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OUR VIEW

The threat of threats

Anonymous, online threats in various forms have been directed at schools in Hermiston, Pendleton, Los Angeles and New York in the past week.

In all cases the threats were quickly determined to be hoaxes. Yet schools in Los Angeles closed for a day as a precaution, and in Hermiston numerous students missed at least part of a day of classes due to the unsubstantiated threat of gun violence.

Clearly we are living in dangerous times, and people are on edge. We read about school shootings from Columbine to Sandy Hook, and tragedy has touched Oregon already this year at Umpqua Community College, where nine people were killed.

The idea that it can't happen here has long been off the table.

So how do we proceed then in this climate, when we still need to get to school, work, church, the grocery and the park?

School districts and education service districts must walk a narrow line of keeping students and parents informed of possible dangers, while at the same time not giving credence to online anarchists nor causing unnecessary panic for no good reason.

Briana Cortaberria, communications officer for the Hermiston School District, said last week's online threat, which had no basis in reality (someone misheard someone, posted that information online, and the exaggeration mill and telephone game clicked into action) didn't cause the district to change any policies or protocol.

"But we were reminded that rather than watch something explode on social media and play catch-up, we want to be out in front of it ... get some facts out there," she said.

People online expressed frustration at the district's intentionally vague Facebook post repudiating the threat, and numerous students did not show up for school the next day. An exact count was not available as of press time, but teachers documented noticeably fewer students.

Pendleton had their own incident earlier this week, based on a threat of violence on Twitter. Michelle Madril, communications specialist for the Intermountain Education Service District, released a statement to the media and posted the three-paragraph explanation to the district's website, after Pendleton police determined there was no cause for concern.

> We must be vigilant and careful, but we also have to be strong and not cowered by fear.

Getting out in front of threats and rumor can be hard to do in the instantaneous, interconnected world of information. Social media is a prime reason why threats gather steam in a way they didn't just a decade ago.

Parents have the right and the responsibility to keep their children out of dangerous situations. Yet we cannot let anonymous, Internet tough-talkers terrorize our public sphere.

We have to be vigilant and careful, but we also have to be strong and not cowered by fear. We cannot be boarded up in our houses, scared of violence and terrorism outside.

School districts and city governments, stadiums, public squares, parks and events are learning how to deal with Internet threat-makers, and local police and the FBI and the CIA and the NSA are, too.

But those of us who live in the 3-D world — you know, the one outside the computer screen — have to figure out a way to keep calm and carry on. The world is full of threats, from stubbed toes to heartbreak, from car accidents to neutron bombs.

But it can't keep us from showing up. That's the most important thing of all.

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

What's the emergency?

The (Bend) Bulletin

Oregon lives in a state of emergency, or at least lawmakers seem to think it does. How else can they explain the emergency clauses attached to nearly half the bills introduced in the 2015 Legislature?

The clauses allow the bills to become law immediately and, in doing so, make it impossible for citizens to gather signatures and refer unpopular measures to the voters. Among the Legislature's emergencies last spring was the measure tightening background checks on gun sales in Oregon.

It's easy to see why some would want the emergency definition on the background check bill, and it's equally easy to see why others would not. But for many bills, the value of or need for an emergency declaration is less clear.

Lawmakers declared an emergency so banks and credit unions could immediately hold raffles to lure customers into opening savings accounts. They did so again when they created the office of state resilience officer, a position that had formerly been voluntary. A third time, they made "emergency" changes in the state's agricultural mediation service.

It's no wonder, then, a Wilsonville lawyer and the anti-tax group Taxpayer Association of Oregon are working to make changes in the state's constitution that would limit the practice of attaching emergency clauses so freely.

> Lawmakers should not be allowed to run roughshod over voters when they're concerned bills will be so unpopular that voters will decide to weigh in on them.

The petition would require a two-thirds majority of lawmakers to attach an emergency clause to the four laws mentioned above. At the same time, it would carve out exceptions for measures dealing with "catastrophic disaster," ordinary spending measures and bills cutting funds if revenues come up short.

In other words, its crafters seek to strike a balance that would allow lawmakers to address real emergencies in a timely fashion even as they create a major hurdle for less legitimate emergencies.

It's too soon to tell if the effort to get the petition on next year's general election ballot will be successful, but if fairness plays a role, it should. Lawmakers should not be allowed to run roughshod over voters when they're concerned bills will be so unpopular that voters will decide to weigh in on them. This petition would end that practice.

Be heard!

Comment online at eastoregonian.com

OTHER VIEWS

Trump and Muslims

BYRON YORK
Comment

Among the many criticisms of Donald Trump's ban-Muslim-immigration proposal is that it is based on bogus data. In his statement announcing the proposal, Trump cited a survey from the conservative Center for Security Policy showing that "25 percent of (Muslims) polled agreed that violence against Americans here in the United States is justified as a part of the global jihad" and also that 51 percent "agreed that Muslims in America should have the choice of being governed according to sharia."

Critics attacked the Center for Security Policy poll as unreliable. "Donald Trump's call to ban Muslim immigrants is based on a very shoddy poll," read a Washington Post headline, reflecting a widely held view.

