

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Come together right now

News is coming fast and furious these days — so fast it can be hard to keep up. But the indictment against 13 Russian nationals unsealed last week in Washington, D.C., laid bare the fact that a foreign government was meddling successfully in our political process.

And that should make us stop and consider the implications for more than just a moment.

As others have noted in these opinion pages over the past week, news of Russian meddling is not earth-shaking. And we’re not so naive to think the United States hasn’t acted similarly for decades, both with covert and overt operations the world over. Loch K. Johnson, the dean of American intelligence scholars, told Scott Shane this week that “(The United States) has been doing this kind of thing since the C.I.A. was created in 1947.”

Yet in our modern world, manipulation and propaganda has become more subtle than briefcases filled with money, incendiary mailers delivered to doorsteps, or salacious

information slipped to newspapers.

Social media allows us to become easier targets. Facebook is a near-perfect portal for passing along dubious information, and covering your tracks while doing it. It is an outrage that these billion-dollar corporations are becoming rich while polluting civil discourse and, like Russia, publishing information designed to inflame and distract.

Those attempting to divide our nation are exploiting an American nature that we have been far too eager to engage ourselves. We’re too likely to pass along information that confirms our biases or picks on people we disagree with. We’re too easy to demonize the other side in the debate. We’re too lax at considering different opinions.

But we should not feel helpless in the battle for our knowledge and our vote. We can read different sources.

We can take education seriously and never stop learning. We can conduct ourselves decently online, and think of those we interact with as real humans who want our world to be better — but



have a different way of getting there.

Enemies of our democracy, Russia included, love to see Americans yelling at one another. They love it even more when we turn our deadly weapons against one another. But why make the Russians and ISIS and Kim Jong-Un happy with our infighting?

We are not vulnerable. We are a rich, powerful, free nation. Life is good for most. As a whole, the world is richer and healthier and more peaceful than ever before.

We can argue about taxes and government, immigration and gun control. We can argue online and in the street. And we should do all of these things — but we should do it peacefully, and with respect, and with people who we know are real humans and not trolls.

This movement toward nationalism and ethnic identity is a reaction to globalization, loss of identity and fear of change. Still, we can rise above the anxiety of the moment, trust our neighbors and thwart our enemies.



YOUR VIEWS

We need to find way to sensible gun control

I have watched and read reactions to school shootings, and the sad thread I always see is willful misunderstanding of each other’s views, vilification and a lack of common decency rather than debate and discussion. The NRA’s battle cry is that sensible gun control legislation is certain to lead to all gun ownership being illegal. On the opposite side are those who think all gun owners are a bunch of idiots who would sacrifice others in support of their right to bear any and all arms.

We need to get out of our silos and be willing to look at facts, not alternative facts that fit our narrative. It is a fact that the high incidence of school shootings is a uniquely American problem. Other countries all deal with the same societal and mental health problems as the U.S. without these constant deadly shootings. The lack of intellectual curiosity to ask ourselves why this is so astounds me. My purpose is not to rant but to provoke us to reexamine ourselves and what we assume to be true.

There have always been weapons used for marksmanship. I can imagine the further thrill of firing an assault style weapon and huge magazines that let you fire repeatedly. It’s exhilarating, it’s challenging, and heck, downright fun.

There is nothing wrong with being a thrill seeker, but this weapon was not designed for target shooting. It was designed for killing people brutally and quickly.

Sometimes common sense and the good of society need to prevail over our individual wants to be able to exercise our individual freedom. I would argue that an assault weapons bans is one of those times where to give up something that might be perfectly safe in your hands for the good of all is warranted.

Those other countries? One thing we know for sure is they do not allow citizens to own assault style weapons. It is not the only piece of the puzzle but it is a big, obvious piece. Would it stop everyone from acquiring a gun illegally or using other guns or weapons? No. It may be imperfect in search of the good, but if it saved a deadly shooting from being a mass shooting, I think denying

us the pleasure of owning such weapons and some inconvenience when buying others is a small price to pay.

Anita Burrows
Pendleton

Forest plan revision would reduce motorized access

In the next few months we anticipate the release of the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision. This revision by the U.S. Forest Service is a rewrite of the 1990 Forest Plan that currently sets policy for management of our lands administered by the Forest Service in Eastern Oregon.

The revision will cover all three national forests and calls for a monumental shift in how East Oregonians enjoy our mountains and access natural resources we have utilized for over 150 years.

That shift will take place in adoption of a “closed unless open” forest model. This new model will adopt motorized access restrictions known as “designated routes” and “closed cross country travel.” When adopted, East Oregonians will no longer be allowed to access natural resources via a motorized means if they are not within a designated route. You will not be allowed to you retrieve your big game with an ATV off a road and, if your private property isn’t on a designated route, you will have to request permission from the Forest Service to access it. These are but a couple of examples.

Any motorized use off a designated route could lead to a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or up to a year in jail.

To be clear, the forest plan revision does not close the forest, as that will happen through the travel management plan. But the plan revision will allow the Forest Service to change current policy cutting off cross country travel, then justify travel management plans that restrict motorized access to public lands.

