

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

MARISSA WILLIAMS
Regional Advertising Director

MARCY ROSENBERG
Circulation Manager

JANNA HEIMGARTNER
Business Office Manager

MIKE JENSEN
Production Manager

OUR VIEW

Oregon needs its sunshine

As a disappointing legislative session comes to a close, you can lament a lot of missed opportunities: Tax reform didn't get done. PERS reform never got off the ground. The education budget survived disastrous cuts but didn't take the necessary steps forward. A transportation package may have legs, but time is short to get it to the governor's desk.

The Democrats have control of everything —

Senate, House and governorship — but couldn't get anything of substance done, which is disappointing. A single-party state is only as competent as that single party, we suppose.

You can harp on the big things, but sometimes it's the small ones that illuminate the larger missteps.

One little bill that we continue to harp upon has, like the grand bargains, also not found traction. It's a simple one, but one we believe has a bipartisan ability to make Oregon government better and help make Oregonians better informed.

It is House Bill 2101-A, colloquially known as the public records law, which is geared around informing Oregonians about their government and the world around them.

It provides extra analysis and notice of bills that affect government transparency. But it has not been scheduled for a hearing by the Joint Ways and Means Committee.

HB 2101-A would not only give the public specific notice of bills that would increase government secrecy, it would set up a balanced,

nonpartisan committee to update and simplify Oregon's confusing thicket of more than 550 existing records-law exemptions.

We think that improves the lives of every Oregonian. Yet the first major reforms to public records law in the state since 1973 has

stalled, while the aforementioned exceptions allowing greater secrecy become ever more commonplace.

"Journalists often — and rightly — complain about a lack of openness in government," Oregon Society of Professional Journalists sunshine chair Shasta Kearns Moore said. "Now is our chance to push the needle in a better direction."

The bill passed out of the House Rules Committee with a "do pass with amendments" recommendation but remains stuck goes to the Joint Ways and Means Committee.

The bill would cost the state about \$200,000 a year, but the spending would boost trust in government and prevent what could be costly unintended consequences from future legislation by ensuring increased debate around a law that is the cornerstone of our democracy.

We know which party could get it done, although we've learned not to hold our breath when it comes to Oregon Democrats.

"Journalists often — and rightly — complain about a lack of openness in government."

— **Shasta Kearns Moore,**
Oregon SPJ Sunshine Chair

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

Georgia says more about Trump than House in '18

The Georgia 6th District results don't tell us what will happen in 2018. But they do tell us what is happening right now.

In a conversation two weeks before the GA06 election, a Republican strategist involved in the fight mused on the possibility that all the money spent, all the doors knocked, all the phones called, all the accusations hurled — that it might mean nothing when it comes to the crucial question of who will win control of the House of Representatives in 2018.

"That's the silliness of all this," he said. "Assuming we win Georgia, we will have won all of the special elections, and it means nothing — nothing — for next year."

He was right. Special elections have been notoriously unreliable for predicting the results of elections more than a year away. That's probably especially true in the current speeded-up news cycle. That doesn't mean Republican and Democratic strategists won't try to take lessons from GA06 and try to apply them to the future. But who knows what might happen by next week, much less next year?

Still, the election results do tell us something about this moment. "They tell you that Trump's supporters support Trump," said the strategist. "So far, all the available data is that Trump's supporters not only support him but are motivated."

Indeed, talking to voters during a door-knocking session with conservative activists in GA06 earlier this month revealed a sentiment shared by a lot of Trump supporters. "Give him a chance," they said over and over. They sense, correctly, that Democrats in Congress have sought not just to oppose Trump from Day One, but hope to actually remove him from office through the Russia investigation.



BYRON YORK
Comment

"I think it's a witch hunt — they're not giving him a chance," one man in Marietta, Georgia, told me.

So on Tuesday, if the GA06 vote was a referendum on the president, the message from a winning margin of voters in the district was probably this: Give him a chance.

