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OUR VIEW

Foster parents make a real difference

No one is a hero by default. No family lineage, club membership or profession makes someone a hero. Neither does simply doing the right thing — that's called integrity, and is admirable but not proof by itself of heroism.

A hero is made by both choices and actions, by specific selfless service for the good of others, and the title should be reserved for those who truly deserve it.

We submit to you Jason and Mary Mortensen, an Irrigon couple who for the past six years have been foster parents to 24 teenagers.

East Oregonian reporter Jade McDowell profiled the couple over the holidays in a story about foster care and the Department of Human Services. Both husband and wife were raised in and out of the foster care system and know the tribulations that come with a childhood in flux.

The Mortensens have embraced their upbringing and used that intimate understanding to help teens. They've opened their home and changed their lives to accommodate a serious need.

"They need parents, not a pity party," Jason said.

Good foster care is indeed a serious need. The DHS is always looking for adults willing to take in children, sometimes for a few weeks, sometimes for years. The need is especially pronounced in the Hispanic community, where language and cultural barriers are added to the stress on a child being taken from one home and moved to another. Lucio and Esperanza Ochoa were also featured in the *East Oregonian* story and fill part of that need, but the DHS is always looking for more Hispanic foster parents.



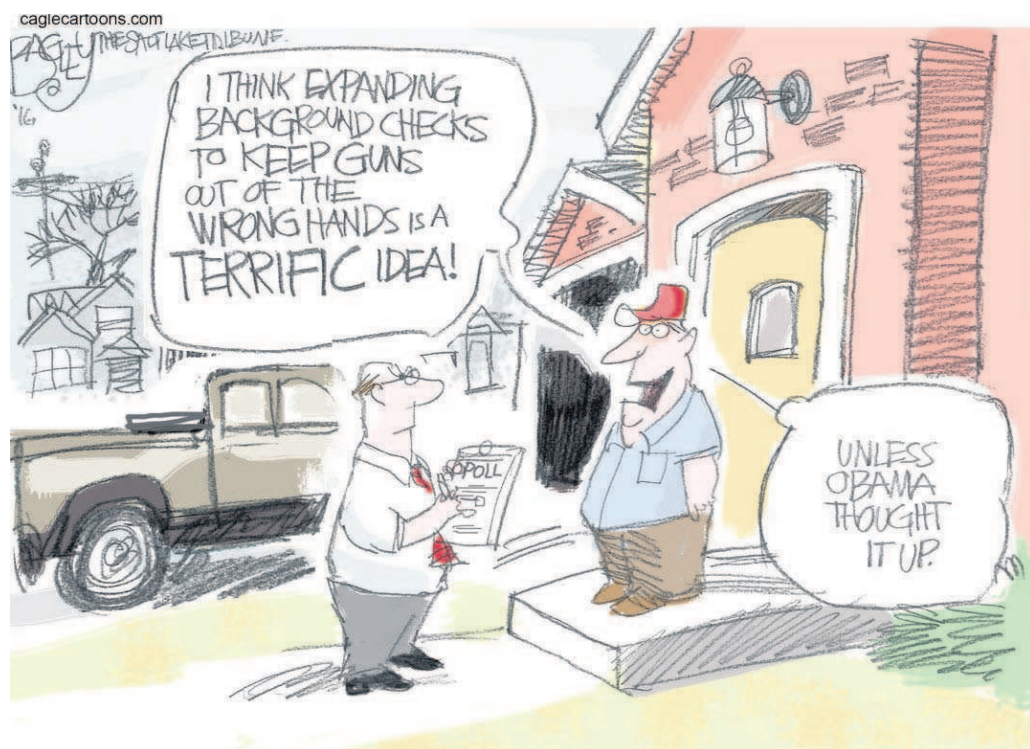
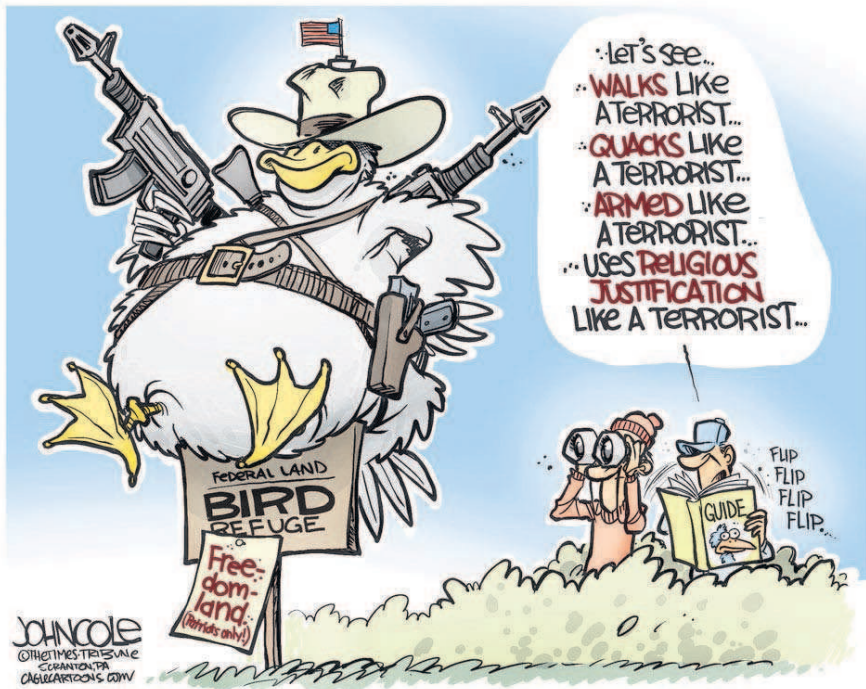
Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Mary and Jason Mortensen have welcomed 24 foster children into their Irrigon home since 2009.

