

Quick takes

Schnitzer scoops up Pendleton property

This has been a vision of mine for years! So happy to see someone blessed with the means to fulfill what our community really needs.

— Robbin Booth Coleman

I used to walk in the bank as a kid and see my grandad riding his horse on a big mural. It made me sad to see nothing there for so long.

— Mark Temple

1.2 million vote in primary

That's great, but with three million eligible voters, that's not good enough. It should be at least twice that.

— Ann Snyder

Would it be higher or lower if Oregon had an open primary?

— Richard Ryan III

EOCI work ban lifted

There is a great way to clean up and maintain our parks and cemeteries, not to mention helping out the elderly with yard work, and cleaning up the river walk.

— LoriAnne Dunagan

How about a pothole repair crew?

— Karen Marlene Fulbright

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

Still difficult, dangerous to be gay in the West

By NATHAN C. MARTIN
High Country News

It was a Saturday night in Rock Springs, Wyoming, and 30 or 40 of us were partying in a derelict trailer house on a dead-end road. Suddenly, a queer couple we knew showed up and said a bunch of rednecks had been chasing them down Elk Street.

Sure enough, four pickup trucks pulled up moments later and a bunch of burly guys piled out. The encounter escalated into a full-blown brawl — teenagers rolling around in the muddy snow beating on each other. There were more of us than there were of them, so we were able to whoop them soundly and run them off. Then we celebrated what felt like a righteous victory deep into the night.

This was in 2001, just a few years after Matthew Shepard's murder had made gruesomely public the anti-gay violence that was taking place throughout Wyoming. Shortly after, I left the state for about 14 years. During that time, it appeared to me that gay rights had made great strides — not least with the incremental support to legalize gay marriage nationwide.

Living in places as different from each other as Buenos Aires, Chicago and New Orleans, I witnessed homophobia now and then, but not nearly as often as I saw jubilant demonstrations of gay pride or, more frequently, plain old gay normalcy. Among the myriad people who are oppressed in this world, homosexuals seemed to be in pretty good shape, particularly white "cisgendered" men.

Then I moved back to Wyoming. Trevor O'Brien couldn't escape to a friendly trailer house when five young men attacked him one night in December 2015

in Gillette, Wyoming. His mother told the *Casper Star-Tribune* that O'Brien had responded to the men's comments about his being gay with a smart remark, so they threw him on the ground and stomped on his groin so hard he had trouble urinating for three days. O'Brien didn't report the incident, nor did he report the homophobic slurs someone repeatedly carved into his car.

In fact, few people beyond his closest friends and family would have known about any of this had O'Brien not killed himself in a park this March 8. He was 20 years old.

It is true that many factors likely contributed to O'Brien's decision to commit suicide. Likewise, the story of Matthew Shepard's murder is more complex than it might seem on the surface. Many people in Wyoming, for instance, have gone to great lengths to emphasize that both Shepard and his killers may have been high the night he was tied to a fence and pistol-whipped. But rather than adding nuance to the conversation — perhaps by acknowledging that anti-gay violence is sometimes drug-related, too — this emphasis is meant to silence people who might suggest Wyoming has a problem.

In Laramie, where Shepard was assaulted and where I now live, folks don't like to talk about him much. A student organizer here told me that even the gay community sometimes shies away from discussing Shepard's murder because of all the negativity and distortion people have heaped onto it.

But whenever horrifying instances of homophobia come to light, such as the attack on O'Brien — or an assault discussed on public radio last year, in which a Casper, Wyoming, man had his teeth kicked in for cross-dressing — any Wyoming citizen whose eyes aren't clouded by delusion or

prejudice should be able to put the pieces together. Anti-gay violence in Wyoming is real, and it deserves a real response.

Shepard's memory was invoked in 2009 when the U.S. Congress passed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. This law, co-named for a black man murdered by white supremacists in Texas, strengthened federal law enforcement's ability to investigate and prosecute hate crimes, including those committed against people on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Forty-five states have passed similar laws that empower state-level authorities. Wyoming is not one of them. It is time we changed that.

Few of us believe that harsher criminal punishments can cure social ills. Hate-crime bills often include tougher sentencing provisions, but just as meaningful are the signals that enacting such laws send. Passing a hate crime bill in Wyoming would admit to the state's citizens that hate crimes persist. It would communicate that acknowledgement and honest discussion of the problem are necessary if we want to stop the violence. A bill would also tell those at risk that they are not alone in facing anti-gay violence or abuse. It would let them know that we, as a state, have their backs.

So far, the Legislature's consistent refusal to pass such a bill has sent a different message to anyone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual in Wyoming: This is the Wild West. Better run to your friends and hope they can protect you, because the rest of us don't really give a damn.

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Australia or anywhere

SYDNEY — I boarded a flight at Kennedy Airport in New York. There were HSBC ads in the jet bridge. I flew for 24 hours to the bottom of the world. There were HSBC ads in the jet bridge.

I had my obligatory duty-free experience in Sydney, which is to say that I was channeled through a duty-free store rather than opting to enter it, and so was exposed to all the familiar brands I had seen a day earlier under similar duress.

I left a country, the United States, in the midst of an election campaign. I arrived in a country, Australia, in the midst of an election campaign. The electoral battle here pits the conservative prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, from the Liberal party, against Bill Shorten from the left-of-center Labor party. But the candidate people talk about is Donald Trump.

America's election is the world's election, but only Americans get to vote in it.

