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OUR VIEW

You can't fix stupid, but you can take away its matches

The Columbia Gorge is aflame, and the smoke from Eagle Creek has mixed its way (along with smoke from other regional fires) into Eastern Oregon.

Although the view is hazy and the air quality abysmal, its quite clear that the massive blaze was started with fireworks illegally set on the Mt. Hood National Forest.

According to witnesses, a group of teenagers casually tossed smoke bombs and fireworks into the steep valley beneath beautiful Punch Bowl Falls. A surprise to no one with a brain, the dry September brush caught fire. That fire soon got bigger, and by the time of this writing had grown to more than 10,000 acres. Thousands of people have evacuated, many homes are in danger, and so are historic buildings like the Multnomah Falls Lodge. That's not to mention the environmental damage in a place like Eagle Creek, which is a haven for salmon and steelhead and other wildlife. Oh, and there is the recreational damage done to one of the most beautiful and most-used hikes in the Gorge.

Damage, damage, and more damage.

Even though most of our readers are well aware, this is a critical time to remind Oregonians of the dangers of fireworks. And a drive or hike

through the Gorge for the next decade should be a reminder each and every time we pass: Don't use fireworks in Oregon's forests. Bad things will happen. You may be held criminally and financially responsible.

A simple reminder: Don't use fireworks in Oregon's forests.

We must make it perfectly clear to those who have long lived in and loved this state, and those who are new arrivals, that it is never OK to use fireworks on public land. Parents must instill that in their children.

Lighting fireworks in Oregon forests must be culturally verboten — it cannot be something that crosses the mind of even the most rebellious teenager. We have too much at stake, spend too much money, time and energy trying to keep Oregon as beautiful and environmentally pure as possible to have it all go up in smoke by one careless hand.

Oregon could consider banning fireworks. Sale, possession and use. If an outright ban is a bridge too far, then perhaps consider hiking taxes high enough that we can continue hiking in a green Oregon. Shouldn't fireworks be taxed immensely to pay for the cost of fighting the fires that result from them?

We're as red-blooded, Fourth of July-firework loving Americans as you'll find from sea to shining sea. But if you love this country, and you love this state, wouldn't you show it by not setting it on fire?

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

'Stars and bars' a bad fit for Round-Up merchants

When I was little I studied the Civil War outside of school. I learned in the books that I read that the Civil War was fought over slavery and the United States won.

The southern armies almost always flew the battle flag or "stars and bars" because the official flag of the South was too easy to mistake for the American flag. It's an enemy flag.

Round-Up isn't about the Civil War. The hubbub about flag vendors on Main Street isn't about free speech, this is about time and place. Confederate flags don't fit Round-Up.

Liberty Flags & Gifts told me last year that they have flags from many enemies of the United States and not just the Confederate States. Round-Up definitely is not about treason. Go get your \$6,000 somewhere else.

If you're for the Confederacy or the stars and bars or whatever, that's fine with me. I just think you're stupid.

James Tibbets Pendleton

Confederate flag is not racist, should be welcome

In response to the Main Street Cowboys not allowing the flag vendor to be on Main this year, here is what I have to say.

First of all, the flag is not the "Confederate Flag." It is the "Battle Flag of Northern Virginia." The stars are laid out in the pattern of an X, and the blue bands are put on the 13 stars to show that the southern states no longer wanted to

be a part of the union with the northern states. In simpler terms, the message of flag's design is simply this: cross us out of your Union.

The southern states withdrew from the union in a movement called "secession," which led to the Civil War. That is the only message this flag is sending.

If this flag actually represented slavery, hatred, white supremacy or something worse — as so many biased and uneducated people so foolishly believe — then its design would reflect that by incorporating images of those whom it stood against, and there would be a big X on their images. But that is not what is on this flag. And that is not the message this flag sends.

This flag is not racist. Never has been. Never will be. All that people need to have to be able to see and understand this truth is a basic knowledge of history and an ounce of common sense.

We need all the vendors and all diversities of the vendors to keep this town alive. We cannot start acting like other states. This hate has to stop somewhere. I refuse to let this town end up like Charlottesville, or the many others desecrating monuments. We will not run over people, we will not tear down our statues, will not tear down our heritage.

We are famous for Round-Up. This could tarnish us, first the flag, then what — our statues? Then what? We look no better than any other state and then no one wants to come to Round-Up or to our town for fear of being harmed or run out of town due to race, creed or color. That's not what this country is about. We are all equal.

Donald Edwin Lien Jr. Pendleton



OTHER VIEWS

The real campus scourge

Across the country, college freshmen are settling into their new lives and grappling with something that doesn't compete with protests and political correctness for the media's attention, something that no one prepared them for, something that has nothing to do with being "snowflakes" and everything to do with being human.

They're lonely. In a sea of people, they find themselves adrift. The technology that keeps them connected to parents and high school friends only reminds them of their physical separation from just about everyone they know best. That estrangement can be a gateway to binge drinking and other self-destructive behavior. And it's as likely to derail their ambitions as almost anything else.

