

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# The gun debate minus rhetoric

Guns are part of life in Eastern Oregon, and that won't be changing anytime soon.

But President Barack Obama will try to change some narrow and considered regulations about guns in the time he has remaining in office. This executive action will certainly set off the paranoid, as well as the haters of the president, of which there are many. But perhaps we should take a deep breath before expelling vitriol, pointing our muzzles defensively at the door and denouncing the tyranny of our federal government.

Is it possible there is a way to respect our country's long and important tradition of firearms, yet make this a safer place to live?

We would argue: Yes.

The stark reality of America's tide of gun violence is easily understood from the vantage point of our northern neighbor, Canada, or our industrialized ally, Japan. To people living in those countries, America appears barbaric in its willingness to tolerate massacre after massacre, knowing that children are prey in many of them.

The president stated his case in a column published recently by *The New York Times*.

"Gun deaths and injuries constitute one of the greatest threats to public health and to the safety of the American people," wrote Obama. "Every year, more than 30,000 Americans have their lives cut short by guns. Suicides. Domestic violence. Gang shootouts. Accidents. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have lost brothers and sisters, or buried their own children. We're the only advanced nation on earth that sees this kind of mass violence with this frequency."

For decades, we could have no national conversation about guns. Our government was forbidden from studying their effects and the frequency at which they were involved in American deaths.

Any politician who dared to say anything about guns — especially moderate Republicans — were overthrown by a well-funded and cutthroat gun lobby.

Yet during that time, the Pew Research Center has been polling Americans, asking if they are in favor of protecting gun rights or controlling gun ownership. The result has been reliably against gun control (not only because "protecting" and "rights" are words with positive connotations).

Just in the last year, however, the tables have turned. Roughly 50 percent of responders said it is more

important to control gun ownership, compared to 47 percent who said it is more important to protect the right of Americans who own guns.

But drill down farther, and a large majority of Americans agree on some narrow, responsible gun legislation.

Should there be universal background checks before buying a gun?

Nearly 86 percent of Americans said yes.

Should you be banned from buying a gun if you're on the terrorist watch list?

More than 90 percent of Americans say yes.

Should people with a history of mental health problems, or domestic abuse be banned from owning a gun?

More than half of Americans say yes.

Should there be a waiting list to buy a gun?

Nearly 80 percent of Americans say yes.

Should the U.S. reinstate and strengthen the ban on assault rifles?

Roughly 60 percent said yes in 2013.

(These poll results are all according to Gallup.)

The key is to try think anew about this vexing problem. Guns are an inexorable part of American culture, and our ability to keep them is written into our Constitution. That can't be messed with. Gun owners of Eastern Oregon will be able to continue to own and enjoy firearms to hunt, to target shoot, to protect against crime. They can continue to showcase their family heirlooms.

But there are ways to be smarter and safer, and we'd be crazy not to at least start to study those possibilities, especially with the advent of new technologies that our founding fathers could never imagine. That starts with overturning the Dickey Amendment, which even Rep. Jay Dickey agrees should be nixed. That would restore funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who could then again study guns and their effects, and make recommendations for making them safer. That is what this country does with automobiles and children's toys and out nation's food supply, so why should guns be different?

It won't solve the problem. Terrorists will still terrorize, murderers will still murder, accidents will still happen. But it will likely save lives, perhaps some in Eastern Oregon. That makes executive action worth considering.

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

# Making some sense of a standoff

Baker City Herald

The illegal occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, which has put Harney County in the harsh spotlight of the international media, a position the county's residents neither wanted nor deserve, could end not just peacefully, but positively.

But this ideal outcome requires compromise. We'd like President Obama to announce publicly that he will consider granting clemency to Dwight Hammond and his son, Steven.

Attorneys for the two ranchers, who are in a California prison serving the remainder of their five-year sentences for their arson convictions, said they will ask the president to do so. It's a reasonable thing for Mr. Obama to do.

The Hammonds committed arson, and they deserved to be punished. Before they were resented in October, Dwight had served three months in prison, and Steven one year.

But the belief, which we share, that the five-year terms mandated by the 1996 federal law under which the Hammonds were convicted are excessive, is hardly limited to a radical fringe. U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan also deemed the punishment improper, which is why he sentenced the pair to shorter terms in 2012.

But freeing the Hammonds is only one part of the compromise.

We also hope Ammon Bundy and the others who barged into the Wildlife Refuge will leave. They say they're supporting the Hammonds, but their claim lost all validity the moment they made the Wildlife Refuge inaccessible to the public, whose tax dollars help to operate the place.

The occupiers say they'll leave only when the government agrees to give the Refuge's 187,000 acres to the county and, eventually, to private owners.

There is no justification for that request, legal or otherwise.

Moreover, this demand has nothing to do with the Hammonds' current plight. The Hammonds and other nearby ranchers have no more legitimate claim to the Refuge than anyone else.

Much of the land was never privately owned, and was set aside as a bird sanctuary in 1908. The government acquired the rest legally, by buying it from private owners. Bundy's bunch obviously has other grievances against the federal government. But depriving Harney County of one of its major tourist draws is a terrible way to bring attention to those complaints.

It's no surprise that Harney County Sheriff David Ward, who has urged the occupiers to go home, has drawn the loudest and most sustained applause.



