

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Native issues as loud as ever

Thanksgiving is among the most beloved days in the American calendar, a unique holiday that honors our country's best qualities.

Yet its roots are not the grade-school pageant and fairy tale we learned as children. That narrative — the survival of the Pilgrims

and the friendly meal shared with Indians — is closer to Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny than historical fact. It's more mythology than history, but unlike the Easter Bunny it is a myth that continues to shape the lives and issues that some people face today.

We know that in Umatilla County and Eastern Oregon. This is a rare

American place, and not just because it is home to Indian reservations and thousands of tribal members are friends, family and neighbors.

Treaty rights and tribal issues have always been part of the discussion here — though the power dynamic has never been static. But those long-gnawed-on local issues are re-entering the national conversation at a level not heard since the 1970s.

Mostly that is because of protests and legal fights at Standing Rock in North Dakota. The issues there strike at the core of the current political landscape — environment, energy policy, corporate power, the right to protest and, yes, treaty rights. Larger media organizations are concentrating on the daily clashes, but recently there has been deeper reporting — partly due to the Malheur occupation — on land right claims throughout this country.

There is a clear dichotomy between how America views past Indian issues and present Indian

issues. The Thanksgiving story is a cornucopia filled with partnership, respect and gratefulness between cultures. At Standing Rock, there is a complete lack of all three.

That dichotomy was present in downtown Pendleton last week, as the city celebrated Clarence

Burke, a revered tribal member and longtime co-chief of the Round-Up Indian Village. The reveal of Burke's statue took place just after a gathering of local people marched down Main Street in support of Standing Rock — something no city official or representative was a part of, as far as we can tell.

As much good as statues can be, or words of thanks to Squanto and the farming tips of a now-extinguished tribe, it avoids the real issues people are fighting for today. And you don't have to look all the way to Standing Rock, either. Tribal rights are being debated against Nestlé in Hood River and the state of Oregon and Port of Morrow and Port of Arlington. These are good debates to have, no matter your outlook, and much more complex than nodding appreciatively at a statue.

It's Thanksgiving. We should find ways to be thankful and appreciative and kind. The buffet of food and family spread before us today is the product of more than 200 years of tribal and government and human relations, of continuous arrival of immigrants by boat and plane and foot. Few have suffered more in pursuit of that feast — financially and culturally and literally — than American Indians. It continues today, on this most native of American holidays.

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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.

## YOUR VIEWS

### Legislator thankful for re-election, voter support

Dear friends and neighbors:  
As we come to that time of year where we give thanks for the many blessings in our lives, I would be remiss if I did not say "thank you" for returning me to the Oregon House of Representatives to serve as your voice in Salem. It is a great privilege and honor. While session will not convene until the second week of January, I want you to know our office continues to be open to serve your needs.

There are many challenges that will need to be addressed by Oregon's 79th Legislative Assembly. These issues include constitutionally balancing the state budget, fully funding our schools, protecting small business owners, advocating for our senior citizens, addressing the PERS shortfall, creating a transportation package that is fair and equitable, as well as bringing balance

back to our natural resource laws. As the GOP House Budget Chairman, I am committed to working on these issues.

Your input in this process is valuable. Please do not hesitate to contact me, or better yet, stop by and visit me at the State Capitol. My contact information is:

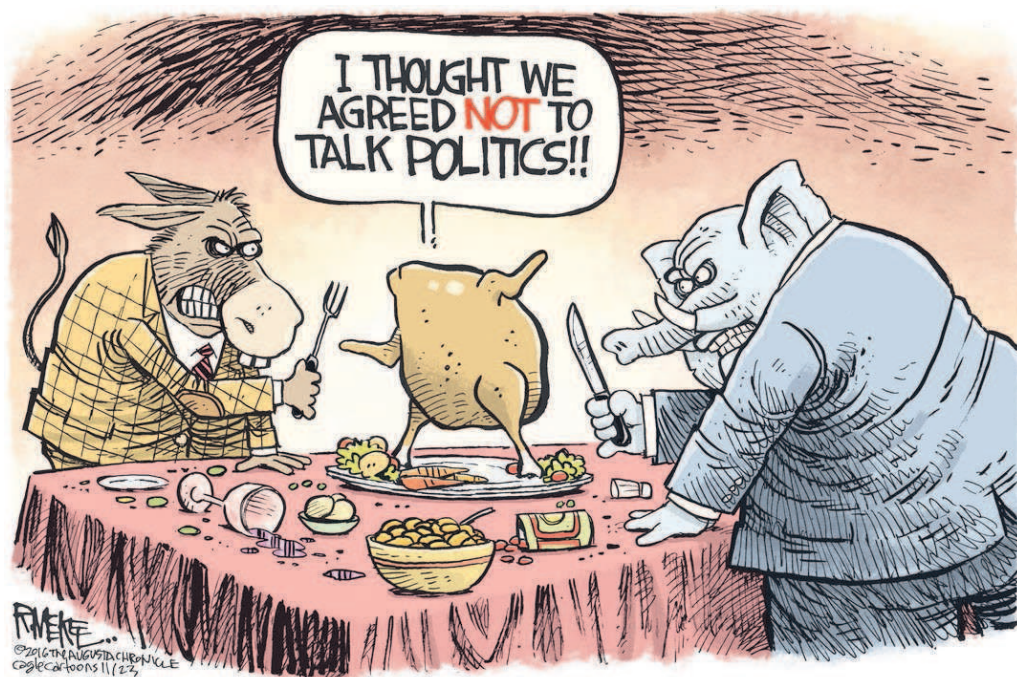
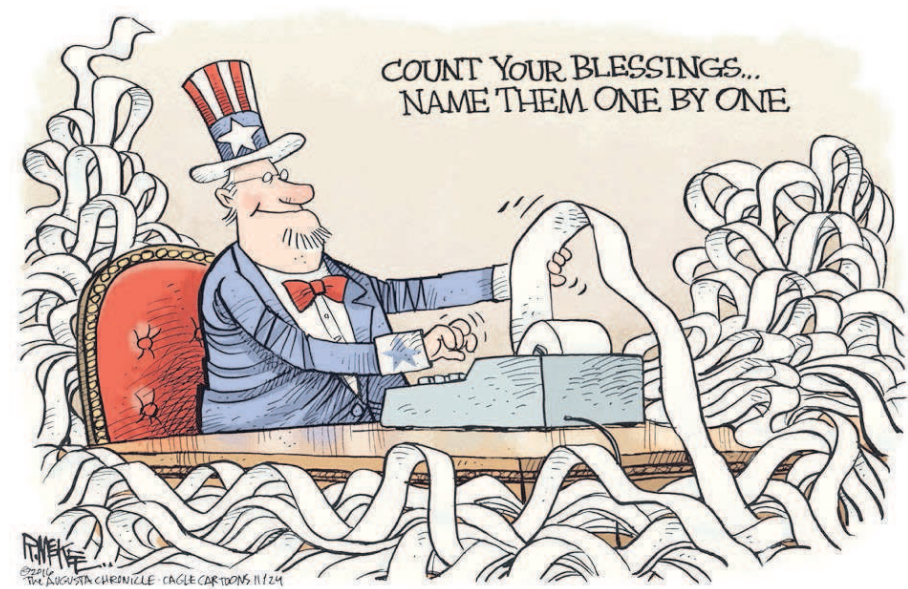
The Honorable Gregory V. Smith  
Oregon House of Representatives  
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My telephone is 503-986-1457, and the email address is rep.gregsmith@oregonlegislature.gov.

If you have any meetings or events in your area that you would like me to attend, please contact my legislative aide, Mr. Phillip Scheuers, to coordinate attendance at the above number.

It is by working together that we will make District 57 and the State of Oregon a better place to live.

Rep. Greg Smith  
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## OTHER VIEWS

# A different kind of pilgrim

By COLIN STEELE  
*Writers on the Range*

Celebrating Thanksgiving four years ago, I was a stranger in a strange land. Fresh out of college and not quite three months into AmeriCorps service on the Colville Reservation in north-central Washington, I would not be able to enjoy the Thanksgiving tradition I'd known all my life — watching the parade in New York City with my family. I was going to need to find another home for the holiday.

Spike, a rancher and the cousin of a teacher friend, was a possibility. I had met him when I went to help gather his cattle in from their summer pasture, visions of cowboy glory dancing in my head. When I told him I had just completed college back in Washington, D.C., he growled, "D.C., huh? You better not be no f---in' politician." But then he laughed and taught me how to use a modern cowboy's four-wheeled steed: "This turns it on. This makes it go. Now follow me — and don't flip it."