Brett Epstein felt it. "I spent my first night in the dorm and it hit me like a pile of bricks: It's just me here," Epstein, a 21-year-old senior at the College of Charleston, told me about his start there three years ago. "I was completely freaked out."

Clara Nguyen felt it, too. "It's a lot more difficult to make friends than people make it out to be," Nguyen, a 19-year-old sophomore at UCLA, told me about her experience last year. "I didn't know how to be someone new while at the same time being who I always was."

The problem sounds so ordinary, so obvious: People in an unfamiliar location confront dislocation. On their own two legs for the first time, they're wobbly. Who would expect otherwise?

Well, most of them did, because college isn't sold to teenagers as just any place or passage. It's a gaudily painted promise. The time of their lives! The disparity between myth and reality stuns many of them, and various facets of youth today — from social media to a secondary-school narrative that frames admission to college as the end of all worry — worsen the impact.

Harry Rockland-Miller, who just retired as director for the Center for Counseling and Psychological Health at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, told me the emblematic story of a freshman he treated:

"He was 18. He came to school and was invited to a party his first weekend, and he didn't know anybody. So he started to drink. He drank way too much and ended up lying on a bench in his residential hall, feeling very sick. Nobody stopped and said, 'How are you doing? Are you OK?' And he felt so isolated. When he came in to speak with me the next day, the thing that struck him — what he said — was, 'There I was, alone, with all these people around.'"

Alone, with all these people around. In a survey of nearly 28,000 students on 51 campuses by the American College Health Association last year, more than 60 percent said that they had "felt very lonely" in the previous 12 months. Nearly 30 percent said that they had felt that way in the previous two weeks.

Victor Schwartz, medical director of the Jed Foundation, which is one of the nation's leading advocacy groups for the mental health of teenagers and young adults, said that those findings were consistent with his own observation of college students today. "While they expected that academics and finances would be sources of stress," he told me, "many students were lonely and thought this was sort of unique to them, because no one talked about it."

Their peers in fact do something that mine couldn't back in the 1980s, when I attended college: use Facebook and Instagram to perform pantomimes of uninterrupted fun and unalloyed fabulousness. And these "highly



FRANK BRUNI
Comment

curated selves," as UCLA psychologist Elizabeth Gong-Guy called them, "amplify the fact that you're sitting in your residence hall alone."

Gong-Guy runs her university's Campus and Student Resilience program, which helps students with emotional struggles and exemplifies many schools' intensifying efforts to address loneliness, among other mental health issues.

Extended, elaborate freshmen orientation schedules are another intended prophylactic against loneliness, which is a common reason for dropping out. And as Lawrence Biemiller recently noted in an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, there's even a push to place and design freshmen dormitories so that solitary time is minimized and interaction maximized.

Three new residence halls at Goucher College, one of which opened last fall and two of which are nearing completion, typify this trend. Goucher's president, José Antonio Bowen, said that the center-of-hall situation of

College freshmen are settling into their new lives and grappling with something that no one prepared them for: they're lonely

bathrooms, the glass walls of laundry rooms and even the speed of the wireless connection in common areas — much faster than in the rooms — are deliberate pushbacks against forces that can isolate students.

"Students are arriving on college campuses with all of their high school friends on their phones," Bowen told me, referring to the technological quirks of today. They too easily substitute virtual interactions for physical ones, withdrawing from their immediate circumstances

and winding up lonely as a result. That's why the solution isn't hourly messages from concerned moms and dads, whose stubborn attentiveness, no matter how well meant, can leave their children psychologically frail. Mental health experts and college administrators recommend a more thoughtful organization of campus life and more candid conversations about the tricky transition to college.

Nguyen, the UCLA sophomore, said that in her Vietnamese-American family in Southern California, all the talk was of doing well enough in high school to get to college and not about the challenges college itself might present. Epstein, the College of Charleston senior, said that his popularity in high school in the suburbs of New York City perhaps distracted him from any awareness that "I was going 700 miles away and being dropped in a place of 10,000 people and wasn't going to know anybody." What followed, he added, was "a long battle with anxiety and depression."

One of the narrators of Tom Perrotta's superb new novel, "Mrs. Fletcher," is a former high school lacrosse star who arrives on campus "after all the endless buildup" and develops a "queasy feeling" that his world has become at once more populous and a whole lot colder. "There I was, people-watching and eating my omelet," he says of one morning in the dining hall, "and the next thing I knew my throat swelled up. And then my eyes started to water."

We urge new college students not to party too hard. We warn them of weight gain ("the freshman 15"). We also need to tell them that what's often behind all that drinking and eating isn't celebration but sadness, which is normal, survivable and shared by many of the people around them, no matter how sunny their faces or their Facebook posts.

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since 2011, joined the newspaper in 1995.

LETTERS POLICY

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