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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to everyone who slept in this morning, avoiding the Black Friday crowds and especially those "sales events" that stretched into Thanksgiving proper.

Although everyone appreciates a good deal, we should appreciate time with friends and family even more.

That's what holidays should always be about, and Thanksgiving especially so. It's one day a year we set aside to feel grateful for the things we have — a mountain of food on the table and the people who have chosen to share in the gluttony of the meal.

We shouldn't exchange that thankfulness for long lines in pitch-black parking lots, nor hustling through department stores in a competitive rush to save a few bucks. In addition, skipping that day allows our family members and neighbors who work in retail to enjoy the holiday, too. Nothing like having to show up at work at 4 a.m. to impede on your enjoyment of Thanksgiving.

Simply, our national slow-food holiday is more necessary than ever. That rat race that precedes Christmas is right around the corner, but we should all stand firm by keeping it away from our beloved Thanksgiving.

A tip of the hat, too, then to all the people who volunteered at one of the many free Thanksgiving Day meals in our area.

From Boardman to Hermiston to Pendleton and places in between, there was no reason for not joining into a community meal where everyone was welcome. Lack of family or funds wasn't an issue.

As we said above, spending Thanksgiving with the ones you love is important. And if the ones you love is the community at large — people who were strangers just the day before — then you're well on your way to making this world a better place.

This community appreciates it, and you surely made some people happy yesterday.

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

State should reconsider plan to expand Deer Ridge prison

The (Bend) Bulletin

The state Department of Corrections should recalculate its assumptions about the state's need for prison space.

Just over two years ago, then-Gov. John Kitzhaber and the state Legislature made dramatic changes to the state's prison system. Lawmakers cut the sentences for some property crimes and drug crimes. They promised more money to local communities for efforts aimed at cutting recidivism.

And, lo and behold, the number of men and women being sent to Oregon's prisons dropped: In 2013, according to the *Medford Mail Tribune,* some 4,972 Oregonians went to prison, a number that fell to 4,784 last year.

But something else happened, as well. While the average sentence served in 2013 was 37.1 months, it's now some 44.1 months. The result is that the overall prison population in this state has dropped 13 bodies, not the 500 or so that was being predicted when the reforms became law.

The state is now faced with two choices. It can open the medium security wing of the Deer Ridge prison outside of Madras, a facility that never has been used. That would cost about $9.5 million, mostly in additional staffing, and would allow the state to house more prisoners. Or, it can tell counties to keep some of their criminals home, move Deer Ridge's current prisoners to the medium security wing at a cost of $2 million, and hope the Legislature comes up with the remaining $7.5 million needed to add prisoners to Deer Ridge.

> The fear is that ... lawmakers will dip into justice reinvestment funds.

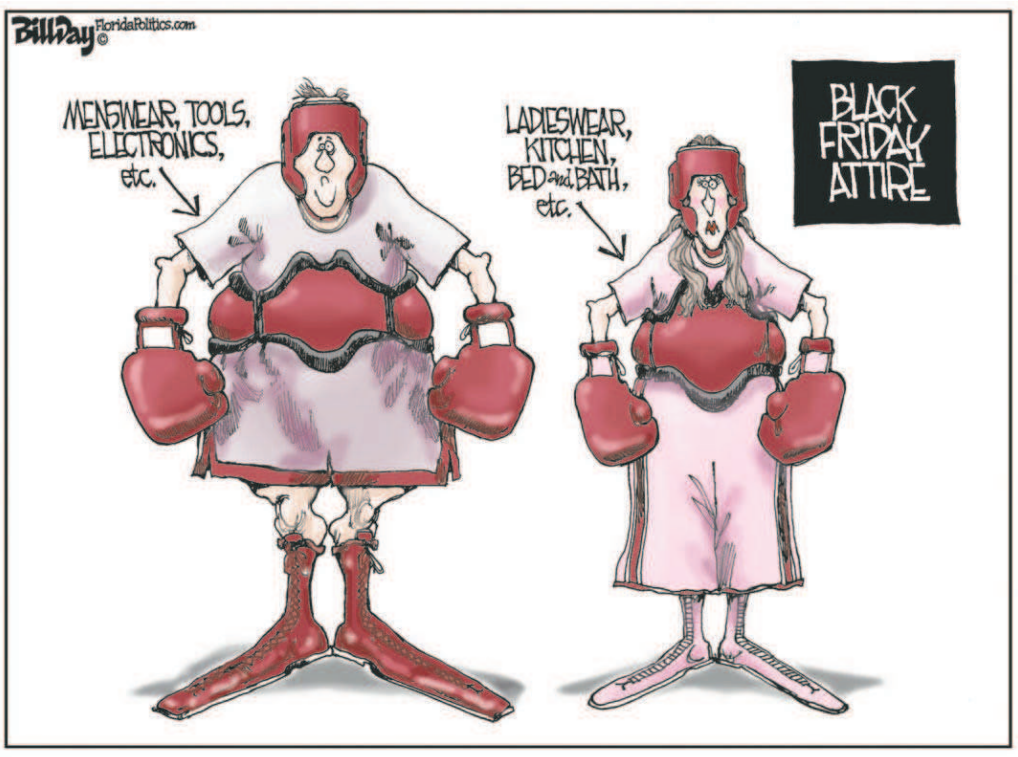
It has chosen the latter.

