

# EAST OREGONIAN

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## OUR VIEW

# As summer arrives, think sunshine

Oregon lawmakers are in danger of missing an important opportunity to make state government more transparent, democratic and — we believe — better.

As the legislative session draws to its July 10 close, House Bill 2101 remains stuck in the House Rules Committee.

This bill would provide for extra analysis and notice of legislation that could affect government transparency. It also sets up a

balanced, nonpartisan committee to update and simplify Oregon's confusing thicket of more than 550 records-law exemptions that gets larger each year.

"The overwhelming majority of Oregonians want their government to be open and accountable. There has been very little opposition to this bill, but it has not received a hearing," said Shasta Kearns Moore, Oregon Territory Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists' sunshine chair.

And we understand why some are happy to keep the public in the dark about controversial issues. Journalists are the key providers of information to the public — information that often makes life more difficult for those in power. And the steady accumulation of state government data that is off-limits to public eyes consolidates that power in the hands of a few and makes us all less-informed voters.

The Society of Professional Journalists spearheaded the concept of the Oregon Sunshine Committee and earned bipartisan support for it, including from Secretary of State Dennis Richardson and Gov. Kate Brown. The bill is also supported

by such wide-ranging interests as former Deputy Attorney General Pete Shepherd, the statewide transparency group Open Oregon, Oregon State Public

Interest Research Group (OSPIRG), the Oregon Environmental Council and more than 10 other nonprofit public interest groups.

The Sunshine Committee would give the public a seat at the table during exemption review as already happens in Washington, Virginia, New York, Maine and Tennessee.

The bill also would also create Open Government Impact Statements for bills moving through the legislature. This means that every piece of legislation that has the potential to close public access to information would get a statement on the arguments for and against creating more secrecy.

Oregon has an opportunity with this bill to make a major leap forward for transparency in the state at negligible cost. We think the legislature should take it, or at the very least argue the bill on its merits in open session. Secrecy is easier, but it doesn't make for better government.

## Transparency is good for good government.

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

# Is national popular vote more fair than electoral college?

The Medford Mail Tribune

The 73 million Americans who voted for someone other than Donald Trump for president — outnumbering Trump voters by more than 10 million — might understandably support the national movement to sidestep the Electoral College and award the top job in future elections to the winner of the popular vote. Oregon is on its way to joining that movement after the state House voted to do so along party lines.

To abolish the Electoral College would require amending the U.S. Constitution — a daunting task. But it could be circumvented if enough states agree. Here's how:

Individual states enact legislation pledging their Electoral College votes to the candidate who wins the national popular vote, regardless of how their state's electorate voted. If enough states sign on to what's called the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact to total the magic number of 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House, those states would determine the winner.

That sounds good in theory, but it raises some interesting issues. In the 2016 election, for instance, Donald Trump lost the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes, but won just enough votes in three key states to give him the electoral votes he needed. If Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin had signed on to the Interstate Compact, those states would have awarded their Electoral College votes to Hillary Clinton, even though their voters narrowly picked Trump.

Other states where Trump won

handily also would have been forced to deliver their electoral votes to Clinton, if their state had joined the compact. Then there is the likelihood that just enough states sign on to reach the 270 number, but the rest don't. Are their electoral votes irrelevant?

In Oregon, where Clinton won easily, Democratic voters would have been happy to have the Interstate Compact in place. But in some future election, the result could conceivably be reversed, and the candidate chosen by Oregon voters could narrowly lose the popular vote but still get all seven of Oregon's electoral votes.

Supporters of the Interstate Compact argue that the current system prompts candidates to concentrate their campaigning in swing states, ignoring states they consider safe and those where they have little support. But there is no guarantee that would change appreciably under the Compact system. In fact, candidates would be more likely to spend most of their time and money in big cities and urban states with large concentrations of voters. It was Clinton's overwhelming wins in the urban parts of California and New York that gave her the bulk of her popular vote margin.

The Oregon House has approved the Interstate Compact three times before, only to have it blocked by Senate President Peter Courtney. This year, he says he will allow a Senate vote if the matter is referred to the voters.

That still would leave the national effort little more than 60 percent of the way toward its goal. If Oregon voters are given a say, they should be sure it's what they want before voting yes.

## 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.



## OTHER VIEWS

# On a Portland train, the battlefield of American values

America may seem leaderless, with nastiness and bullying ascendant, but the best of our nation materialized during a moral crisis on a commuter train in Portland.

A white man riding on that train on Friday began screaming anti-Muslim insults at a black 16-year-old girl and her 17-year-old Muslim friend wearing a hijab. One can imagine people pretending not to hear and staring fiercely down at their phones; instead, three brave passengers stepped forward to protect the girls.

The three were as different as could be. One was a 23-year-old recent Reed College graduate who had a mane of long hair and was working as a consultant. Another was a 53-year-old Army veteran with the trimmest of haircuts and a record of service in Iraq and Afghanistan. The third was a 21-year-old poet and Portland State University student on his way to a job at a pizzeria. What united the three was decency.

When they intervened, the man harassing the girls pulled a knife and slashed the three men before fleeing. Rick Best, the veteran, died at the scene. Taliesin Namkai-Meche, the recent Reed graduate, was

conscious as he waited for an ambulance. A good Samaritan took off her shirt to cover him; she recounted that some of his last words were: "I want everybody on the train to know, I love them." He died soon after arriving at the hospital.

Another passer-by stanch the bleeding of the student poet, Micah Fletcher, and called his mother to tell her to go to the hospital — but played down the injuries to avoid terrifying her. Fletcher underwent two hours of surgery to remove bone fragments from his throat and is recovering.

Police arrested Jeremy Christian, 35, a white supremacist, and charged him with the murders. The train attack doesn't fit America's internal narrative of terrorism, but it's a reminder that terrorism takes many forms. Last year Americans were less likely to be killed by a Muslim terrorist (odds of 1 in 6 million) than for being Muslim (odds of 1 in 1 million), according to Charles Kurzman of the University of North Carolina.

In tragedy, we can sometimes find inspiration. In that train car, we saw that courage and leadership are alive — if not always in Washington, then among ordinary Americans converging from varied backgrounds on a commuter train, standing together against a threat to our shared humanity. I'd been dispirited by recent events.

President Donald Trump's overseas trip marked an abdication of American leadership, with German Chancellor Angela Merkel concluding that Europe can no longer rely on the United States. The Trump budget was intellectually dishonest and morally repugnant, with cuts in global AIDS funding alone that may cost 1 million lives.

Today's White House seems to stand for nothing loftier than crony capitalism and the

scapegoating of refugees, Muslims and immigrants. To me, Trump "values" are primarily narcissism, nepotism and nihilism.

And this is infectious: Cass Sunstein of Harvard cites psychology research indicating that Trump has made it more acceptable for Americans to embrace xenophobia. I wrote last year that "Donald Trump is making America meaner," prompting bigotry in rural Oregon where I grew up, and around the country.

We don't know whether the murderer on the Portland train felt empowered to scream at a Muslim girl because of Trump's own previous Islamophobic rants, any more than we can be sure that Trump's denunciation of reporters led a Montana candidate to body slam a journalist. But when a president incites hatred, civilization wanes.

If all that is one thread of America, another is represented by those three men who stepped forward on that train. It's also represented by the good Samaritans who helped them when they were stabbed, by the countless people who joined vigils to honor the victims and who donated more than \$1 million in a few days for the families of those killed and for the survivor.

It's terrific that the White House eventually acknowledged these heroes in a tweet. But it would have been more convincing if the tweet came sooner and from Trump's own @realDonaldTrump account rather than the @Potus account mostly managed by his staff.

What the three men in Oregon understood, but the White House doesn't, is that in a healthy society, Islamophobia doesn't disparage just Muslims, racism doesn't demean blacks alone, misogyny hurts more than women, xenophobia insults more than immigrants. Rather, we are all diminished, so we all have a stake in confronting bigotry.

Best, the veteran, had three teenage children and a 12-year-old daughter, and I hope his kids understand that their dad died challenging a venomous intolerance that threatens our social fabric. He fell on the battlefield of American values. He deserves the chance to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

One thing I've learned in my reporting career is that side by side with the worst of humanity, you find the best. The test for all of us is whether we can similarly respond to hatred and nihilism with courage and, in the dying words of Namkai-Meche, with "love."

After coming out of surgery, weak but indomitable, Fletcher wrote a poem that offers us guidance. According to the *Oregonian*, it read in part:

"I, am alive.

I spat in the eye of hate and lived.

This is what we must do for one another

We must live for one another."

Nicholas Kristof grew up on a sheep and cherry farm in Yamhill. A columnist for The New York Times since 2001, he won the Pulitzer Prize twice.

## What united the three was decency.



NICHOLAS KRISTOF  
Comment

## YOUR VIEWS

### No respect for authority

Aretha Franklin was always one of my favorites. "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" was the song I always loved to hear over and over. It seems respect is much harder to find now, however, and it is a sad thing.

It seems everywhere you look now you see evidence of the lack of respect. Take Beyoncé at the Super Bowl halftime show where she showed a gross lack of respect for police; take Black Lives Matter, who promote violence against police. Look at the looting and rioting — even here in our own Portland — where "protesters" break windows and burn cars and stores with no respect for property or the public.

Look at our colleges, who used to be strong defenders of the right of free speech. Berkley students rioted and caused a great deal of damage, all because they didn't happen to agree with a speaker invited to the campus. Look at the Berkley police when they didn't even show up to enforce the laws they swore to enforce.

Look at some of our governors and mayors who have no respect for our Constitution and federal laws by creating sanctuary cities (such as Portland and Seattle). These cities now harbor many illegal criminals across the country — some who have been deported up to 15 times.

Look at the privileged athlete Colin Kaepernick, who disrespected our country and our flag by not standing for the national anthem. Now the Seahawks are interested in him playing in Seattle? If they take him that will be the last Seahawk game I will watch.

Look at the parade of rich celebrities who have uttered such violent statements and threats to our president (Madonna said she wanted to blow up the White House). Look at the students who have shown little respect for the vice president as he gave a graduation speech at Notre Dame.

It seems like we used to be able to disagree — or play against a rival team — and still end up shaking hands and having respect for one another. If you don't like the President, at least have some respect for the office of President. That attitude seems to be gradually giving way to violence and hatred everywhere you look. I expect it from ISIS but not from our own citizens here in the USA.

I used to love Rodney Dangerfield with his "I get no respect."

It isn't so funny now. Maybe it's time to remind ourselves of Lee Greenwood's great song. And I'd gladly stand up (so stand up Kaepernick) next to you and defend her still today.

David Burns  
Pendleton