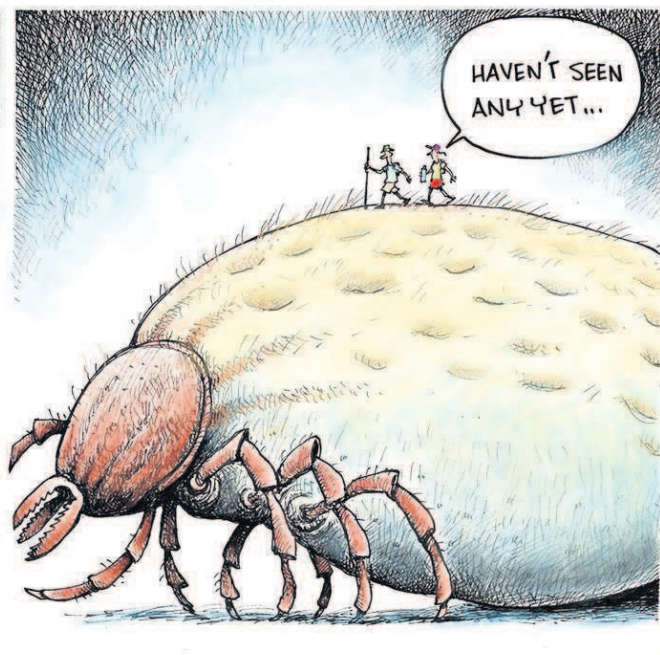
"People are very optimistic about the Republican agenda," the strategist said. "Now, has it been smooth? You know the answer to that. But they are cautiously optimistic about the president's agenda, and they want to give him time."

And that is where Trump likely stands with supporters far beyond GA06. But that is right now, and just right now. Next year, nothing is guaranteed. "Next year, the most important factor will be what results we deliver," said the strategist when I asked whether Trump could build any support beyond those who voted for him in 2016. "If his administration leads the way in cutting middle class taxes and improving the economy, absolutely he will."

"People don't care about Russia," he continued. "They care about things that impact their life every day. Russia is not one of those. Those are partisan issues. They stir up the base. But the Democratic base already hates the president. They don't need to be stirred up any more."

It's not a bad formula for the president. If Trump were to follow it, he would manage the Russia affair, because it has to be managed. But he would spend his time working on delivering more jobs and higher wages to Americans who voted for him and Americans who didn't. On that, one prediction is pretty safe: If you improve the lives of voters, you'll do pretty well.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.



OTHER VIEWS

The muggle problem

This week we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the first Harry Potter novel, and the beginning — in Britain, at least; the first volume's publication in America came a little later — of a cultural juggernaut that defined a generation's experience with books.

It is a timely anniversary, since if you believe what you read on social media the Potterverse has never been more relevant. As Western politics has become more extreme and a generation raised on Hogwarts more politically engaged, the Potter novels have been embraced ever more fervently as political allegories and moral manuals for our times.

As I write this *The Telegraph of London* has just informed its readers that a poll reveals that Jeremy Corbyn belongs in Gryffindor while Theresa May should be in Slytherin — respectively the bravest and most sinister of houses on the Hogwarts campus. Hillary Clinton has just given a speech praising the Potter novels for instilling progressive values in the young. Meanwhile, the social-media celebrations of 20 years of Potter have temporarily crowded out the endless liberal memes comparing Trump and his court to Voldemort and his Death Eater lackeys.

Writing for *The Spectator* recently, Lara Prendergast offered a good survey of the proliferation of Potterpolitics, from anti-Trump organizers invoking "Dumbledore's Army" to J.K. Rowling's Twitter interventions ("Voldemort was nowhere near as bad," she wrote of Trump's proposed Muslim ban) to Hermione Granger's — sorry, Emma Watson's — role as a roving ambassador for millennial feminism.

Prendergast also offered a harsh assessment of the trend: "If you have ever wondered why young people are often so childish in their politics, why they want to divide the world between tolerant progressives and wicked reactionaries, it helps to understand" that they think they're living in a Potter novel.

Admittedly, if you think that the world really is divided between tolerant progressives and wicked reactionaries, you won't find this assessment all that damning.

But I'm not sure that sort of Manichean vision is actually the most important political teaching in the Potter novels. Because if you take the Potterverse seriously as an allegory for ours, the most noteworthy divide isn't between the good multicultural wizards and the bad racist ones. It's between all the wizards, good and bad, and everybody else — the Muggles.

For the six readers who have never read the Potter books but who have stuck with the column thus far nonetheless: Muggles are non-magical folks, the billions of regular everyday human beings who live and work in blissful ignorance that the wizarding world exists. The only exception comes when one of them marries a wizard or has the genetic luck to give birth to a magic-capable child, in which case they get to watch their offspring ascend to one of the wizarding academies while they experience its raptures and revelations secondhand.

