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OUR VIEW

Tip of the hat; kick in the pants

A tip of the hat to Danny Bane, the new violence prevention coordinator for Umatilla County.

We tip our hat not so much for what Bane has accomplished so far — it's a newly created job and he's just getting started — but for the depth at which he is looking at the issue of violence. Many view violence as an effect of crooked and cruel thinking — a single or series of acts that can be cured, or at least vindicated, with punishment.



Bane and the Umatilla County Health Department are looking to the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES) done by the Centers for Disease Control, which points to links between childhood trauma and violent acts later in life. By addressing these roots and providing treatment before the trauma turns into abuse and other life-crippling crime, Bane is making a difference.

He understands the issue intimately. In a story written by Kathy Aney in Thursday's *East Oregonian* ("Cutting off violence at the root"), Bane talks about growing up in the shadow of tragedy, which led to problems in school, drug abuse and crime. For the last 16 years he has worked as a drug abuse counselor and started the Lost & Found program in Pendleton.

His job is funded by St. Anthony Hospital, Umatilla County Public Health and Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc., who all deserve a tip of the hat for their forward-looking approach.

A kick in the pants to the Umatilla City Council, the second public body in recent months to try to appoint a councilor in a secret and illegal fashion.

We have to assume there was no ill intent, just a misunderstanding of Oregon law, but as a general rule elected officials should be wary of making decisions on a secret ballot. They're elected so they can be held accountable to their decisions, no matter how minor.

On Tuesday each councilor jotted down the name of who they thought should be appointed to an open seat on the council, which five citizens had shown an interest in: Mark Ribich, Graig Gunsolley, Craig Simpson, Lyle Smith and Kristle Wyant. Mayor Dave Trott collected the ballots and announced that Ribich was the winner.

Doesn't sound like democracy, does it? Pilot Rock selected a councilor in a nearly identical fashion in November, and convened at the next meeting to take the vote in public. We hope to see Umatilla make the same correction at the earliest opportunity, although it would be even better if they followed the news and learned from nearby city governments facing many of the same issues they are.



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

Oregon graduation rate not worth crowing about yet

The (Bend) Bulletin

Don't break into your happy dance just yet. While Oregon's high school graduation rate did go up last year, it's still certain to be near the bottom of the national pack.

Moreover, if the current rate of increase is sustained, we won't reach the laudable 100 percent graduation rate until around 2029, well past the 2025 goal set by former Gov. John Kitzhaber.

Oregon, it seems, still hasn't found the keys to helping all students get through the most basic education they'll receive.

The Oregon graduation rate was up by slightly less than 2 percent. Even at that, fewer than 80 percent of youngsters in this state can expect to complete high school within four years of starting it, well below the national average. Thus, in 2014, the last year for which complete numbers are available, 72 percent of Oregon high schoolers graduated on time; nationally the number was 82 percent.

Meanwhile, in Central Oregon, the two smallest school districts, Culver and

Sisters, continued to boast the strongest graduation rates, and traditional high schools in most communities also posted above average rates.

It's no doubt impossible to blame a single thing, or even a handful of single things, for Oregon's inability to get kids through school on time. We know that up to a point, money plays a role, and that keeping students connected with teachers and with one another helps. And, though the evidence isn't crystal clear, we suspect that more time in school for all students — more days, more hours — can help.

Too, we know that kids who routinely miss school are less likely to graduate, and Oregon's children miss lots of school. In fact, youngsters who are not in class at least 90 percent of the time are considered chronically absent. Oregon has an epidemic of chronic absenteeism.

All that suggests that if Gov. Kate Brown's as-yet-unnamed education innovator does one thing it should be to concentrate on absenteeism. Help Oregon schools keep kids coming day after day, and all the state's goals should be easier to reach.

YOUR VIEWS

Plute recall drive irresponsible waste

Larry Anderson's letter is irresponsible. Accusing Pendleton city councilor Al Plute of wrongfully defending himself in a lawsuit, which both sides resolved between themselves, is no reason for a recall. Have you ever been sued, Mr. Anderson?

Are you dropping the allegation of Plute voting for the \$5 monthly charge for water service (as did several other council members) or are you deferring that to someone on your "committee" to bring up again in a subsequent letter? Mr. Plute not only saved the old

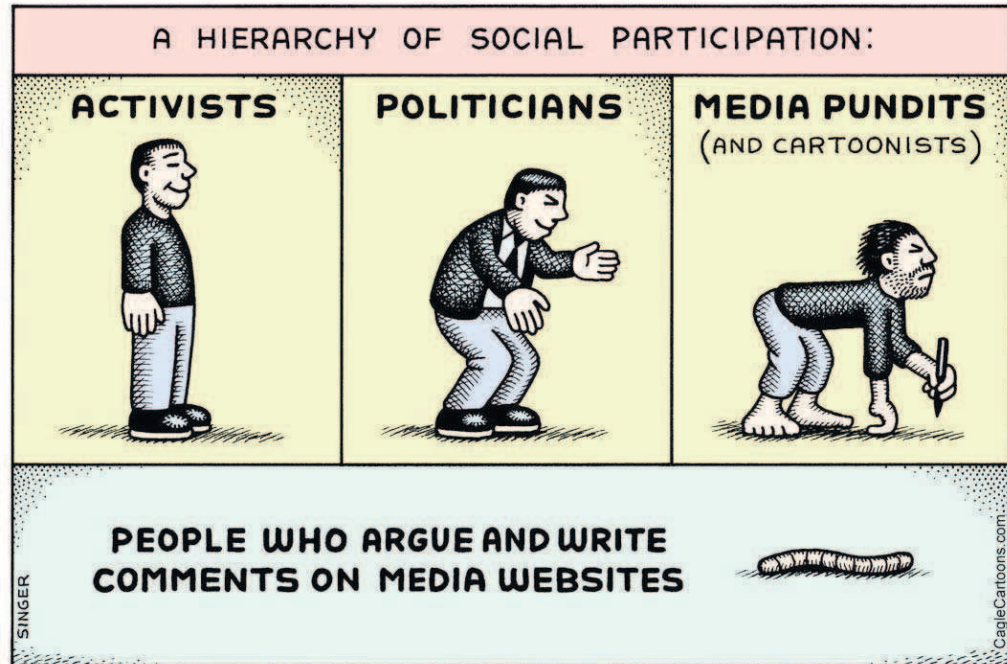
Temple Hotel from demolition, but fully restored the hotel, adding a number of living spaces to our downtown.

He also has been an enthusiastic cheerleader for the future of Pendleton, including writing several features in the *East Oregonian* about funding of various departments within city government.

It will be interesting to see the names of those signing the recall petition, if it is ever completed. I'd suggest you run for one of the seats coming open on the council, if you think you can do a better job!

Bill Bridges
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS



Social media: Destroyer or creator?

Over the last few years we've been treated to a number of "Facebook revolutions," from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street to the squares of Istanbul, Kiev and Hong Kong, all fueled by social media. But once the smoke cleared, most of these revolutions failed to build any sustainable new political order, in part because as so many voices got amplified, consensus-building became impossible.



THOMAS FRIEDMAN
Comment

Question: Does it turn out that social media is better at breaking things than at making things?

Last month an important voice answered this question with a big "yes." That voice was Wael Ghonim, the Egyptian Google employee whose anonymous Facebook page helped to launch the Tahrir Square revolution in early 2011 that toppled President Hosni Mubarak — but then failed to give birth to a true democratic alternative.

In December, Ghonim, who has since moved to Silicon Valley, posted a TED talk about what went wrong. It is worth watching and begins like this: "I once said, 'If you want to liberate a society, all you need is the Internet.' I was wrong. I said those words back in 2011, when a Facebook page I anonymously created helped spark the Egyptian revolution. The Arab Spring revealed social media's greatest potential, but it also exposed its greatest shortcomings. The same tool that united us to topple dictators eventually tore us apart."

In the early 2000s, Arabs were flocking to the Web, Ghonim explained: "Thirsty for knowledge, for opportunities, for connecting with the rest of the people around the globe, we escaped our frustrating political realities and lived a virtual, alternative life."

And then in June 2010, he noted, the "Internet changed my life forever. While browsing Facebook, I saw a photo ... of a tortured, dead body of a young Egyptian guy. His name was Khaled Said. Khaled was a 29-year-old Alexandrian who was killed by police. I saw myself in his picture. ... I anonymously created a Facebook page and called it 'We Are All Khaled Said.' In just three days, the page had over 100,000 people, fellow Egyptians who shared the same concern."

Soon Ghonim and his friends used Facebook to crowdsource ideas, and "the page became the most followed page in the Arab world. ... Social media was crucial for this campaign. It helped a decentralized movement arise. It made people realize that they were not alone. And it made it impossible for the regime to stop it." Ghonim was eventually tracked down in Cairo by Egyptian security services, beaten and then held incommunicado for 11 days. But three days after he was freed, the millions of protesters his Facebook posts helped to galvanize brought down Mubarak's regime.

Alas, the euphoria soon faded, said

Ghonim, because "we failed to build consensus, and the political struggle led to intense polarization." Social media, he noted, "only amplified" the polarization "by facilitating the spread of misinformation, rumors, echo chambers and hate speech. The environment was purely toxic. My online world became a battleground filled with trolls, lies, hate speech."

Supporters of the army and the Islamists used social media to smear each other, while the democratic center, which Ghonim and so many others occupied, was marginalized. Their revolution was stolen by the Muslim Brotherhood and, when it failed, by the army, which then arrested many of the secular youths who first powered the revolution. The army has its own Facebook page to defend itself.

"It was a moment of defeat," said Ghonim. "I stayed silent for more than two years, and I used the time to reflect on everything that happened."

Here is what he concluded about social media today: "First, we don't know how to deal with rumors. Rumors that confirm people's biases are now believed and spread among millions of people." Second, "We tend to only communicate with people that we agree with, and thanks to social media, we can mute, unfollow and block everybody else. Third, online discussions quickly descend into angry mobs. ... It's as if we forget that the people behind screens are actually real people and not just avatars."

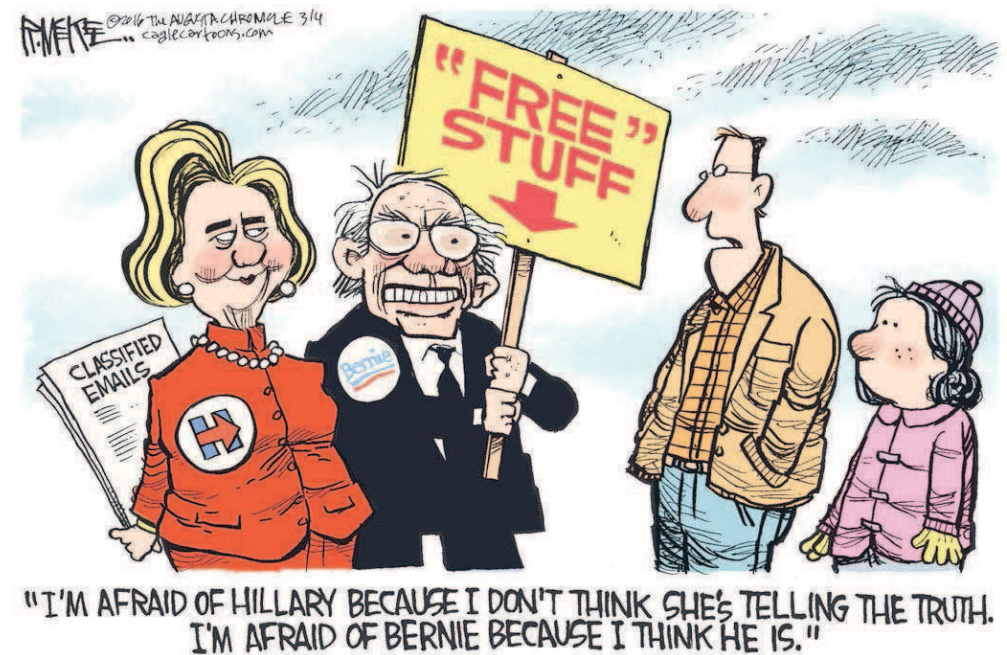
"And fourth, it became really hard to change our opinions. Because of the speed and brevity of social media, we are forced to jump to conclusions and write sharp opinions in 140 characters about complex world affairs. And once we do that, it lives forever on the Internet."

Fifth, and most crucial, he said, "today, our social media experiences are designed in a way that favors broadcasting over engagements, posts over discussions, shallow comments over deep conversations. ... It's as if we agreed that we are here to talk at each other instead of talking with each other."

Ghonim has not given up. He and a few friends recently started a website, Parlio.com, to host intelligent, civil conversations about controversial and often heated issues, with the aim of narrowing gaps, not widening them. (I participated in a debate on Parlio and found it engaging and substantive.)

"Five years ago," concluded Ghonim, "I said, 'If you want to liberate society, all you need is the Internet.' Today I believe if we want to liberate society, we first need to liberate the Internet."

Thomas 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.



LETTERS POLICY

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