Please participate in the upcoming objection process and let the Forest Service know these restrictions are unacceptable. You expect your public lands to remain open to full multiple use, not to the segregated system currently being proposed.

John D. George
Bates, Ore.

OTHER VIEWS

The necessity of discomfort

NOTE: This is the text of a lecture delivered Tuesday at the University of Michigan.

I’d like to express my appreciation for Knight-Wallace for hosting me in Ann Arbor today. It’s a great honor. I think of Knight-Wallace as a citadel of American journalism. And, Lord knows, we need a few citadels, because journalism today is a profession under several sieges.

To name a few:

There is the economic siege, particularly the collapse of traditional revenue streams, which has undermined the ability of scores of news organizations to remain financially healthy and invest in the kind of in-depth investigative, enterprise, local and foreign reporting this country so desperately needs.

There is a cultural siege, as exemplified by the fact that a growing number of Americans seem to think that if something is reported in the so-called mainstream media, it is ipso facto untrue.

There’s a technological siege, which not only has changed the way we work, and distribute our work, but has also created a new ecosystem in which it is increasingly difficult to distinguish fact from opinion, clickbait from substance, and real news from fake.

Then there is the president of the United States. We are all familiar with the ways in which Donald Trump’s demagogic assault on the press has already normalized presidential mendacity, mainstreamed “alternative facts,” and desensitized millions of Americans to both.

But there is also a fifth siege, and this is the one I want to focus on today: This is the siege of the perpetually enraged audience.

This is no small thing when it comes to the health, reputation and future prospects of our profession. Journalism, by its nature, must necessarily be responsive to its audience, attuned to its interests, sensible to its tastes, alert to its evolution. Fail to do this, and you might not survive as a news organization.

At the same time, journalism can only be as good as its audience. Intelligent coverage requires intelligent readers.

We cannot invest in long-form, in-depth journalism for readers interested only in headlines, first paragraphs, or list-icles. We cannot purchase the services of talented wordsmiths and expert editors if people are indifferent to the quality of prose. We cannot maintain expensive foreign bureaus if audiences are uninterested in the world beyond our shores. We cannot expect columnists to be provocative if readers cancel their subscriptions the moment they feel “triggered” by an opinion they dislike.

In sum, we cannot be the keepers of what you might call liberal civilization — I’m using the word liberal in its broad, philosophical sense, not the narrowly American ideological one — if our readers have illiberal instincts, incurious minds, short attention spans and even shorter fuses.

A newspaper, after all, isn’t supposed to be a form of mental comfort food. We are not an advocacy group, a support network, a cheering section, or a church affirming a particular faith — except, that is, a faith in hard and relentless questioning. Our authority derives from our willingness to



BRET STEPHENS
Comment

challenge authority, not only the authority of those in power, but also that of commonplace assumptions and conventional wisdom.

In other words, if we aren’t making our readers uncomfortable every day, we aren’t doing our job. There’s an old saying that the role of the journalist is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, but the saying is wrong. The role of the journalist is to afflict, period.

News is new— new information, new challenges, new ideas — and it is meant to unsettle us.

That’s a good thing. To be unsettled and discomforted is the world’s great motivator. It is a prick to conscience, a prod to thinking, a rebuke to complacency and a spur to action.

Now, when I say we need to be making our readers uncomfortable, I don’t mean we should gratuitously insult them if we can avoid it. But neither should we make an effort to play to their biases, or feed this or that political narrative, or dish the dirt solely on the people we love to hate, or avoid certain topics for fear of stirring readers’ anger, even if it means a few canceled subscriptions. Especially in an age in which subscribers account for an ever-greater share of our revenue, publishers will have to be as bold in standing up to occasional, if usually empty, threats of mass cancellations for this or that article as they were in standing up to the demands of advertisers in a previous era.

What I mean by making readers uncomfortable is to offer the kind of news that takes aim at your own deeply held convictions and shibboleths.

The truth may set you free, but first it is going to tick you off. This is why free speech requires constitutional protection, especially in a democratic society. Free speech may be the most essential vehicle for getting the truth out. But the truth, as anyone minimally versed in history knows, is rarely popular at first.

It’s fair to say that Americans of different ideological stripes feel that many things have gone profoundly amiss in our social and political life in recent years. We all have our diagnoses as to what those things are. But one of them, surely, is that we are losing the ability to talk to one another.

The president has led the way in modeling this uncivil style of discourse. But he has plenty of imitators on the progressive left, who are equally eager to bully or shame their opponents into shutting up because they deem their ideas morally backward or insufficiently “woke.” As each side gathers round in their respective echo chambers and social media silos, the purpose of free speech has become increasingly more obscure.

It’s purpose isn’t, or isn’t merely, to allow us to hear our own voices, or the voices of those with whom we already agree. It is also to hear what other people, with other views, often anathema to ours, have to say.

To hear such speech may make us uncomfortable. As well it should. Discomfort is not injury. An intellectual provocation is not a physical assault. It’s a stimulus. Over time, it can improve our own arguments, and sometimes even change our minds.

In either case, it’s hard to see how we can’t benefit from it, if we choose to do so.

Bret Stephens, *The New York Times*.

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