The proper treatment of Muggles, meanwhile, is the great controversy within the wizarding world, where the good guys want them protected, left alone and sometimes studied, while the bad guys want to see them subjugated or enslaved (and all the Muggle-born "mudbloods" purged from the wizarding ranks).

All of this plays as an allegory for racism, up to a point ... but only up to a point, because what's notable is that nobody actually wants to see the mass of Muggles (as opposed to their occasional wizardish offspring) integrated into the wizarding society. Indeed, according to the rules of Rowling's universe, that seems to be impossible. You're either born with magic or you aren't, and if you aren't there's really not any obvious place for you in Hogwarts or any other wizarding establishment.

So even from the perspective of the enlightened, progressive wizarding faction, then, Muggles are basically just a vast surplus population that occasionally produces the new blood that wizarding needs to avoid becoming just a society of snobbish old-money inbred Draco Malfoys. And if that were to change, if any old Muggle could suddenly be trained in magic, the whole thrill of Harry Potter's acceptance at Hogwarts would lose its narrative frisson, its admission-to-the-inner-

circle thrill.

Which makes the thrill of becoming a magical initiate in the Potterverse remarkably similar to the thrill of being chosen by the modern meritocracy, plucked from the ordinary ranks of life and ushered into gothic halls and exclusive classrooms, where you will be sorted — though not by a magic hat, admittedly — according to your talents and your just deserts.

I am stealing this magic-and-meritocracy parallel from the pseudonymous blogger Spotted Toad, who wrote a fine post discussing how much the Potter novels and movies trade upon the powerful loyalty that their readers feel, or feel that they should feel, toward their teachers and their schools. But not just any school — not some suburban John Hughes-style high school or generic Podunk U. No, it's loyalty to a selective school, with

an antique pedigree but a modern claim to excellence, an exclusive admissions process but a pleasingly multicultural student body. A school where everybody knows that they belong, because they can do the necessary magic and ordinary Muggles can't.

Thus the Potterverse, as Toad writes, is about "the legitimacy of authority that comes from schools" — Ivy League schools, elite schools, U.S. News & World Report top

100 schools. And because "contemporary liberalism is the ideology of imperial academia, funneled through media and nonprofits and governmental agencies but responsible ultimately only to itself," a story about a wizarding academy is the perfect fantasy story for the liberal meritocracy to tell about itself.

Especially because (unlike reality) it writes the Muggles, the genuinely ordinary people, out of its political clashes and good-versus-evil conflicts. In the Potter novels the selective school is conterminous with wizarding society as a whole (allowing for some elves and goblins to do maintenance and keep the books), and thus the threats to that world's liberal integrity all come from within the academy's walls, from Slytherin House and its arrogant aristocrats, who must be constantly confronted in the halls and classrooms of the beloved school itself. Voldemort, the dark lord, has Muggle blood, but he isn't trying to rally an army of non-magic-wielders to seize Hogwarts' towers; he's trying to remake meritocratic — er, magical — institutions in his own dark image. And so the battle for Harvard — er, Hogwarts — is the battle for the world.

Which is basically the premise of a great deal of youthful liberal activism these days — that once the last remnants of Slytherin are eradicated from the leafy quads of Yale or Middlebury, once Draco Malfoy's frat or final club is closed and the last Death-Eater sympathizers purged from the faculty, then the battle of ideas will have been finally and fully won.

But even if it were, beyond the walls of the imperial academy all of our world's Muggles would still remain, with an agency and a power that they don't have in the Potterverse.

Because after all it was mostly Muggles, not some dark conspiracy by the Slytherin sort of conservatives, who put Donald Trump in power.

It is Muggles who keep turning to parties of the far left and farther right, Muggles who drift into radicalism and set off bombs. Mass migration, rising nationalism, Islamic terrorism, rural despair — many disruptive forces in our era flow from global Muggledom's refusal to just be a tame and subsidized surplus population, culled for its best and brightest, living only for the hope that occasionally a gifted son or daughter might be lifted up.

In the Potterverse, the meritocracy of magic allows the chosen to withdraw, to disappear behind a curtain into their academic world, leaving Muggledom to its own devices.

In our universe, though, the meritocracy of talent expects the chosen to actually go out and try to rule. On the evidence we have, they are not particularly good at it. And how to lead wisely in a society where most people did not go to Hogwarts is a lesson that J.K. Rowling's lovely, lively, but ultimately childish novels do not teach.

Ross Douthat joined *The New York Times* as an Op-Ed columnist in April 2009.



ROSS DOUTHAT
Comment