I did flip the all-terrain vehicle once, but I liked ranching, and Spike liked me enough to keep teaching me to chase cows. So, in mid-November, I gratefully accepted his invitation to join his family's Thanksgiving dinner on the ranch with my six fellow volunteers.

By that point, I knew a little bit about families and traditions on the reservation but had yet to join a Native family for a celebration in their own home. Holiday gatherings differ from family to family, and at the home level they are bound to be imbued with "the way we do things." We were warmly welcomed, yet I could not shake the feeling of being an interloper. I stood awkward and tense in my new cowboy boots during the drumming and singing that began the family's version of Thanksgiving.

As the afternoon wore on, I began to relax. I couldn't help but see the irony in being a pilgrim, a newly arrived suyapi — white person — from Massachusetts, celebrating Thanksgiving with a Native American family, and all of us watching the Dallas vs. Washington football game on TV after dinner.

The game ended, and over dessert I learned that, in October, our host and several other family members had fought a wildfire that came within feet of destroying the tribal

school and the trailer we volunteers lived in. The story was told in an uproarious way, but it brought a pang to my heart. The silly parallels I had been drawing in my mind between the "First Thanksgiving" story of Squanto and the Pilgrims gave way to a deeper appreciation for the meaning of the holiday. I felt deep gratitude for the hospitality of Spike and his family.

That hospitality, and my thanksgiving, continued through the rest of the year. Months later, sitting on the porch of the ranch house watching the cows, Spike delivered a lesson that rivaled — in maybe a minute and a half — anything I'd heard in four years of college.

"Look," he said, "You ain't gonna save anybody here. We don't need it. But I'm sure glad all you volunteers come here each year from all over the country and see how we live here. And maybe you'll take that with you when you go back East or wherever."

This Thanksgiving, I'll wake up in my grandmother's apartment in New York City. As I dress for the parade, I'll glance out the window at the bits of Hudson River still visible between the towers of Trump Place across the street, and I'll think back to the lessons I learned on the ranch.

Indeed, that year, for which neither my suburban Boston upbringing nor my shiny diploma in international relations had really prepared me, taught me the meaning and power of gratitude in daily life.

During volunteer orientation, someone said that we didn't have to like everyone in our communities, but we did have to try to love them. The more I came to know that endlessly complex community, the less I understood it. But I loved that slice of rural and Native America with my whole soul.

I didn't fully understand rural America then, and I won't pretend to now. But I remain shaped for life by people who opened their homes and their hearts to me when I was a stranger. We called each other friends four years ago, and we still do today.

Colin Steele is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, the opinion service of *High Country News*. He was a *Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest/AmeriCorps* volunteer on the Colville Reservation from 2012-2013. He is now a student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

## OTHER VIEWS

# Forget fasting — Thanksgiving a time to feast

By BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

There is a tradition that in the planting of New England, the first settlers met with many difficulties and hardships, as is generally the case when a civiliz'd people attempt to establish themselves in a wilderness country. Being so piously dispos'd, they sought relief from heaven by laying their wants and distresses before the Lord in frequent set days of fasting and prayer. Constant meditation and discourse on these subjects kept their minds gloomy and discontented, and like the children of Israel there were many dispos'd to return to the Egypt which persecution had induc'd them to abandon.

At length, when it was proposed in the Assembly to proclaim another fast, a farmer of plain sense rose and remark'd that the inconveniences they suffer'd, and concerning which they had so often weary'd heaven with

their complaints, were not so great as they might have expected, and were diminishing every day as the colony strengthen'd; that the earth began to reward their labour and furnish liberally for their subsistence; that

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their seas and rivers were full of fish, the air sweet, the climate healthy, and above all, they were in the full enjoyment of liberty, civil and religious.

He therefore thought that reflecting and conversing on these subjects would be more comfortable and lead more to make them contented with their situation; and that it would be more becoming

the gratitude they ow'd to the divine being, if instead of a fast they should proclaim a thanksgiving. His advice was taken, and from that day to this, they have in every year observ'd circumstances of public felicity sufficient to furnish employment for a Thanksgiving Day, which is therefore constantly ordered and religiously observed.

— Benjamin Franklin, 1785

## LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.