

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# Ceding social media to the trolls

There was a time we thought that social media could be a beneficial, progressive influence on the world.

In 2010, it helped Tunisian protesters organize and overthrow an oppressive regime. In Egypt and other places where governments controlled information and restricted freedom, online networks crowded about their ability to organize people in pursuit of a greater good.

That thought trickled through all of us — that Twitter could overthrow oppressive governments, Facebook could strengthen human rights and Weibo could promote freedom and self-expression. In short, that social media was the key for spreading Western, democratic values across the world — this country's aim for much of the past century.

We considered the worldwide implications, but also the personal ones.

Many opinions about gay people changed rapidly for the better, thanks in no small part to social media. For millennia, homosexuals had been hidden from view and away from the mainstream. But as our online networks expanded, we found out we knew and loved gay people, or we knew and loved someone who knew and loved a gay person. Understanding and respect grew, and people who posted hurtful and hateful things were quickly confronted by newly emboldened online crowds. The impact was immediate, and many Americans quickly changed their minds about the issue, both politically and personally.

Perhaps this portended a world with more personal connections, and an increase in compassion and maybe someday a decrease in conflict.

Yet that has clearly turned out not



**TIM TRAINOR**  
Comment

to be the case.

Our calls for respect have turned to demands for agreement. The shouting and shaming have increased and made nuanced discussion in an open venue nearly impossible. We keep our real opinions to our virtual chest for fear of a mud fight.

That has made social networks decidedly less

human — largely the domain of hackers and scammers, and the trolls who latch themselves onto each and every online conversation. The internet is where complainers and insult-hurlers feel most comfortable, and those eager to tear down rather than build support are given wide berth.

The technology that was supposed to bring us together is now a vehicle for outrage and incomprehension.

The technology that was supposed to bring us together is now a vehicle for outrage and incomprehension. Nihilism is in vogue. Our nation elected a reality television star and his supporters ask the majority of

Americans to find the humor in it.

A caring person is now a snowflake. An autocrat is now looked on with admiration.

Social media has failed to make our online selves as caring and neighborly as we are in real life. It has become nothing more than a worldwide mob that warps reality and attacks people and institutions.

Mob mentality is a studied phenomenon — how a crowd can get the people who comprise it to act in opposition to how they would as individuals. Social media has increased the herd factor by the billions, and at the same time it has decreased the human interaction and empathy that have long been the core of a civilized world.

Its potential to damage to our world is currently much larger than its potential to help.

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

# Raise pay of Oregon legislators

*The (Albany) Democrat-Herald*

A pair of legislators from central Oregon recently made a bit of news when they said they would not accept the pay raises for legislators that were included in Gov. Kate Brown's proposed budget.

The legislators, Rep. Knute Buehler and Sen. Tim Knopp, said it sent the wrong message to accept the pay raises at a time when the state is facing a budget deficit that's closing in on \$2 billion for the next two-year budget cycle. They said the law doesn't allow them to actually decline the raises, so they planned to donate the extra money (the 2.75 percent increase works out to about \$648) to charities.

OK, that's fair enough. We have considerable respect for the work that Buehler and Knopp are doing in the Legislature, and they're free to do what they like with their money.

Still, this raises a couple of points that are worth additional discussion.

First, although it's tempting to take a political slap at Gov. Brown, she included the increase for legislative pay because that's what was in state statutes; the governor doesn't decide unilaterally what legislators should be paid. (Although it would make for interesting news stories if the governor did get to make that call, say at the end of each session.)

If Buehler and Knopp want to make an issue of how much legislators get paid, they should launch an effort to change the law. (To be completely fair, the two have said they plan to do that in the 2017 session.)

Legislative salaries are computed using the state's Management Service Compensation Plan. Effective Dec. 1, the plan was increased by 2.75 percent for a cost of living adjustment. Before the adjustment, a legislator pulled down \$1,964 a month. Now, beginning with

their Jan. 1 checks, they're being paid \$2,018 a month. The total annual salary is \$24,216.

The total added cost to the state works out to \$58,320 a year. Now, we don't claim any particular skills at math, but a quick run with a calculator says that amount works out to be about 0.003 percent of the state budget shortfall. It'll take a lot more than that to fill this particular hole.

And let's run a little mental calculation of our own. The Legislature this year is scheduled to meet for 160 days, about 22 weeks. Let's assume for the sake of argument that a typical legislator works 60 hours a week while in session (we suspect that this is way low). That's 1,320 hours. Let's assume that legislators work 10 hours a week on state business even when the Legislature isn't in session (again, this likely is way low). That adds another 300 hours to the total. If you divide 1,620 hours by what we pay them, it works out to \$14.95 an hour, and that rate is almost certainly high.

Oregonians pride themselves on having a citizen Legislature; by 2022, after the last few increases in Oregon's minimum wage, we'll have something very close to a minimum-wage Legislature.

We understand where Knopp and Buehler are coming from; the timing of this particular raise, as small as it is, is unfortunate at best. But there's a larger issue here: Considering what we ask from them and the complexity of the issues that they must grapple with, you can make a strong case that we don't pay our legislators nearly enough — especially if we want to attract younger legislators who must also juggle families and other jobs. This probably isn't the session to address this issue. But that doesn't mean the problem is going away.

## Wacky winter drivers



## OTHER VIEWS

# Bannon vs. Trump

It's becoming clear that for the next few years U.S. foreign policy will be shaped by the struggle among Republican regulars, populist ethno-nationalists and the forces of perpetual chaos unleashed by President-elect Donald Trump's attention span.