The decision raises concerns, clearly. Among the biggest is the fear that in order to find money for Deer Ridge, lawmakers will dip into justice reinvestment funds, which go to local anti-recidivism programs. For money-shy counties, that possibility has ugly implications.

All this suggests it's time for the state to reconsider its assumptions about its prison population and prepare to deal with the problem. It cannot continue asking counties to keep bad guys at home at county expense.

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. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

Letter from Saudi Arabia

THOMAS FRIEDMAN
Comment

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia is a country that is easier to write about from afar, where you can just tee off on the place as a source of the most austere, anti-pluralistic version of Islam — the most extreme versions of which have been embraced by the Islamic State, or ISIS. What messes me up is when I go there and meet people I really like and I see intriguing countertrends.

Last week I came here looking for clues about the roots of the Islamic State, which has drawn some 1,000 Saudi youths to its ranks. I won't pretend to have penetrated the mosques of bearded young men, steeped in Salafist/Wahhabi Islam, who don't speak English and whence the Islamic State draws recruits. I know, though, that the conservative clergy is still part of the ruling bargain here — some of the most popular Twitter voices are religious firebrands — and those religious leaders still run the justice system and sentence liberal bloggers to flogging, and they're still in denial about how frustrated the world is with the ideology they've exported.

> Something is stirring in this country. This is not your grandfather's Saudi Arabia.

But I also ran into something I didn't know: Something is stirring in this society. This is not your grandfather's Saudi Arabia.

"Actually, it's not even my father's Saudi Arabia anymore — it is not even my generation's Saudi Arabia anymore," the country's 52-year-old foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir, said to me.

For instance, I was hosted by the King Salman Youth Center, an impressive education foundation that, among other things, has been translating Khan Academy videos into Arabic. It invited me to give a lecture on how big technological forces are affecting the workplace. I didn't know what to expect, but more than 500 people showed up, filling the hall, roughly half of them women who sat in their own sections garbed in traditional black robes. There was blowback on Twitter as to why a columnist who's been critical of Saudi Arabia's export of Salafist ideology should be given any platform. But the reception to my talk (I was not paid) was warm, and the questions from the audience were probing and insightful about how to prepare their kids for the 21st century.

It appears that conservatives here have a lot more competition now for the future identity of this country, thanks to several converging trends. First, most of Saudi Arabia is younger than 30. Second, a decade ago, King Abdullah said he'd pay the cost for any Saudi who wanted to study abroad. That's resulted in 200,000 Saudis studying overseas today (including 100,000 in the United States), and now 30,000 a year are coming back with Western degrees and joining the labor force. You now see women in offices everywhere, and several senior officials whispered to me how often the same conservatives who decry women in the workplace quietly lobby them to get their daughters into good schools or jobs.

