

# Democrats win the summer

**P**HILADELPHIA — Donald Trump has found an ingenious way to save the Democratic Party. Basically, he's abandoned the great patriotic themes that used to fire up the GOP and he's allowed the Democrats to seize that ground. If you visited the two conventions this year you would have come away thinking that the Democrats are the more patriotic of the two parties — and the more culturally conservative.

Trump has abandoned the Judeo-Christian aspirations that have always represented America's highest moral ideals: toward love, charity, humility, goodness, faith, temperance and gentleness.

He left the ground open for Joe Biden to remind us that decent people don't enjoy firing other human beings.

Trump has abandoned the basic modesty code that has always ennobled the American middle class: Don't brag, don't let your life be defined by gilded luxuries.

He left the ground open for the Democrats to seize middle-class values with one quick passage in a Tim Kaine video — about a guy who goes to the same church where he was married, who taught carpentry as a Christian missionary in Honduras, who has lived in the same house for the last 24 years.

Trump has also abandoned the American ideal of popular self-rule.

He left the ground open for Barack Obama to remind us that our founders wanted



DAVID BROOKS  
Comment



active engaged citizens, not a government run by a solipsistic and self-appointed savior who wants everything his way.

Trump has abandoned the deep and pervasive optimism that has always energized the American nation.

He left the ground open for Michelle Obama to embrace the underlying chorus of hope that runs through the American story: that our national history is an arc toward justice; that evil rises for a day but contains the seeds of its own destruction; that beneath the vicissitudes that darken our days, we live in an orderly cosmos governed by love.

For decades the Republican Party has embraced America's open, future-oriented nationalism.

But when you nominate a Silvio Berlusconi you give up a piece of that. When you nominate a blood-and-soil nationalist you're no longer speaking in the voice of Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and every Republican nominee from Reagan to McCain to Romney.

Democrats have often been ambivalent about that ardent nationalistic voice, but this week they were happy to accept Trump's unintentional gift. There were an unusually high number of great speeches at the Democratic convention this year: the Obamas, Biden, Booker, Clinton, the Mothers of the Movement and so on.

These speakers found their

eloquence in staving off this demagogue. They effectively separated Trump from America. They separated him from conservatism. They made full use of the deep nationalist chords that touch American hearts.

Trump has allowed the Democrats to mask their deep problems. A Democratic administration has presided over a time of growing world chaos, growing violence and growing anger. But the Democrats seem positively organized and orderly compared to Candidate Chaos on the other side.

The Sanders people have 90 percent of the Democratic Party's passion and 95 percent of the ideas. Most Sanders people are kind- and open-hearted, but there is a core that is corrupted by moral preening, an uncompromising absolutism and a paranoid unwillingness to play by the rules of civic life.

But the extremist fringe that threatens to take over the Democratic Party seems less menacing than the lunatic fringe that has already taken over the Republican one.

This week I left the arena here each night burning with indignation at Mike Pence. I almost don't blame Trump. He is a morally untethered, spiritually

vacuous man who appears haunted by multiple personality disorders. It is the "sane" and "reasonable" Republicans who deserve the shame — the ones who stood silently by, or worse, while Donald Trump gave away their party's sacred inheritance.

The Democrats had by far the better of the conventions. But the final and shocking possibility is this: In immediate political terms it may not make a difference.

The Democratic speakers hit doubles, triples and home runs. But the normal rules may no longer apply. The Democrats may have just dominated a game we are no longer playing.

Both conventions featured one grieving parent after another. The fear of violent death is on everybody's mind — from ISIS, cops, lone sociopaths. The essential contract of society — that if you behave responsibly things will work out — has been severed for many people.

It could be that in this moment of fear, cynicism, anxiety and extreme pessimism, many voters may have decided that civility is a surrender to a rigged system, that optimism is the opiate of the idiots and that humility and gentleness are simply surrendering to the butchers of ISIS. If that's the case then the throes of a completely new birth are upon us and Trump is a man from the future.

If that's true it's not just politics that has changed, but the country.

David Brooks's column on the Op-Ed page of *The New York Times* started in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*, a contributing editor at *Newsweek* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, and he is currently a commentator on "The Newshour with Jim Lehrer."

## Quick takes

### Farmworker housing nixed

I'm really glad this article was written. I had no idea that the federal gov. required farmers to pay more than minimum wages and give free housing to people from other countries where the American dollar is 1,000 times their currency value. Puts a lot more things into perspective!

Connie Hansen

I'm sure all the naysayers are going to run out and apply for work there now.

Kate Chastain

### Trespassing near butte

I used to cut through the south east side of the butte everyday on my way to school and walked my dog on the trail that is on his property. In 18 years I never realized it was private property.

Jessica Brown

I can see the property owners point of view. Two reasons I would not want people walking on my property is: 1) People trash and disrespect others' property. 2) If someone were to get hurt on the property the land owner is responsible. Sometimes as property owners we have to be mean and protect ourselves.

Jessica Oster

### American Pickers are coming

They need to go up past Heppner and take a good long look at Hardman.

OJ Rumilus

They need to hit up old rural farms.. trouble is with their popularity it will of driven prices up.

Teresa Thorpe Long

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.

## The outdoors can be a life saver

By MELISSA HART  
*Writers on the Range*

**B**efore you can adopt a child from Oregon's Department of Human Services, social workers ask you to spend several half-days together. The first time my husband and I took the toddler we hoped would be ours out alone, her foster mother gave me a green plastic rectangle. "State parks special access pass," she said. "Waives the parking fee."

She directed us to a nearby forest with sunny patches of grass ideal for a family picnic. We spread out our plaid blanket with sandwiches and bananas. My husband and I clasped hands as our child-to-be — this curly-haired baby born of addiction and loss — stepped onto the grass. Barefoot, blades prickling her tender soles, she burst into tears. This was a problem we had to solve.

Almost 2,000 foster children wait for permanent families in Oregon, and over 100,000 do nationwide. They've been relinquished by birth parents suffering from addiction, poverty and domestic violence. Most go to foster parents who are dedicated to giving kids a decent start. A stipend provides money for food, clothing, a few toys and medical care. The cost of pediatricians and therapists leaves scant extra for trips to waterfalls, sand dunes and forests.

Enter Oregon's special access pass. Like similar programs in some other states,

it offers foster and adoptive parents free day-use parking and overnight camping at state parks. Our own green rectangle arrived in the mail shortly after our new daughter's unhappy encounter with grass. My husband and I lived to spend our free time outside: If our daughter couldn't tolerate nature, how would we integrate her into our world?

Overwhelmed by diapers and therapy appointments and our toddler's mirthless silence, we told ourselves, "We've got to get outside." We showed our daughter how to pick blackberries along the meandering trails of Elijah Bristow State Park beside the Willamette River. We pointed out herons and deer. She stared grimly, face smeared berry-red.

We drove up to Silver Falls State Park near Portland and strapped her into a backpack for a hike to the cave behind South Falls. The roar of water combined with mist on her face undid her. She wailed until we returned to the car. For a while, the special access pass lay abandoned. We restricted our travels to the backyard until she began, gradually, to trust us and the wider world.

Years later, a learning

disability became so significant that we pulled her from second grade and began home-schooling. I took a pay cut and cooked rice and bean dinners so we could afford gymnastics lessons, Girl Scouts, and museum trips. When our special access pass expired,

we gratefully applied for renewal. We've used it to explore Umpqua Lighthouse State Park, to dig quartz at Agate Beach State Recreation Area, to gaze up at red and orange MonkeyFace Rock at Smith Rock State Park near Bend. Our daughter began to look forward to those trips.

Over the years, we've met families for whom the pass has been a lifesaver. One couple has fostered over 20 kids; they now have one who's undergone 13 heart surgeries. On vacations, they head out to one of Oregon's 361 state parks. Other friends adopted three children. They pile everyone into their van with the pass dangling from their mirror, then trot along trails with backpacks and binoculars, their faces alive with curiosity.

Some will argue that tax dollars are better spent on more pressing needs. But nature is a need, too, and most children — foster, adopted or otherwise — too often plant themselves in

front of screens in sterile rooms devoid of streams and grass and wildlife. Plenty of studies have linked time spent outdoors to increased optimism and physical wellbeing. The pass removes a financial barrier between kids who've gotten a rough start in life and the therapy that only standing in a stream, gazing at clouds or rolling down a sand dune can provide.

Last year, my family drove across Oregon. The pass got us into Wallowa Lake State Park, where our daughter swam until her lips turned blue. We drove to Pete French's Round Barn and toured Kam Wah Chung Museum, an old Chinese apothecary and opium den. Travels like this have broadened our daughter's perspective and captured her imagination. A child born bereft and abandoned now moves through the world with confidence and excitement.

After Kam Wah Chung, we spread out our blanket on a sunny patch of grass and ate sandwiches and tangerines. Afterward, my daughter practiced her gymnastics. Hands clasped, my husband and I watched as she ran barefoot across the grass. Suddenly, she sprang into a cartwheel, fell over onto her back, then leaped up and laughed.

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## Protect nonprofit tax exemptions

The Bend Bulletin, July 23

**O**regon law has a fairly broad property tax exemption for nonprofits. But there's been a push in the Legislature and from the League of Oregon Cities to change that.

It's worth exploring as long as the Legislature doesn't rush in and disrupt important charitable organizations without careful analysis.

Nonprofits use services, too. They benefit from roads, police and fire protection and water and sewer services. Should they not pay any property taxes that support those services? Should they be required to meet some sort of benefit test to see if they qualify for a full or partial exemption? Everyone else arguably

pays more because nonprofits don't pay. Is that worth it?

Those are valid questions to ask. They are hard questions to answer.

There's a good reason nonprofits got exemptions in the first place. Many of them improve lives. They have benefited the community. They

have played a role where government sometimes does not. Taxing them more would mean they could do less good work. Just having nonprofit status, though, does not grant nonprofits a halo that entitles them to immunity from closer examination.

There is a significant amount of money at stake.

"Nonprofit organizations that are charitable, literary, benevolent or scientific are provided a property tax exemption that will cost more

than \$194 million in the 2015-17 biennium," according to the League of Oregon Cities. "In addition, exemptions for the property of nonprofit religious organizations costs more than \$113 million for the biennium."

Oregon courts have used a test to determine if organizations qualify for a property tax exemption, according to a report from the Legislative Revenue Office. Is the organization charitable? And is the property actually and exclusively occupied or used in the charitable work carried on by the organization? There's a deeper test for hospitals to ensure they treat people regardless of ability to pay, make a special effort to help the needy and are not operated for profit.

All states offer some level of property tax exemption. And we aren't suggesting that Oregon get rid of all exemptions. The Legislature is right to take a look. Tax-exempt status should be earned.



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