

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



Staff photo by Kathy Aney
Vietnam veteran and retired East Oregonian managing editor Skip Nichols reads a story he wrote during a writing workshop for veterans with PTSD. He and five other veterans shared their work last week in Walla Walla.

Support their stories

Lip service is easy, especially for popular causes.

For the past 40 years or so, since the days of misdirected anger toward our veterans coming home from the Vietnam War, our country has gladly rallied around the mantra "Support Our Troops." It's been on bumper stickers and spoken loudly in campaigns, and even those against our wars generally offer their thanks to the men and women who serve.

And yet, those words alone offer little actual support.

There's also been a social movement to pay for a cup of coffee, a beer, a meal or a bag of groceries for veterans and active service members spotted in public. It's tangible gratitude that requires putting money where your mouth is, and a step in the right direction.

But there's a lot more to supporting our armed forces than offering a pat on the back or to pick up a tab.

At the Red Badge Project reading in Walla Walla last week, the group's co-founder Warren Etheredge summed up the group's mission as two-fold.

For veterans, it is a place to explore and work through their painful memories and experiences in a safe setting. Rather than wrestling with the trauma alone, they bring it

to a group that understands where they're coming from.

For non-veterans, Etheredge had a simple suggestion, a step further than lip service — to support their stories. Listen and try to understand to the psychic toll carried by these men and women.

The veterans at Friday's reading told their stories of killing and suicide and fear and loss, and of the difficulty of coping with life after war. They shared their personal demons with a crowd of strangers. It was both heartbreaking and illuminating.

Hearing the stories took no sliver of courage compared to what the veterans showed by standing on that stage. But being willing to listen, to reckon with the toll of war and what follows, gave the audience a window into what true support looks like.

The suicide rate for veterans is unacceptable, and was a common theme through the evening. One speaker called it the dirtiest word of all in politically correct culture. The Red Badge Project helps veterans find a purpose from the pain that a prescription can't provide.

Whether in the structure of Red Badge or in an everyday interaction, hearing the stories of our veterans can offer both healing for them and understanding for the rest of us.

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

How to respond to Trump request for state voter records

The (Eugene) Register Guard

Donald Trump's Presidential Advisory Commission on Voter Integrity brings to mind the joke about a man who stood on a street corner snapping his fingers. A passer-by asked him what he was doing. "Keeping the rhinoceroses away," the man explained. There aren't any rhinoceroses around here, the passerby said. "See?" the man answered. "It's working."

The voter integrity commission is snapping its fingers, demanding that state elections officials provide data on 200 million voters — names, party affiliations, birth dates, criminal records, voting histories and partial Social Security numbers. The commission is looking for the rhinoceros that President Trump claims denied him a popular-vote victory in the 2016 elections: massive voter fraud.

Elections officials in at least 22 states have said they cannot or will not comply with the demand for information. One of the more embarrassing refusals came from Kansas, whose secretary of state, Kris Kobach, is vice chairman of the commission. Privacy laws in Kansas prevent the disclosure of some of the information the commission requested. The refusals are bipartisan: Democrat-led states such as California and Massachusetts rejected the request, while Mississippi's Republican secretary of state said commission members "can go jump in the Gulf of Mexico."

A more measured response came from Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a Republican. Richardson took the opportunity to explain the benefits of Oregon's vote-by-mail and automatic voter registration systems, which result in high participation and

low fraud rates. He said that 15 people have been indicted or convicted of voter fraud since 2000 — fewer than one per year.

Richardson then offered to send the commission the same voter information that is available to anyone upon receipt of the standard \$500 fee. He said state law prevents him from providing personal information as driver's license or Social Security numbers. He then warned that it would be a crime to use the data for commercial purposes.

This is the proper response: The commission deserves no better and no worse treatment than any other party. Voter information that is a matter of public record should be provided promptly and at a reasonable cost. Information that is protected by privacy laws should be guarded.

The commission hopes to gather all this information so that it can be compared to other federal databases, such as lists of non-citizen residents and undocumented immigrants who have been arrested. Trump's expectation is that many matches would be found: "What are they hiding?" Trump tweeted Saturday after he was informed that many states would not grant the commission's request for information.

Critics of the commission believe that its findings, no matter what they are, will be used to justify efforts to make it harder to register to vote and to cast a ballot — restrictions that tend to suppress participation by low-income and minority voters who are likely to be Democrats. But Trump is more than a garden-variety seeker of partisan advantage. He believes there can be no explanation other than fraud for his defeat in the popular vote. The rhinoceroses must be kept at bay.



