

# The pain and joy of watching girls grow up

Last week, *The Oregonian* published a story describing the growing number of people who were tuning to the Hallmark holiday series, in many cases trying to escape from the news of the day. We live in unsettling times and as the holiday season moves into full swing, it is important we find sources of reflection and comfort that remind us of the true joys of this magical time.

I love that old Hallmark ad where the farmer dons a wool coat, puts on his gloves and boots, picks up his lantern and trudges through the snow to the top of a special hill where he stands looking wondrously at the clear winter sky and watches Christmas Eve fold into Christmas morning. There is no doubt this is a tradition he has maintained for several decades.

Just before the transition takes place, he reaches into the pocket of his coat and brings out a card written to him by a daughter who lives far enough away that on this night, she is not able to share the moment in person with her father. It is apparent that on many such previous occasions, however, she was with him for this magical moment and she reminds him in writing that while she cannot be standing beside him on the hilltop, she is still there in spirit and in memory.

His face becomes a mixture of reflection and guarded emotion.

Oh, I know it's only an advertisement,



GEORGE MURDOCK  
Comment

but Hallmark has a way of capturing the moment and while their programming for their special movies is superb, it's their ads that I find the most intriguing. The formula for their movies is also pretty predictable but it doesn't stop them from being a marvelous escape.

Somehow, they know what moves us.

Dads are the members of the family whose emotions are expected to remain somewhere on a shelf. It's all about the "guy thing."

In the case of sons, there are male outlets that, while not classified as emotional experiences, are macho events that are physically manifested in things like hunting, fishing, attending sports events, chasing cows, watching Monday Night Football or a host of other similar activities. When it comes to those sweet young girls who are now wives and mothers or on the verge, well, we don't know exactly where we fit in anymore. For dads who have daughters who have now grown up, moved away and started families and lives of their own, our opportunities to bond are more limited.

When I first wrote this column, my own two daughters were in their 30s and I was blessed with a new generation who were 7 and 4 at the time. Now, that 7 year old is only months away from high school graduation.

When I first wrote, I talked about my

daughters as the same young ladies who, just a few years ago, were happy to sit on our laps, beg us to take them shopping because they knew dad was a little looser with the wallet, or stand awkwardly in the living room while a shaking young 16-year-old tried to pin on a corsage as we snapped multiple photos.

Ten years ago I was comforted by the fact they had provided me with little ones who were only too happy to sit on my lap, listen to stories and be reminded the old guy they call papa actually once looked like their own dad, amazing as the concept might seem. These same little ones looked through old pictures that provided evidence there was once a lot less of papa except on top where once upon a time he had hair.

As they transition to adulthood, these girls become a new source of pride in other ways as they increasingly take on important professional and leadership roles in the communities to which they have migrated. That phenomenon, perhaps, makes the equation even a little more confusing.

Christmas is just a few days away and dads all over Eastern Oregon will be having another chance to spend a few hours or a few days with those little girls.

Sadly, like the lonely farmer who walks solo to the top of the hill, some only will be able to talk by phone or read a message. In other cases, there might be a chance to travel across the country to join them.

In all cases, they will be in our hearts.

Many of us grew up in an age when communication meant writing and we still have the cards those little girls made for us on special occasions. Many of us also have letters and cards sent by special people in our lives who are now only a memory.

