

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

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OUR VIEW

Congress punishes the Postal Service

If you walk into the lobby of any of our post offices at certain times, you will see a cross section of the community doing business. They are picking up their mail and sending envelopes and parcels.

Despite the ascension of Federal Express and UPS and the proliferation of social media, the U.S. Postal Service remains an essential cog in American commerce and culture.

As *The Register-Guard* of Eugene wrote Monday, "... (T)he Postal Service remains the only truly universal delivery system in the country. For 49 cents (or 47 cents, as of today), it will deliver a letter from any address to any address, whether it's in Marcola or Manhattan. The availability of such a service binds the nation, lubricates the channels of communication and creates a democratic equality among urban and rural areas."

The object of the RG's scorn was the rate cut inflicted on the Postal Service. After years of gaining ground, the rate cut will throw the USPS back into deficit.

It is no way to run a business. In fact, it is a stupid way to run a business. And Congress professes that the Postal Service should be run as a business.

There was a time when members of Congress ensured that post offices took care of their constituents. But these days when — as former Congressman Brian Baird famously pointed out — Afghanistan matters more than a schoolhouse in Chinook, Washington, the needs of common Americans rank low. We also see it in the House and Senate's inability to craft an infrastructure package — aimed at the deterioration of highways, roads and bridges.

Congress has lost its way.

The U.S. Postal Service remains an essential cog in American commerce and culture.

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

End the ban on bikes in wilderness areas

The (Bend) Bulletin

Bring up the possibility of bicycles in wilderness areas and some people react as though vampires are coming to suck the wilderness dry.

But bicycles don't belong lumped into the same category as motorcycles and ATVs. Horses can do more damage to trails than bikes or hikers. And horses are allowed in wilderness areas.

We don't want bikes everywhere in wilderness. There should be, though, an end to the ban that says they can go nowhere. They should be allowed in some areas.

That's the idea behind a proposal from a group called the Sustainable Trails Coalition. It may become a bill in Congress. The idea deserves consideration and debate.

Bicycles weren't banned by name from wilderness areas in the legislation that created the areas. But they were banned in 1984 because they are a form of "mechanical transport."

Many conservationists see bikes in wilderness as a nonstarter. They argue bikes are unnatural and shatter the feel

they want in wilderness.

You can't dispute that. Allowing bicycles on some trails in wilderness areas would change the character of the experience. Bikes coming down the trail can be like being charged by Lycra-clad, neon cavalry.

Bicycles don't belong lumped into the same category as motorcycles and ATVs.

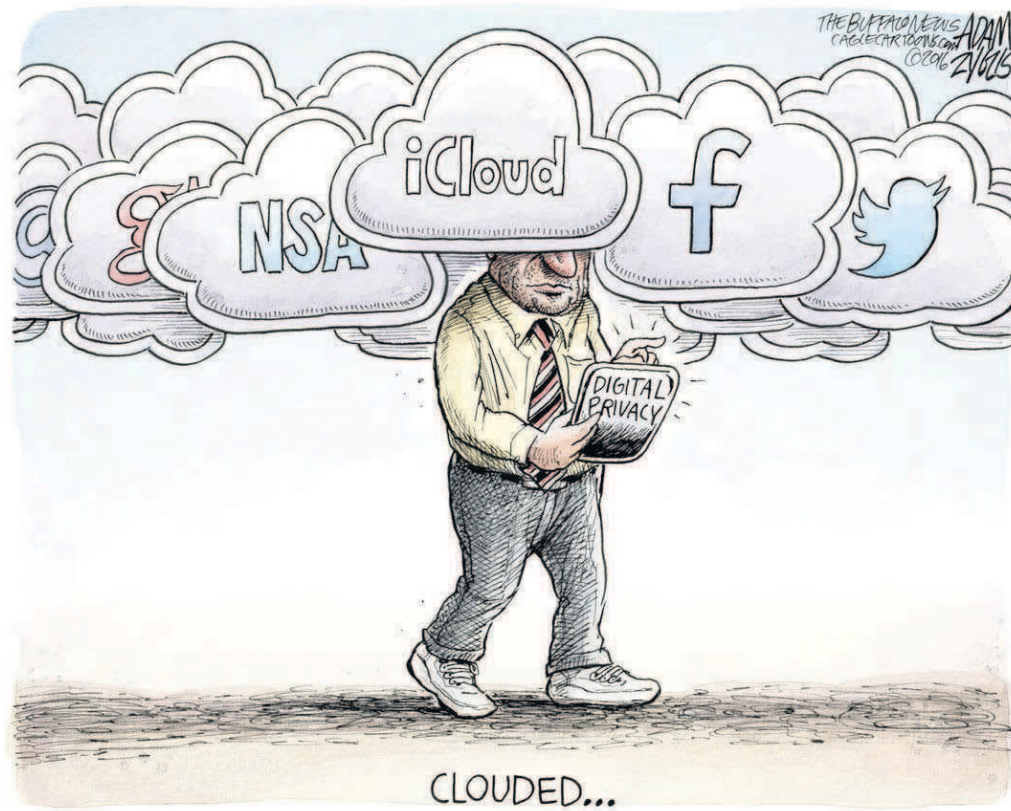
Mountain bikers would help their own case if the first thing that came to everyone's mind when seeing them was: Oh, it's another group of those polite people.

There's a slugfest over public lands: Hikers versus bikers versus ATVs versus equestrians versus skiers versus

snowmobilers versus mining versus grazing versus whoever else we have left out. Don't expect detente. Expect headaches.

They all must learn better to share and how to play nice together. You don't start by banning bikes from all wilderness areas. You start by letting bikes in on some of the trails. If trails are really so delicate, bikes don't belong, but neither do horses or hikers.

So end the bike ban in wilderness areas. It will create more support for wilderness areas if bicyclists know that they aren't completely locked out.



OTHER VIEWS

How to fix politics

In the middle of this depressing presidential campaign I sometimes wonder, How could we make our politics better?

It's possible to imagine an elite solution. The next president could get together with the leaders of both parties in Congress and say: "We're going to change the way we do business in Washington. We're going to deliberate and negotiate. We'll disagree and wrangle, but we will not treat this as good-versus-evil blood sport." That kind of leadership might trickle down.

But it's increasingly clear that the roots of political dysfunction lie deep in society. If there's truly going to be improvement, there has to be improvement in the social context politics is embedded in.

In healthy societies, people live their lives within a galaxy of warm places. They are members of a family, neighborhood, school, civic organization, hobby group, company, faith, regional culture, nation, continent and world.

Each layer of life is nestled in the others to form a varied but coherent whole. But starting just after World War II, America's community/membership mindset gave way to an individualistic/autonomy mindset. The idea was that individuals should be liberated to live as they chose, so long as they didn't interfere with the rights of others.

By 1981, the pollster Daniel Yankelovich noticed the effects: "Throughout most of this century Americans believed that self-denial made sense, sacrificing made sense, obeying the rules made sense, subordinating oneself to the institution made sense. But now doubts have set in, and Americans now believe that the old giving/getting compact needlessly restricts the individual while advancing the power of large institutions ... who use the power to enhance their own interests at the expense of the public."

The individualist turn had great effects but also accumulating downsides. By 2005, 47 percent of Americans reported that they knew none or just a few of their neighbors by name. There's been a sharp rise in the number of people who report that they have no close friends to confide in.

Civic life has suffered. As Marc J. Dunkelman writes in his compelling book "The Vanishing Neighbor," people are good at tending their inner-ring relationships — their family and friends. They're pretty good at tending to outer-ring relationships — their hundreds of Facebook acquaintances, their fellow progressives, or their TED and Harley fans.

But Americans spend less time with middle-ring township relationships — the PTA, the neighborhood watch.

Middle-ring relationships, Dunkelman

argues, help people become skilled at deliberation. The guy sitting next to you at the volunteer fire company may have political opinions you find abhorrent, but you still have to get stuff done with him, week after week.

Middle-ring relationships also diversify the sources of identity. You might be an O'Rourke, an Irish Catholic and a professor, but you are also a citizen, importantly, of the Montrose neighborhood in Houston.

With middle-ring memberships deteriorating, Americans have become worse at public deliberation. People find it easier to ignore inconvenient viewpoints and facts. Partisanship becomes a preconceived lens through which people see the world.

They report being optimistic or pessimistic depending on whether their team is in power. They become unrealistic. Trump voters don't seem to realize how unelectable their man is because they hang out with people like themselves.

We're good at bonding with people like ourselves but worse at bridging

with people unlike ourselves. (Have you noticed that most people who call themselves "connectors" are actually excluders because they create groups restricted to people with similar status levels?)

With fewer sources of ethnic and local identity, people ask politics to fill the void. Being a Democrat or a Republican becomes their ethnicity. People put politics at the center of their psychological, emotional and even spiritual life.

This is asking too much of politics. Once politics becomes your ethnic and moral identity, it becomes impossible to compromise, because compromise becomes dishonor. If you put politics at the center of identity, you end up asking the state to eclipse every social authority but itself. Presidential campaigns become these gargantuan two-year national rituals that swallow everything else in national life.

If we're going to salvage our politics, we probably have to shrink politics, and nurture the thick local membership web that politics rests within. We probably have to scale back the culture of autonomy that was appropriate for the 1960s but that has since gone too far.

If we make this cultural shift, we may even end up happier. For there is a paradox to longing. If each of us fulfill all of our discrete individual desires, we end up with a society that is not what we want at all.

The highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-actualization, is actually connected to the lowest level, group survival. People experience their highest joy in helping their neighbors make it through the day.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in 2003.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

With fewer sources of ethnic and local identity, people ask politics to fill the void.

YOUR VIEWS

Minimum wage hike good for Oregonians

Concerning the current debate centered on the new minimum wage law, let me begin by stating that I am an employment case manager serving both businesses and job seekers at the state employment center here in Pendleton.

I have been professionally active in social services for some time and I can assure you that a single person, even without the additional challenge of raising a family, attempting to get by on a full-time job paying even \$10 an hour (currently 75 cents more than the state minimum wage of \$9.25 an hour) has a difficult time getting by.

This is the situation with many of my clients: They are forced to take multiple jobs to meet survival expenses. At current costs of even modest living (which are always increasing due to inflation), it is impossible to get by with a full-time job on the current minimum wage if your livelihood depends wholly on you. The problem is

complex and requires a wide range of strategies, but punishing workers by guaranteeing they remain poor, impoverished and struggling is immoral. Keeping wages down while costs of living continue to spiral upward over time is not the answer.

Everyone that I know who maintains the minimum wage is high enough and cannot afford to get higher has a job that pays much more than that. If you're prone to complain about raising the minimum wage, before you do, take an honest inventory and ask yourself if you could get by in your current lifestyle costs on even \$11.50 an hour, let alone \$9.25. Otherwise, you come off sounding like, "I've got mine and the rest can go to hell."

Many say the new minimum wage law is "unrealistic." What I call unrealistic is any billionaire presidential candidate who claims he can relate to the economic challenges of the lives of those consigned to make minimum wage. Rent, groceries and utilities (not to even mention day care, fuel and car maintenance and

medical expenses — forget any entertainment and new clothes) eat up even \$12 an hour real fast.

Matt Henry Pendleton

Lindsay the choice for Morrow County

We are writing in support of Melissa Lindsay for Morrow County Judge. We feel that Melissa is a highly qualified candidate for this leadership position in county government.

Melissa has had a very successful business career as head of the mortgage loan department for the Bank of Eastern Oregon. In addition, she has served on several community boards and committees that have benefited from her work in the schools, health care and various other groups. She has always been willing to donate her time and energy where needed.

Melissa is a highly intelligent,

motivated individual who has proven skills working with the public and her co-workers.

Please join us in voting for Melissa Lindsay for Morrow County Judge.

Larry and Betty Mills Heppner

Support Milton-Freewater school bond

As a Walla Walla Valley resident and a Milton-Freewater educator, I am writing to express my support for ballot measure 30-111.

It has been over three decades since a capital bond measure passed and almost a century since a new school has been built in Milton-Freewater. It's time to commence a new era.

Passage of 30-111 will mean a \$31 million jolt for the Milton-Freewater community and its schools. Almost half of that amount, \$15 million, would

come from a Wayne and Gladys Valley Foundation grant. Another \$12 million would come from the hard-working taxpayers of Milton-Freewater, and the final \$4 million would be provided by matching funds from the state of Oregon.

If 30-111 passes, a new kindergarten-through-third-grade facility that would house over 600 of our youngest learners and a new sports complex at the current Grove Elementary location would be built. Infrastructure needs, such as the replacement of deteriorating roofs and outdated HVAC systems, would be addressed at the Ferndale Elementary, Central Middle School, and McLoughlin High School locations. And district-wide technology capacity would increase.

On May 17, say yes to the Milton-Freewater community, its schools, and its students. Vote yes on 30-111.

Roy Elia Walla Walla

LETTERS POLICY

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