I left an America raging about refugees and immigration and came to find the Australian immigration minister, Peter Dutton, fuming about "illiterate and innumerate" refugees intent on taking "Australian jobs."

I had a cappuccino before I left. There was a cute heart shape traced in the foam. Next to the Sydney Opera House, familiar from photographs, I had a cappuccino. There was a cute heart shape traced in the foam.

From my window in Brooklyn Heights I watch joggers at water's edge, some with dogs or infants in strollers. Old industrial areas, piers and warehouses that have no use in the knowledge economy have been transformed into parks and lofts for the gentrified. From my Sydney hotel window I gaze at an urban landscape similarly transformed. I watch joggers at water's edge. They wear the same gear. They use the same devices. They are into wellness in the same way.

I lose myself in the silvery play of moonlight on water. Where on earth am I? I have traveled a long way through time zones over a vast ocean to find myself in the same place.

My Twitter feed looks the same. My Facebook friends have not changed. My little universe with all its little excitements and aggravations is still at my fingertips. My bills are maddeningly accessible. Through an immense displacement nothing has been left behind. Even in another hemisphere I contemplate my life from the same angle. People argue about climate change and same-sex marriage and jobs and immigration, as if the world is now a place



ROGER COHEN
Comment

where everyone discusses the same thing.

Can it be then that Sydneysiders are merely New York's Westsiders with a smile and an economy that has not seen a recession in more than 20 years?

In his great poem "The City," C.P. Cavafy wrote: "As you've wasted your life here, in this small corner, you've destroyed it everywhere else in the world." We never escape our own skins, nor our lives lived to this point, however far we go in search of escape. But today's trap, fashioned through technology, is of a different nature. The homogenization of experience is also an insidious invitation to conform.

Experience, like journalism, withers without immersion in place. At some level, the truly lived moment involves the ability to get lost — lost in a conversation, or in the back alleys of Naples, or in silence, or in the scents and inflections of a new city. There is no greater thrill than being lost in this way because self is left behind, a form of liberation.

Yet a world is taking form that wants you never to be lost, never to feel displaced, never to be unanchored, never to be unable to photograph yourself, never to stand in awe before mystery, never to exit your safety zone (or only in managed fashion), never to leave your life behind: a world where you travel for 24 hours to your point of departure.

How reassuring! How desperate! There may be no choice but to head for the Outback, the vast and empty interior of this continent-sized land where everyone hugs the coast, or perhaps eat Vegemite, apparently a singular experience. I will keep you posted, dear reader, should I survive either.

At least Australians speak a different language. A colleague tells me to "sing out" if I need something. A problem is met with the reassuring "She'll be right." She? Who? I am asked if "there's anything else I can get you, AT ALL." I eat brekkie. Those joggers, apparently, are on a footpath, not a sidewalk, and if I need gas when I head for the Outback I'll find it at the "servo." Every sentence seems to end with a kind of upward-rising lilt that turns it into a half-question to which I have no answer.

So I am somewhere else after all. Surely I am. I wake at night, sleep by day, and find myself altogether lost in translation.

Roger Cohen joined *The New York Times* in 1990. He was a foreign correspondent for more than a decade before becoming acting foreign editor on Sept. 11, 2001.

California considers drug sentencing reform

San Francisco Chronicle

Once upon a time, California lawmakers imagined that tougher penalties and longer jail sentences for drug offenders would stem the drug trade.

This approach led to our statewide three-year sentencing enhancement for drug offenders who have prior convictions for possession with the intent to sell, drug sales, or similar offenses.

Today, California has met the reality that this was a failed approach. The sentencing enhancements didn't stop the flow of drugs into any of our communities, especially the most vulnerable ones. What they did achieve, unfortunately, was great financial expense to the taxpayer, and great social expense to lower-income communities.

California officials have already begun the long journey of fixing our criminal justice decisions with realignment, which reduced state prison overcrowding by transferring low-level offenders to county supervision.

Now the Legislature has the opportunity to begin the long journey of sentencing reform with SB966, by state Sen. Holly Mitchell, D-Los Angeles.

SB966 would repeal the three-year term enhancement for prior drug convictions. Offenders would still be subject to base sentences. Under current law, that's between two and four years in jail for the possession of drugs for sale.

SB966 won't be a panacea for California's drug problems. But then again, neither were sentencing enhancements.

Drugs remain widely available, and in many instances they're stronger than when sentencing enhancements were first passed.

What SB966 will do is free up some of the considerable money that the state of California currently spends on incarceration for proven options that do help — things like drug treatment, rehabilitation and job-training programs. The state is already struggling to increase money and staffing for rehabilitation programs in light of realignment and Proposition 47, which reduced criminal penalties for certain offenses.

Increased services could help the many drug-sales offenders who struggle with their own addictions. In the long run, it's a simple and humane way to save the state money.

But some state legislators are still hesitant about ending a failed policy.

It's disappointing to see that SB966 failed to pass the state Senate in late April, defeated on a 16-18 vote, with six abstentions. Most of the "no" votes belonged to Republicans, but three came from Democrats — including Sen. Steve Glazer, D-Orinda.

They need to have a change of heart, and fortunately they'll have the opportunity to do so. Mitchell has until the end of May to bring the bill back for reconsideration.

It's way past time for California to try a new approach to drug offenses. Sentencing reform will save us money and allow money that was previously spent on incarceration to go to more effective forms of drug prevention.

SB966 is a good place to start.

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