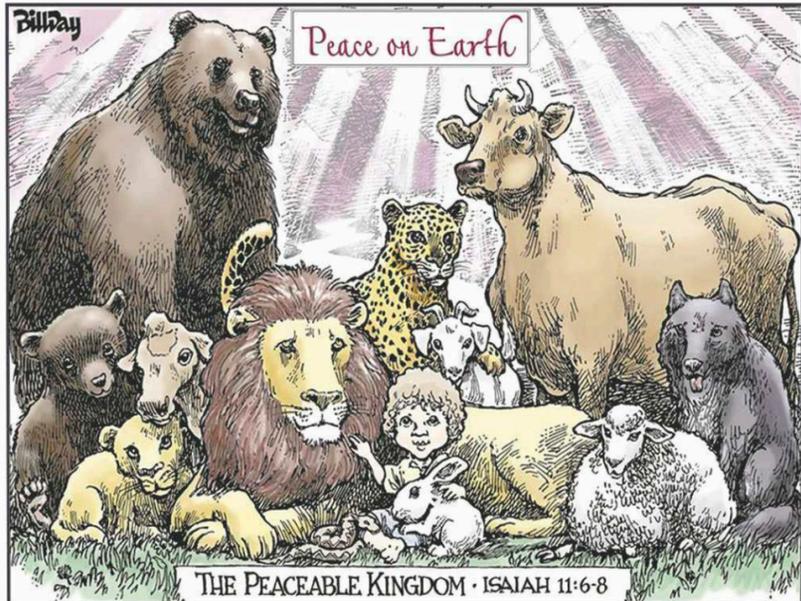
My two daughters and my two granddaughters live not far away and we will be together for part of the holidays, although we now share them with other families.

As their father and grandfather, I'm not exactly sure what the equation is supposed to look like now that they are in their 40s and late teens, but somehow the Christmas season always serves as a reminder of the joy they have provided throughout each transition in their life and mine.

And I can't think of a more meaningful gift to reflect upon.

George Murdock is a Umatilla County Commissioner.

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## Politics should step aside when children's health at risk

This year has been one of stark partisanship, with rhetoric from both sides of the aisle seeking to stress differences between Democrats and Republicans. But one thing I thought we all could agree on is that we need to do everything we can to look out for our children. I see our responsibility and mission as legislators — and the core purpose of our Constitution — as ensuring children have safe spaces, full bellies, and good health.

That's why I am outraged that the majority in Congress has refused to act to renew the Children's Health Insurance Program, commonly referred to as CHIP.

For 20 years the program, with strong bipartisan support, has ensured that no children fall through the cracks of our health care system. It provides states with funding to cover health care expenses for children whose families have incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid, but too low to afford expensive private coverage.

Oregon's CHIP program, called Oregon Healthy Kids, last year helped more than 140,000 Oregon children access health care. Thanks to CHIP, 1,899 children from Umatilla County — that's 9 percent of children in the county — this year have been able to access check-ups, immunizations, dental care, doctors' visits, and other important health care services.

Funding for CHIP expired on September 30, because Congress failed to extend funding for the program. Every single state in America — 50 out of 50 states — has a CHIP program.

Oregon, along with five other states, will run out of CHIP money this month. Another 25 states will run out of CHIP money in the first three months of 2018.

It is completely unacceptable that the Congressional majority allowed CHIP to expire — and it's even more outrageous that they've waited 82 days and counting to reauthorize it.



JEFF MERKLEY  
Comment

Right now there is a bipartisan bill ready and waiting to be brought to the Senate floor. It would extend the Children's Health Insurance Program through 2022. It was passed by the Finance Committee with unanimous support. The Senate could take up that bill right now and pass it. So what's the holdup? Why is health care for our children being disrupted?

The answer makes my blood boil: It is a pawn in cynical political machinations. The majority leadership in Congress is using the health and well-being of thousands of children in Umatilla County and 9 million children

Thousands of children in Umatilla County and 9 million across the country cannot be a bargaining chip.

across the country as a bargaining chip. Instead of taking up this bipartisan bill, they're holding it hostage to try to win concessions in budget negotiations. The most the majority is willing to give our children is a paltry three-month extension of the program that was included in a continuing appropriations bill. Three months is unacceptable; we need

to create stability and reliability for our children by reauthorizing this program for years to come.

The holidays are around the corner, and no parents should have to worry at this time of year that an illness or injury could endanger their child's life or family's finances. I am urging my Senate colleagues on both sides of the aisle to urgently prioritize issues that are essential to working folks — like ensuring the children who rely on CHIP can keep getting the care they need.

There is no reason I can see that we shouldn't be able to agree that protecting health care for 9 million children across the country is an absolute top priority. That is our responsibility. That should be our mission. We must get it done. Nine million American children are waiting.

Jeff Merkley is Oregon's junior U.S. Senator.

## The Interior Department is being destroyed

During his confirmation hearing and throughout his time in office, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has presented himself as an admirer of Teddy Roosevelt and a believer in conservation. But less than a year into his tenure, his leadership has produced an existential crisis at the Department of the Interior.

Zinke has surprised many with his willingness to support President Trump's extreme environmental policies, including the recent attempt to erase most of two national monuments in Utah from the map. Those policies have extended to the attempted dismantling of the Interior Department itself, which, as Zinke recently told *Outside Magazine*, he plans to reorganize along the lines of a "military command." He indicated to Congress earlier this year that this plan will include losing approximately 4,000 Interior staff and slashing the department's budget by \$1.6 billion.

This plan has not improved Interior's already low staff morale, which Zinke damaged earlier this year when he claimed (inaccurately) that a large percentage of personnel were not loyal to "the flag." To boost *esprit de corps*, he has installed a deer-hunting video game at headquarters and instituted "bring a dog to work day," neither of which have had any effect on the underlying substantive reason employees are worried.

As part of his reorganization, Zinke intends to move the headquarters of several agencies more than a thousand miles from Washington, D.C., to be closer to what he calls "the front line." As he describes it, these drastic moves will result in multiple agencies with different missions operating under what he calls a "Joint Management Agency" structure similar to a joint military command.

"That's how we fight wars," Zinke reportedly said in outlining his vision to employees at Alaska's Denali National Park. Tellingly, this is just part of the secretary's broader attempt to militarize the department he now oversees. As the *Washington Post* reported in October, the former Navy SEAL demands that a DOI employee raise a flag over the building whenever he enters his office in Washington and lower it when he leaves.

He should read the literature on military management theory more closely. A 2012 Army War College research paper titled "Leading Change: Military Leadership in Civilian Organizations" describes what Zinke is doing and why it fails. As the paper



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argues, military leaders who take civilian leadership positions late in their careers often find the transition jarring and confusing. Some expect the rest of the world to match their military experiences and are lost when it doesn't happen.

Zinke insists on seeing our nation's conservation and wildlife management agencies as military branches, which sometimes combine forces on particular missions, and himself as a general leading the fight.

The fundamental difference in structures, purposes and operating cultures between Interior, which manages our national parks and natural resources, and the Pentagon, which fights terrorism and conducts military operations overseas, is lost on him.

The National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management and other agencies manage our federal

lands for balanced use and public enjoyment, but they follow different laws and mandates. There's a reason you can drill for oil on BLM land but not in a national park. To order agencies with different priorities to work together on some vaguely defined "operational" basis is a recipe for confusion and inevitable staff attrition, though this might suit the Trump administration just fine.

It is impossible to criticize this on the merits because not only are there no merits, there seems to be no real plan. Neither Zinke nor his assistants have opened the specifics of their proposed reorganization to public or congressional input. It shouldn't be too much to ask for Zinke to explain his thinking before he starts making irreversible moves.

Until that happens, we're in the dark. Zinke has provided no data to explain how the move will save time or taxpayer money. It is not based on any demonstrated public demand. Despite his professed respect for military-style operational planning, Zinke is taking an enormous leap forward based on spotty personnel management theories and a hunch that it might work.

As the saying goes, if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Secretary Zinke's military career is impressive, but it did not provide him with the broad array of skills his current job demands. The secretary is not at war. He needs to retreat.

Raul M. Grijalva, D-Arizona, is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, the opinion service of *High Country News*. He is the second-most senior member of the House Natural Resources Committee.

There are no merits, there is no plan.

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