Other specific needs include parents willing to take in siblings so they don't get split into different homes and teenagers. And a perfect life is not a requirement — being able to relate to the struggles, loneliness, abuse and other hardships can be valuable.

As with other jobs and titles, simply signing up to be a foster parent will not make you a hero. A story on Page 2A in today's paper shows that the system isn't perfect, and both foster care providers and DHS are vulnerable to bad actors. The Portland foster home Give Us This Day was shut down in September after accusations of mismanaging funds. The staff there was also made up entirely of people with criminal records.

The key is this: When a child enters your home, facing possibly the hardest time in his life, you will have the opportunity to become a hero, if only to one person at a time.

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

The Clintons' secret language

Remember the Gores? Al and Tipper? At the Democratic convention in 2000, they shared that hungry, happy kiss, and it was more than a meeting of lips. It was a window, or so we thought, into a partnership of enduring passion and inextinguishable tenderness.

They're separated now. Have been for more than five years.

And the Edwardses? John and Elizabeth? He resembled a Ken doll. She didn't take after Barbie. That endeared them to voters — endeared him to voters. Only later did we learn about his double life, the furious fights and the copious tears.

We know nothing of other people's marriages. Nothing at all.

So why do we pretend otherwise? Why do we make so many assumptions and judgments?

And why, every election cycle, do we treat candidates' spouses and unions as the keys to their characters?

We can't trust what's paraded in front of us any more than we can take what journalists and opponents dig up as the essential truth. A person's intimate life isn't readily fathomed, and on the inside tends not to look anything like it does on the outside.

Bill Clinton hit the campaign trail this week. That brought back memories, or rather Donald Trump hauled those memories to the surface, and we were reminded anew of all that Bill and Hillary have been through (and have put us through): the infidelities, the intern, the lies, the smears.

We were also reminded of Hillary's role in defending him. How did that square with her claim to be a champion of women? It's fair to ask.

But the fascination with the Clintons as a couple goes beyond that question, beyond those scandals, to the belief in many quarters that we can divine something essential about each of them by the fact that they teamed up and stayed together.

According to her fans, it's a measure of her understanding that people are broken, of her capacity for forgiveness, of her belief in commitments. According to her foes, it reveals a thirst for power that redeems any heartbreak and transcends all humiliation.

It could be proof of both — or neither. The answer isn't gettable. Talk with six different people who know the Clintons well and you hear six different appraisals of their bond, each presented with unalloyed confidence.

I've been told that they light up around each other as they light up around no one else.

I've been told that there's no extraordinary spark there, just a storehouse of shared memories, an accretion of

endurable disappointments, a daughter, a granddaughter and a friendship.

I've been told that they're really business associates, intricately involved in each other's lives because they're jointly invested in the perpetuation of their political relevance.

I've been told that they talk more than anyone would imagine. I've been told that they talk less.

In New Hampshire on Monday, when he described his first encounters with her some 45 years ago, he called her "the most amazing person" and said, "Everything she touched, she made better."

Maybe that was a deeply felt tribute. Maybe just a great line.

Heidi Cruz will also be in New Hampshire this week. She's a busy evangelist for Ted, half of a couple who present themselves as perfect. Perhaps.