Finally, just as this youth bulge exploded here, so did Twitter and YouTube — a godsend for a closed society. Young Saudis are using Twitter to talk back to the government and to converse with one another on the issues of the day, producing more than 50 million tweets per month.

What's been missing was a leadership ready to channel this energy into reform. Enter the new King Salman's son, Mohammed bin Salman, the 30-year-old deputy crown prince, who, along with the moderate crown prince, Mohammed bin Nayef, has embarked on a mission to transform how Saudi Arabia is governed.

I spent an evening with Mohammed bin Salman at his office, and he wore me out. With staccato energy bursts, he laid out in detail his plans. His main projects are an online government dashboard that will transparently display the goals of each ministry, with monthly KPIs — key performance indicators — for which each minister will be held accountable. His idea is to get the whole country engaged in government performance. Ministers tell you: Since Mohammed arrived, big decisions that took two years to make now happen in two weeks.

"The key challenges are our overdependence on oil and the way we prepare and spend our budgets," Mohammed explained. His plan is to reduce subsidies to wealthy Saudis, who won't get cheap gas, electricity or water anymore, possibly establish a value-added tax and sin taxes on cigarettes and sugary drinks, and both privatize and tax mines and undeveloped lands in ways that can unlock billions — so even if oil falls to $30 a barrel, Riyadh will have enough revenues to keep building the country without exhausting its savings. He's also creating incentives for Saudis to leave government and join the private sector.

"Seventy percent of Saudis are under age 30, and their perspective is different from the other 30 percent," Mohammed said. "I am working to create for them the country they want to be living in in the future."

Is this a mirage or the oasis? I don't know. Will it produce a more open Saudi Arabia or a more efficient conservative Saudi Arabia? I don't know. It definitely bears watching, though.

"We have a pulse that we've never seen before," Mohammed Abdullah Aljadaan, chairman of the Saudi Capital Market Authority, told me, "and we have a [role] model in government we thought we'd never see."

Bottom line: There are still dark corners here exporting intolerant ideas. But they seem to now have real competition from both the grass roots and a leadership looking to build its legitimacy around performance, not just piety or family name. As one Saudi educator said to me, "There is still resistance to change," but there is now much more "resistance to the resistance."

■

Thomas L. Friedman won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, his third Pulitzer for The New York Times. He became the paper's foreign-affairs Op-Ed columnist in 1995.

YOUR VIEWS

Pendleton council should give voters choice on marijuana

It appears that the Pendleton mayor and city council — or I should say half the city council — have again misread the voters much as they did during the gas tax debacle.

McKennon McDonald, Chuck Wood, Jane Hill and Al Plute seem to have gotten it right. Give the voters the choice. The mayor, Neil Brown, Becky Marks, Tom Young and John Brenne evidently do not trust the voters to make a rational decision.

I can understand John Brenne. He seems more interested in trying to make the first "second" on every motion and making sure that he gets his free bottle of water at the meetings.

Neil Brown I don't understand. His comment that "if I had a sick child that needed medicine, I'd do whatever it takes to get it," made at a previous meeting, would seem to say yes to medical marijuana, but instead he turns a deaf ear and votes for a permanent ban.

Tom Young seems to think if he lets the voters decide and votes no, the DEA will swoop in and carry him away. He evidently doesn't realize that medical marijuana is legal in Washington, D.C., and the city still functions without federal interference.

Becky Marks? Well, you tell me. She's still trying to figure out why Bill Clinton never inhaled.

And then there's the mayor. He's just mad cause he doesn't get a vote on the ordinance.

Other news: Since the city hired Charles Denight to manage the Pendleton Development Commission, they finally have justified his position with another revisit of the "parklet" concept to add to his hectic schedule. With the resounding success and all the bubbling activity going on in Century Park, evidently the city manager has decided that these "parklets" are the wave of the future despite the loss of additional parking spots. I wish they would reinstall the bench that was removed after the Century Park wall was damaged. The "street people" have been complaining about the lack of napping area. One council member suggested that Main Street should be closed to cars. That would finally eliminate the parking problem on Main Street and give the tourists better access to roam the downtown area.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton