

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

Protect your credit like your home

Data breaches like the one reported by credit-reporting company Equifax are a great calamity of modern life. The ancient Egyptians had swarms of locusts; we have plagues of identity thieves and computer hackers. Nowadays we aren’t totally at the whim of nature or some capricious higher power, but we do have to actively protect our own interests.

In the case of Equifax, the breach lasted from mid-May through July. The hackers accessed people’s names, Social Security numbers, birth dates, addresses and, in some instances, driver’s license numbers. They also stole credit card numbers for about 209,000 people and dispute documents with personal identifying information for about 182,000 people, according to the Federal Trade Commission. You can visit www.equifaxsecurity2017.com for more information and to perform a basic check on whether your data is known to have been compromised.

This was, of course, far from the first time a company or agency has lost control of private confidential information. Yahoo, Target and others have been in the news when electronic burglars have blown holes in Internet security and made off with information that can be used to set up fraudulent credit cards, empty bank accounts, divert tax refunds and commit other forms of theft.

It bears remembering that companies on the receiving end of computer hacks are victims themselves, incurring great costs and loss of trust.

At the same time, however, these companies bear comparison to a bank that didn’t employ good enough security guards or a strong enough vault for our money. After all the breaches of recent years, it is angering and dispiriting to learn a company set up to make money by policing the credit of individual Americans itself became the instrument that could allow criminals to wreck our credit. Lawsuits will inevitably arrive at a fuller understanding of how this happened and whether it should have been possible to avoid it. In technical legal terms, a major question will be whether companies owe consumers

a fiduciary duty to fully safeguard our information. Most of us would argue they do.

In the meantime, we clearly must all become more active participants in protecting our own financial interests. Just as every responsible parent cautions young-adult children to guard debit and credit cards as if they were actual cash, we all must treat our credit lines and financial facts in the same way — like cash that can be stolen if we aren’t vigilant.

Having credit that some criminal can wreck is a decidedly modern “first-world problem” — in other words, a nuisance we’re highly privileged to possess. Even half a century ago in America, such easy access to credit was unheard of. And in much of the world, it still doesn’t exist. In essence, most of us have a nearly forgotten slush fund of hypothetical money floating around for thieves to grab when we aren’t watching.

We each should treat the Equifax incident as a spur to revamp management of our credit assets. The *Washington Post* offers some concise advice on how to freeze (and unfreeze) your credit in such a way as to keep others from tapping it.

Other necessary steps include becoming more knowledgeable about passwords and the security questions financial institutions commonly use to establish people are who they say they are. For example, a genealogy blogger has described how publicly accessible online family trees can provide scammers with many answers to commonly asked security questions, such as your mother’s maiden name.

Responding to all this is a hassle, one that most of us assumed we didn’t need to deal with. But we obviously can’t trust private corporations — or possibly even public agencies — to treat our private information as cautiously as they should. Congress and state lawmakers should hold corporate feet to the fire to make rights, responsibilities and penalties completely clear. And each of us must acknowledge and act upon the knowledge that our credit requires careful ongoing management.

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

Respect is a two-way street, even on Pennsylvania Avenue

I always adhered to the idea that there is an obligation for the citizens of this country to respect the person in the office of President of the United States, regardless of your view on the politics of the moment or whether you voted for that person or not. The flip side of that belief is the person in the position of President is obligated to respect the citizenry that elected him/her, and also respect the institutions through which he/she was elected. Now, I feel an overwhelming current of open disrespect emanating from our President directed at any person, any group, or any entity that does not agree with him. That is not how you get work done.

The adversarial politics of our leadership through the past decade has been destructive. It is exacerbated by the time wasters of petty name calling and temper tantrum over trivial matters, a habit now embodied routinely by the current President. I believe the Office of the President sets the tone for our nation. If we use trash-talk to insult others; nations, institutions, or individual citizens, we should be prepared to get trash-talk back. When we use that technique to isolate groups of our citizens, we will not only get that back in verbal form, but also in the form

of protest. Then we are threatened by upheaval from domestic conflict.

I understand media bias, but I also see inconsistent and incorrect messages coming from our White House. Assurance does not come from assertions that are obviously false, even if they are of little consequence, like the number of people attending an assembly. I caution elected officials against becoming The Emperor’s Men admiring the Emperor’s New Clothes. Saying it is true does not make it truth. The greatness of this nation comes through working to find common ground. When we lose that, we lose our unity and become a nation of separatists.

The most efficient way to collapse a nation is to:

- take away or reduce access to information (discredit the media; release inconsistent or vague information),
- isolate and reduce the power structure (malign judiciary; implement nepotism; reduce or ‘confuse’ communication between lawmakers and citizens),
- alienate neighbors and partners,
- assign negative stereotypes to large segments of the population (support discrimination based on religion, national origin, race, color, or sex),
- devalue diverse opinion become ego- and ethno-centric.

Lynn Robertson
Pendleton

OTHER VIEWS

Want geniuses? Welcome immigrants

Maybe “some are rapists,” in Donald Trump’s nasty words. But many are geniuses. Just ask the MacArthur Foundation, which responded to our president’s frequent demonization of immigrants, including that infamous phrase, by doing a little math.

Every year since 1981, the foundation has bestowed so-called genius grants on more than 20 of the country’s most accomplished and promising scientists, scholars, artists and writers. These awards are a huge deal, trumpeted in the media and worn with pride forevermore. And the winners, typically in the middle of their careers, get \$625,000 each.

Of the 965 geniuses (or, more properly, MacArthur fellows) to date, 209 were born outside the United States, according to Cecilia Conrad, who leads the fellowship program. That’s 21.7 percent. The 2010 census determined that less than 13 percent of the U.S. population is foreign-born.

FRANK BRUNI
Comment

Conrad wondered whether MacArthur fellows are anomalies. They’re not. She looked back over the past 3 ½ decades — which is the life span of the fellowships — to see who’d received other top honors given only to U.S. citizens and residents.

She found that immigrants were overrepresented among the winners of the Pulitzer Prize for music, of the National Humanities Medal and especially of the John Bates Clark Medal, which recognizes brilliant U.S. economists under the age of 40. Thirty-five percent of these economists were foreign born, including people from India, Turkey and Ukraine.

The far-right paranoiacs and scaremongers who pressured Trump to end DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) hate to acknowledge what we reality-moored types understand: Many of our country’s finest minds and brightest ideas are forged when dreamers from elsewhere encounter an unfamiliar place with unimaginable possibilities. There’s a creative spark in that convergence. It has powered American greatness.

That’s the moral of the MacArthur Foundation’s math, which it shared first with *The New York Times*. That’s also the moral of the Nobel Prizes. According to an analysis late last year by Adil Najam, a Boston University professor: “Since its inception in 1901, the Nobel Prizes and the Prize in Economic Sciences have been awarded 579 times to 911 people and organizations. The U.S. alone has had more than 350 Nobel winners. More than 100 of these have been immigrants and individuals born outside of the United States.” If immigrants to the United States were considered their own country, Najam wrote, their tally of Nobels would exceed that of every country but the United States.

An article about immigrants in *The Atlantic* just a few years ago noted that the four U.S.-based physicists who sounded the 1939 warning about nuclear weapons that led to the Manhattan Project were born outside the United States. The article went on to point out that “immigrants or the children of immigrants have founded or co-founded nearly every legendary American technology company, including Google, Intel, Facebook, and of course Apple (you knew that Steve Jobs’ father was named Abdulfattah Jandali, right?).”

And Jennifer Hunt, a professor of economics at Rutgers University, has done research showing that among graduates of U.S. colleges, immigrants are twice as likely to receive patents as native-born Americans. Her research further suggests that this doesn’t come at the expense of native-born Americans but in fact stimulates their innovation, too. “You’re bouncing ideas off each other,” Hunt told me.

Her findings speak to the oft-charted success of U.S. immigrants in STEM (science, technology, economics and math)

fields. The MacArthur grants cover the humanities, too; the past decade’s winners include such celebrated writers as Junot Díaz, born in the Dominican Republic; Edwidge Danticat, born in Haiti; and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, author of “Americanah,” born in Nigeria.

José Quiñonez, named a genius last year for his pioneering work in financial services, was born in Mexico, the country vilified in Trump’s “rapists” remark. He told me that he and his siblings immigrated illegally in 1980, after their mother died, to live with relatives in San Jose, California. He was 9.

He studied hard and got a master’s degree from Princeton. He said that his four siblings, like him, have good jobs, two as high school teachers. Long before Trump’s campaign, he heard and cringed at complaints that Mexican immigrants were criminals, freeloaders. “Especially early on, I began to believe: Maybe I was lazy, maybe I was broken?”

said Quiñonez, 46, who now lives in Oakland, California. “But there was something in our family that helped us reject that narrative. We fought back against that narrative. I never allowed it to seep into my soul.”

It’s possible that the bounty of immigrants who’ve won MacArthur grants demonstrates some predisposition among foundation executives toward certain life stories and a desire to promote people who have been overlooked and underappreciated. Some critics of the foundation have asserted that.

But it’s worth noting that if the foundation took into account children of immigrants as well as immigrants themselves, the percentage of its geniuses that reflects the benefits of immigration would be higher than 21.7. It’s also worth noting that for most of the grant’s history, foreign-born people constituted less than 10 percent of the U.S. population.

The immigrants who’ve won MacArthur grants include refugees, and I spoke with one, An-My Lê, 57, who fled Saigon as a teenager at the end of the Vietnam War. She finished high school in Sacramento, went to college at Stanford, got graduate degrees there and at Yale, and drew acclaim for photography with war and military themes. Her work has been exhibited at the country’s most prominent museums. She lives in Brooklyn and teaches at Bard College in upstate New York.

I asked her what she made of immigrants’ prevalence among MacArthur geniuses. “I think most of us feel very lucky to be here, so we work extremely hard,” she said. “I think maybe trauma is part of what drives us.” She added that in terms of innovation, “Having the different perspectives, having the different life experiences, makes you see things differently.” Fresh ideas and great art are often born that way.

Conrad, the MacArthur Foundation executive, said that in all the debate lately about how many immigrants our country needs for jobs of varying skill levels, she hears too little about the ambient impact of immigrants on the United States’ creative climate. “They have certain attributes,” she told me. “They are risk takers.” And their thinking and discoveries are nourished by “the experience of dislocation, of navigating a new culture and a new set of norms,” she said.

They come with a sort of hunger and a kind of gaze that don’t subtract from what those of us already here have but, instead, add to it. They give us insights, inventions, art. Embracing their genius is the genius of America.

■

Frank Bruni, an Op-Ed columnist for *The New York Times* since June 2011, joined the newspaper in 1995 and has ranged broadly across its pages. He has been both a *White House* correspondent and the chief restaurant critic.

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.