OTHER VIEWS

What's the matter with Republicans?

Over the past two months the Trump administration and the Republicans in Congress have proposed a budget and two health care plans that would take benefits away from core Republican constituencies, especially working-class voters. And yet over this time Donald Trump's approval rating has remained unchanged, at 40 percent. During this period the Republicans have successfully defended a series of congressional seats.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

They are the personal sins — laziness, self-indulgence, drinking, sleeping around.

Then as now, chaos is always washing up against the door. Very few people actually live up to the code of self-discipline that they preach. A single night of gambling or whatever can produce life-altering bad choices. Moreover, the forces of social disruption are visible on every street: the slackers taking advantage of the disability programs, the people

popping out babies, the drug users, the spouse abusers.

Voters in these places could use some help. But these Americans, like most Americans, vote on the basis of their vision of what makes a great nation. These voters, like most voters,

believe that the values of the people are the health of the nation.

In their view, government doesn't reinforce the vigorous virtues. On the contrary, it undermines them — by fostering initiative-sucking dependency, by letting people get away with their mistakes so they can make more of them and by getting in the way of moral formation.

The only way you build up self-reliant virtues, in this view, is through struggle. Yet faraway government experts want to cushion

people from the hardships that are the schools of self-reliance. Compassionate government threatens to turn people into snowflakes.

In her book "Strangers in Their Own Land," sociologist Arlie Hochschild quotes a woman from Louisiana complaining about the childproof lids on medicine and the mandatory seat-belt laws. "We let them throw lawn darts, smoked alongside them," the woman says of her children. "And they survived. Now it's like your kid needs a helmet, knee pads and elbow pads to go down the kiddie slide."

Hochschild's humble and important book is a meditation on why working-class conservatives vote against more government programs for themselves. She emphasizes that they perceive government as a corrupt arm used against the little guy. She argues that these voters may vote against their economic interests, but they vote for their emotional interests, for candidates who share their emotions about problems and groups.

I'd say they believe that big government support would provide short-term assistance, but it would be a long-term poison to the values that are at the core of prosperity. You and I might disagree with that theory. But it's a plausible theory. Anybody who wants to design policies to help the working class has to make sure they go along the grain of the vigorous virtues, not against them.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at The Weekly Standard, a contributing editor at Newsweek and the Atlantic Monthly, and is currently a commentator on PBS.

Many people see their communities as the way foreign policy realists see the world: as an unvarnished struggle for resources.

What's going on? Why do working-class conservatives seem to vote so often against their own economic interests?

My stab at an answer would begin in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many Trump supporters live in places that once were on the edge of the American frontier. Life on that frontier was fragile, perilous, lonely and remorseless. If a single slip could produce disaster, then discipline and self-reliance were essential. The basic pattern of life was an underlying condition of peril, warded off by an ethos of self-restraint, temperance, self-control and strictness of conscience.

Frontier towns sometimes went from boomtown to Bible Belt in a single leap. They started out lawless. People needed to impose codes of respectability to survive. Frontier religions were often ascetic, banning drinking, card-playing and dancing. And yet there was always a whiff of extreme disorder — drunkenness, violence and fraud — threatening from down below.

Today these places are no longer frontier towns, but many of them still exist on the same knife's edge between traditionalist order and extreme dissolution.

For example, I have a friend who is an avid Trump admirer. He supports himself as a part-time bartender and a part-time home contractor, and by doing various odd jobs on the side. A good chunk of his income is off the books. He has built up a decent savings account, but he has done it on his own, hustling, scrapping his way, without any long-term security. His income can vary sharply from week to week. He doesn't have much trust in the institutions around him. He has worked on government construction projects but sees himself, rightly, as a small-business man.

This isn't too different from the hard, independent life on the frontier. Many people in these places tend to see their communities the way foreign policy realists see the world: as an unvarnished struggle for resources — as a tough world, a no-illusions world, a world where conflict is built into the fabric of reality.

The virtues most admired in such places, then and now, are what Shirley Robin Letwin once called the vigorous virtues: "upright, self-sufficient, energetic, adventurous, independent minded, loyal to friends and robust against foes."

The sins that can cause the most trouble are not the social sins — injustice, incivility, etc.

