker, you have an opportunity to set a new direction — one that restores the concept that the American people are the primary stakeholders in U.S. immigration policy. A month is insufficient time to fix even a small fraction of the deficiencies in our immigration policies. But it is enough time to pass smaller bills that affirm that the purpose of immigration policy is to protect the vital economic, social and security interests of the American people.

“Instead of another vain attempt to enact legislation that addresses the demands of people who broke our laws and other interest groups that want easier access to foreign labor, we should focus on sending bills to the president’s desk that would restore public confidence that someone is looking out for their interests.

One such opportunity is final passage of a bill that withholds certain federal funds to jurisdictions that shield illegal aliens. Your final month also presents an opportunity to prevent employers from undermining American workers by hiring illegal aliens. The highly effective E-Verify program, a voluntary program that allows employers to verify employment eligibility, is up for reauthorization. We should push to make E-Verify permanent and mandatory for all

employers. There are other things that we need to fix, such as the unwieldy requirements and regulations that make it nearly impossible for small farmers to take advantage of existing guest worker programs. These and other important issues are the things we need to concentrate on in order to win back the confidence of the American people, not the ill-advised Senate ‘bipartisan reform bill.’”

Gordon Graham
Hermiston

The Pendleton road plan, plain and simple

OK, this is what you’re going to get for your nickels! A brand new “fix the streets” fund like nothing we’ve ever done before in Pendleton. A street fund all our own. Can’t spend the money on anything except our streets. Can’t move the money anywhere else in the budget.

Going to go on for ten years — long enough to actually get a whole lot of streets fixed. Lists the streets to be fixed every year so we know where we are in the lineup. Never had an opportunity like this to really get this “fix the streets” program underway and watch it proceed for long enough to see some great results.

Vote yes. Save Pendleton. Get the nickels out. Let’s do something big for a change. Enough talk. Fix the damn streets.

Larry O’Rourke
Pendleton