So throw out that particular poll. Is there some other data, from sources with agreed-upon credibility, to shed light on Trump's point, or whether he has a point at all? Recently the Pew Research Center, which has conducted surveys on Muslims in the United States and around the world over the last several years, repackaged some of its findings to help people understand the issue.

> The United States admits a lot of immigrants from countries whose Muslim populations favor sharia.

A few basic points. According to Pew, Muslims make up 0.9 percent of the U.S. population — about 2.75 million people. That share is expected to increase to 2.1 percent by 2050. At the moment, 63 percent of Muslims in the United States are immigrants.

The pace of Muslim immigration to the U.S. has picked up significantly in recent years. "A recent Pew Research Center report estimated that the Muslim share of immigrants granted permanent residency status (green cards) increased from about 5 percent in 1992 to roughly 10 percent in 2012, representing about 100,000 immigrants in that year," Pew reports.

As far as beliefs and attitudes are concerned, Pew asked Muslims in 39 countries whether they want sharia to be law of the land where they live. The percentage who answer yes is very, very high in some countries: 99 percent say yes in Afghanistan, 91 percent in Iraq, 84 percent in Pakistan. On the low end, just 12 percent of Muslims in Turkey say they want sharia to be the law of the land; the number is 10 percent in Kazakhstan.

The United States admits a lot of immigrants from the countries whose Muslim populations favor sharia. According to a separate report from the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, the U.S. awarded 11,000 green cards to immigrants from Afghanistan from 2009 to 2013, 83,000 to Iraqis in the same time period, and 83,000 to Pakistanis. The U.S. awarded 22,000 green cards to Turks in that time, and 7,000 to Khazaks.

On the question of violence, Pew asked Muslims around the world the following question: "Some people think that suicide bombing and other forms of violence against civilian targets are justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. Do you personally feel that this kind of violence is often justified to defend Islam, sometimes justified, rarely justified, or never justified?"

"Muslims mostly say that suicide bombings and other forms of violence against civilians in the name of Islam are rarely or never justified, including 92 percent in Indonesia and 91 percent in Iraq," Pew reported. On the other hand, in some countries, the "justified" answers are quite high. In Afghanistan, for instance, 18 percent say such violence is often justified; 21 percent say sometimes justified; 18 percent say rarely justified; and 40 percent say never justified. Four percent say they don't know.

In the United States, Pew found that 81 percent of U.S. Muslims say such violence is never justified; five percent say it is rarely justified; seven percent say it is sometimes justified, and one percent say it is often justified. Six percent say they don't know.

Read the numbers however you like. Some observers stress that large majorities of Muslims in the United States and in some other countries oppose such violence under all circumstances.

Others point to those Muslims in the United States who believe it is justified in at least some cases — 13 percent — and say that is an unacceptably high number. And of course, Trump's proposal targets Muslims from other places in the world coming to the United States, which involves some Muslim-majority countries in which approval of violence in the name of Islam is alarmingly high. It's a complicated story, but at least there are some reliable numbers on which to base the debate.

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Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner.

YOUR VIEWS

Christmas trees, decorations can pose as fire dangers

The holiday season is upon us and the Pendleton Fire Department wants to make sure that everyone has an enjoyable and safe holiday. All of us enjoy the traditional items associated with the holidays such as candles, Christmas trees, and decorations. However, these present hazards when not safely displayed. The greatest danger is from live Christmas trees and candles. Here are some safety tips that can help you have a safe holiday:

Trees: When choosing a live Christmas tree, choose a fresh tree. Look for flexible needles that don't break and a trunk with sap. Make sure that the tree stand has a continuous source of water and is sturdy enough to resist toppling by kids or pets. We recommend that you use low energy, safety lighting that's been certified by a safety testing lab. Don't use damaged or frayed cords.

Remember to keep the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces, candles and even a TV. Finally, remember to dispose of the tree as soon as the holidays are over. A dry tree is a danger and you should not store it near the house or in a garage; please dispose of it properly.

Candles: Candles may be pretty to look at but they are a cause of many home fires — and home fire deaths. Remember, a candle is an open flame, which means that it can easily ignite anything that can burn. If you do burn candles, make sure that you never use a candle if oxygen is used in the home, use candle holders that are sturdy, and keep them at least 12 inches from anything that can burn. It is imperative that you blow out all candles when you leave the room or go to bed. Think about using flameless candles in your home. They look and smell like real candles.

Facts about home holiday fires:

- One of every three home Christmas tree fires is caused by electrical problems.
- On average, one of every 31 reported home structure Christmas tree fires results in a death, compared to an average of one death per 144 total reported home structure fires.
- A heat source too close to the tree causes roughly one in every four of Christmas tree fires.
- More than half (56 percent) of home candle fires occur when something that can catch on fire is too close to the candle.
- December is the peak time of year for home candle fires.

Source: National Fire Protection Association

The men and women of the Pendleton Fire Department believe that the best way to fight fire is to prevent them from ever occurring. I encourage all the citizens to take the steps necessary to help prevent fires in our community. Should a fire occur, rest assured that we stand ever vigilant to come to your assistance.

Mike Ciraulo, fire chief
City of Pendleton Fire & Ambulance

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.