## OTHER VIEWS

# In Iowa, is Trump stronger than people think?

DES MOINES — Who's leading the Republican presidential race here in Iowa? Most recent polls say Ted Cruz, including last month's edition of the influential Des Moines Register poll, which had Cruz ahead of second-place Donald Trump by 10 points.

Yet there is a nagging sense — at least nagging to rival campaigns — that Trump may be closer to Cruz than the Register suggested, and that the race in Iowa could be virtually even at this point.

"I look at Trump, and his ceiling is so much higher than everyone else's," says Craig Robinson, a former political director of the Iowa GOP who now runs the Iowa Republican blog. "His campaign has gone out and had people self-identify that they're interested in him, and they've captured that data."

Robinson's assessment runs counter to one of the dearest-held assumptions of the political punditocracy. Many commentators believe Trump has a high floor but a low ceiling — that is, his supporters really, really support him and are unlikely to go anywhere else, but he doesn't have much room to grow, because he already has the loyalty of Republicans who are inclined to like him.

To Robinson, that's not the way it looks in Iowa. Start with the numbers.

In 2000, George W. Bush won the caucuses with 35,231 votes. In 2008, Mike Huckabee won with 40,954. In 2012, Rick Santorum won with 29,839.

"Ted Cruz is swimming in a pond where the capacity is about 30,000 votes," says Robinson. "I look at Trump and think that Trump is at that 30,000 mark now, and has the ability to blow past it — if they do a good job of turning their people out."

Trump has assembled an Iowa team that puts a lot of stock in gathering the basic data needed to turn potential voters into actual voters. But Cruz, finishing up a six-day race across Iowa, has run a smart campaign, too. "He is the natural fit," says Robinson of Cruz, "appealing to the activists who are going to turn out anyway." Of course, that might be the key to victory if it turns out Trump can't blow by, or even hit, the 30,000 mark. (On the other hand, Robinson believes Cruz's opposition



BYRON YORK  
Comment

to the ethanol mandate might do him more damage here than some Beltway Republicans believe.)

In any event, even if Trump and Cruz do well, there will be room for someone else, too. In 2012, in addition to Santorum's 29,839, Mitt Romney received 29,805 votes and Ron Paul won 26,036. Marco Rubio, Chris Christie — someone can do pretty well here without winning.

As campaigning intensifies across the state, there's another feeling among politicians here: that Iowa, critically important to the nominating process, has gotten the short end of the stick from the Republican Party.

What sense does it make to have the Iowa caucuses lead off Republican presidential voting on Monday, Feb. 1, and not have a Republican debate here — not even one — until Jan. 28, the Thursday before the caucuses?

What sense does it make to have the Iowa caucuses lead off Republican presidential voting, and not have a Republican debate there until Jan. 28?

It doesn't make much sense at all, but that is what the Republican National Committee has wrought. There have been GOP debates in Ohio, California, Colorado, Wisconsin and Nevada, and there will be another next week in South Carolina, while Iowa, for all its importance, will be left out until about 90 hours before the voting begins.

The result is that an Iowa perspective on issues and events has been shut out of the debates, and it's too late to change that now. And of course, there haven't been that many debates in the first place — there will be a total of seven before the caucuses. In 2012, there were 13 debates — three in Iowa — before Iowans voted.

More debates in Iowa this time around would have meant the voters knew more before voting; candidates' strengths and weaknesses would have been more systematically exposed. But that's not what the RNC wanted.

With the caucuses less than three and a half weeks away, even candidates who haven't made a big play for Iowa, like Chris Christie, are stepping up their involvement here. But at this point, Iowa still looks like a two-man Cruz-Trump race. And Trump's position could be stronger than some observers believe.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Hermiston city council should stay out of senior center plans

It seems to me as though the good citizens of Hermiston still have not learned their lesson when it comes to dealing with the city.

Decisions made by the council members and some other city employees have for many years been made to benefit for their own personal agendas, for benefit to their own credentials, their own family members, or for their own personal financial gain.

We have seen this over the past several years with the swimming pool or even the event center — both of which you are all still paying for, and both of which were promised to provide much-needed revenue for the city: the pool that can only be used for three months of the year, or the event center (that was "much needed") that sits empty most of the time. Blame it on the economy, bad timing, or whatever.

But what about when we get a bunch of self-righteous, self-serving individuals who really don't care about the senior center unless there is something in it for them?

This grant money does not come from the city, it is not up to the city to make the decision. It's up to the senior center and its own officials to make the decision of where

and how they want to make their home.

The mayor and the city council should stick to real issues, like games and gang violence, or the homeless roaming the streets, or the other issues like where we need to paint "big red watermelons," or how they're going to screw us out of more taxes.

Gary D. Walls  
Ione

### Guantanamo prison remains a national disgrace

I don't understand who and what this country is afraid of. We want to have drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman brought to the United States so he can be prosecuted here. He is one of the most dangerous individuals walking the face of the Earth.

At the same time, we are totally unable to deal with the prisoners who have been languishing at Guantanamo Bay, some for over 14 years. If these people are dangerous, prosecute and sentence them. If they aren't dangerous (Why are we spending money to lock them up?), then let them go.

The prison we are running in Cuba is a national embarrassment and needs to be closed.

Patrick J. Delaney  
Hermiston

## LETTERS POLICY

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