Or perhaps, as the cringe-worthy outtakes from a Cruz campaign commercial suggest, they're just equally meticulous about the script on which they're collaborating, equally intent on a triumphant denouement.

I'm less and less interested in guessing, because I'm more and more aware of how compartmentalized people are, of how flawed and fruitless it is to extrapolate from one chamber of their lives to another. The stingiest spouse and parent can be the greatest boss, and vice versa. Someone who's selfless and principled in one context is sometimes the opposite in another, as if there's only so much goodness to go around.

And no chamber resists exploration and explanation like that of a marriage or comparable relationship.

We're certain that we have it figured out — who musters the most patience, who makes the greatest sacrifices, who's pure, who's sullied — until it falls apart. Then we gape at the pieces, because none are recognizable.

We're certain that social climbing or religious devotion is a couple's glue, when what matters more is the secret language of goofy endearments that they speak. Or the unremarkable daily rituals that they've grown to relish. Or the tempo of his speech. Or the timbre of her laugh.

And when we come to our sweeping conclusions, we're not perceiving but projecting, and we're using couples to cling to our idealism or validate our cynicism. It's a foolish game under any circumstances. It's a dangerous one en route to the election of a president.

Frank Bruni is the author of *The New York Times* bestseller about George W. Bush called "Ambling into History" and is a restaurant critic and columnist for *The New York Times*.



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

YOUR VIEWS

We, the people, already own federal lands

Amid the flurry and frustrations associated with the armed takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge this past week are new calls to "turn the land back to the people." While this makes for good bumper stickers and plays to political gains, I would challenge this thinking. We are the citizen owners of these lands already.

Very little of the federal lands managed by the BLM and U.S. Forest Service were ever in private ownership. Most of these lands were wrested from Native Americans in the mid 1850s, and what was not settled or claimed became part of the public domain. Over the decades, various laws and authorities were developed to help manage and regulate use of these lands for the greater good of a diverse public.

Politicians have a long history in the West of wanting to divest of these federal lands in response to needs of some of their constituents. This recently occurred with Representative Greg Walden's attempts in the Klamath Basin, Senator Ted Cruz's proposed amendments to the Sportsman's Protection Act, and other similar attempts in Utah and Idaho. While politically expedient, my question is, at what cost to us

as citizen owners?

Environmental protections on federally managed lands are far greater than on state or private lands. These lands are managed under a multiple use mandate, whereas states like Oregon and Washington have strong legal mandates to generate revenue as a prime land management driver. If these lands are not generating enough income, there are strong incentives to sell them off, as is currently being discussed with the Elliot State Forest.

There is no free lunch in giving these lands to states and others. It is very expensive to manage the many uses of these lands, fight fires, maintain roads, trails, facilities and boundaries, and deal with the inevitable lawsuits that result from competing interests. States are currently challenged to balance their budgets and meet PERS obligations without taking on an additional workforce. The temptation to sell would be strong, taking these lands from public use forever.

Visionaries such as Teddy Roosevelt established most of these public lands over a hundred years ago. These are national treasures that will only become more valuable to the public over time. Certainly it is inefficient and frustrating at times to try to please 320 million owners, but the public lands are a great equalizer — each one of us,

no matter our backgrounds, our ethnicity, or our financial or educational standings has equal opportunities to enjoy and access these lands. Attempts to divest our citizenry of these treasures are ill founded, self-serving, and short-sighted.

Jeff Blackwood
Pendleton

Wildlife refuges shouldn't be dismantled

Anyone interested in voting for Jeb Bush needs to read *The New Yorker* article ("Swamped," Jan. 4, 2016) by Dexter Filkins, author of "The Forever War," 2011. Filkins writes: "When it came to restoring the Everglades, Bush's efforts to carve out his own path pleased almost no one." I was surprised to learn he is no environmentalist and that he has a quick temper. The main opposition to the Everglades is from the

sugar cane farmers in Florida who have the money, influence over the state legislature, its lobbyists and politicians.

The Everglades Restoration Act article reminds me of the present difficulty in Harney County. Let us hope the federal government or Governor Kate Brown will not bend to the ranchers who want to take over the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge for grazing of their livestock. The refuge is the winter resting ground for many species of bird and animal wildlife. The federal government purchased the land in about 1900 from cattle barons Peter French and William Hanley, founding the refuge.

Other wilderness areas are also in danger of dismantling and development. We need to preserve them all for our children, grandchildren, and our own welfare.

Dr. Dorys C. Grover
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

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