The Republican regulars build their grand strategies upon the post-World War II international order — the U.S.-led alliances, norms and organizations that bind democracies and preserve global peace. The regulars seek to preserve and extend this order, and see President Vladimir Putin of Russia as a wolf who tears away at it.

The populist ethno-nationalists in the Trump White House do not believe in this order. Their critique — which is simultaneously moral, religious, economic, political and racial — is nicely summarized in the remarks Steve Bannon, the incoming senior counsel for Trump, made to a Vatican conference in 2014.

Once there was a collection of Judeo-Christian nation-states, Bannon argued, that practiced a humane form of biblical capitalism and fostered culturally coherent communities. But in the past few decades, the party of Davos — with its globalism, relativism, pluralism and diversity — has sapped away the moral foundations of this Judeo-Christian way of life.

Humane capitalism has been replaced by the savage capitalism that brought us the financial crisis. National democracy has been replaced by a crony-capitalist network of global elites. Traditional virtue has been replaced by abortion and gay marriage. Sovereign nation-states are being replaced by hapless multilateral organizations like the EU.

Decadent and enervated, the West lies vulnerable in the face of a confident and convicted Islamofascism, which is the cosmic threat of our time.

In this view, Putin is a valuable ally precisely because he also seeks to replace the multiracial, multilingual global order with strong nation-states. Putin ardently defends traditional values. He knows how to take the fight to radical Islam.

It's actually interesting to read Trump's ideologist, Bannon, next to Putin's ideologist, Alexander Dugin. It's like going back to the 20th century and reading two versions of Marxism.

One is American Christian and the other orthodox Russian, but both have grandiose, sweeping theories of world history, both believe we're in an apocalyptic clash of civilizations, both seamlessly combine economic, moral and political analysis. Both self-consciously see themselves as part of a loosely affiliated international populist movement, including the National Front in France, Nigel Farage in Britain and many others. Dugin wrote positively about Trump last winter, and Bannon referred to Dugin in his Vatican remarks.

"We must create strategic alliances to overthrow the present order of things,"



**DAVID BROOKS**  
Comment

Dugin has written, "of which the core could be described as human rights, anti-hierarchy and political correctness — everything that is the face of the Beast, the Antichrist."

"We, the Judeo-Christian West, really have to look at what (Putin) is talking about as far as traditionalism goes," Bannon said, "particularly the sense of where it supports the underpinnings of nationalism."

Last week's intelligence report on Russian hacking brought the Republican regulars, like Sens. John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, into direct conflict with the ethno-nationalist populists. Trump planted himself firmly in the latter camp, and dragged Fox News and a surprising number of congressional Republicans with him.

If Trump were as effective as Putin, we'd probably see a radical shift in U.S. grand strategy, a shift away from the postwar global consensus and toward an alliance with various right-wing populist movements simmering around the globe.

But Trump is no Putin. Putin is theological and cynical, disciplined and calculating, experienced and knowledgeable. When Bannon, Michael Flynn and others try to make Trump into a revolutionary foreign policy president, they will be taking on the entire foreign policy establishment under a leader who may sympathize with them, but is inattentive, unpredictable and basically uninterested in anything but his own status at the moment.

I'm personally betting the foreign policy apparatus, including the secretaries of state and defense, will grind down the populists around Trump. Frictions will explode within the insanely confusing lines of authority in the White House. Trump will find he likes hanging around the global establishment the way he liked having the Clintons at his wedding. In office he won't be able to fixate on the Islamic State group but will face a blizzard of problems, and thus be dependent on the established institutions.

The result may be a million astounding tweets, but substantively no fundamental strategic shift — not terrible policy-making, but not good policy-making, either.

The larger battle is over ideas, whether the Republican Party as a whole will become an ethno-populist party like the National Front or the U.K. Independence Party. In this fight the populists might do better. There's something malevolently forceful about their ideology, which does remind you of Marxism in its early days. There's something flaccid about globalism, which is de-spiritualized and which doesn't really have an answer for our economic and cultural problems.

In short, I suspect Steve Bannon is going to fail to corral the peripatetic brain of Trump. But he may have more influence on the next generation.

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

## YOUR VIEWS

### Corporations should warn customers of scammers

They hit again: A very sophisticated group claiming to be from DirecTV said I needed new software on my receiver and, since my warranty had expired, there would be a charge.

I asked many questions, insulted them, and they kept on for a half hour before they got around to asking for my credit card number, at which point I said "We're done here" and hung up.

I called DirecTV to verify and they said it was a fraud and they'd heard of it before. Then, as my wife asked, "Why weren't we warned?"

Steven Janke, Pilot Rock

### Uninformed electorate poses a danger to democracy

"A properly functioning democracy depends on an informed electorate." Thomas Jefferson wrote about the importance of a well-informed electorate many times.

Unfortunately, we have apparently dismissed Jefferson's ideal. The recent

election presented us with the specter of victory of the uninformed over the informed. The Electoral College victor, though losing the popular vote, was the candidate who lied throughout his campaign, and then lied to deny his lies. Fake news and conspiracy hoaxes were the cornerstone of his campaign.

Now, as president-elect, he even claims he is too smart to need intelligence briefings.

But this is not new; the GOP has long suppressed research as a way to further their goals: They denied the CDC authority to investigate gun violence (research could suggest guns are hazardous.) They denied the Pentagon authority to explore climate change as a threat to the nation (presumably it's better not to know what threats climate change might pose).

And now, in consort with the incoming administration, they plan to suppress climate science research occurring in NASA even though this agency provides much of the best climate research in the world.

Jefferson would be appalled: The worship of anti-democratic ignorance has become the hallmark of government.

Alan Journet  
Jacksonville