

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Will 'new' NAFTA be better for ag than before?

Donald Trump says the United States is close to reaching a deal with Canada and Mexico on changes to the North American Free Trade Agreement, but there's no word yet if the new and presumably improved pact will benefit U.S. farmers and ranchers.

There was plenty of opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement even before it went into effect in 1994.

The treaty was negotiated under President George H.W. Bush's administration and became an issue in his 1992 re-election campaign. Independent candidate Ross Perot famously remarked that if NAFTA was ratified, American workers would hear a "giant sucking sound" of their jobs going south to Mexico.

Labor unions agreed. But to their chagrin, President Bill Clinton supported NAFTA and signed it once ratified.

Some blame NAFTA for destroying U.S. manufacturing jobs. Trump picked up on that riff as part of his campaign

opposition to what he termed "unfair" trade deals. Last year the president threatened to pull out of the pact unless Canada and Mexico renegotiated.

Agriculture has a big stake in NAFTA. Since the pact took effect, ag exports to Canada and Mexico have increased from \$8.9 billion to more than \$38 billion.

But not everyone is completely satisfied.

Local wheat growers, for example, say the pact has opened up the Mexican market, increasing exports by 400 percent.

At the same time, they have a beef with Canada. Canadian wheat sold

at an elevator in the U.S. is rated the same as if it were produced here. But U.S. wheat delivered to an elevator in Canada is rated as feed wheat and priced accordingly.

There's no incentive for U.S. farmers to take wheat to Canada, but Canadian farmers are on an equal footing with U.S. producers when they sell here.

Local dairies take issue with

Canada, too. U.S. and Mexican dairy groups have a common interest in pressing for better treatment when products go north.

Producers of seasonal fruits and vegetables say Mexican growers who can produce crops year round can flood the U.S. with cheaper product.



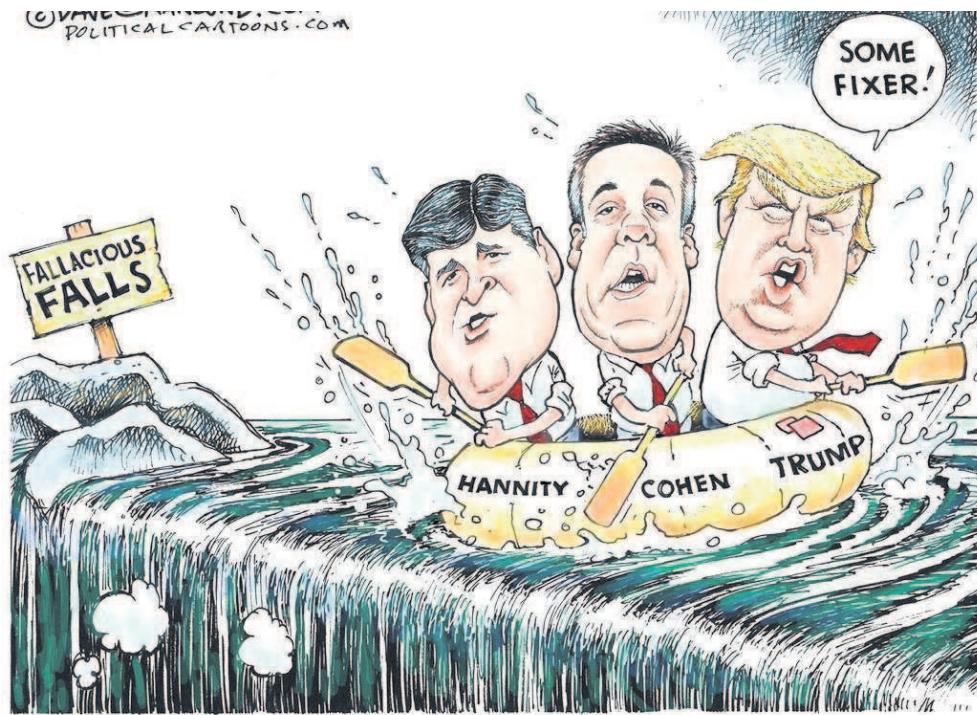
They want new rules that will make it easier for them to file anti-dumping complaints.

Have any of these issues been addressed? No one really knows.

Some Trump critics say the administration, despite the president's bluster, is striking a more conciliatory tone in order to close the deal and claim victory. They note that Trump had harsh words for a trade pact with South Korea, but terms agreed to so far are not dramatically different. They also say having entered into an escalating trade tiff with China, an opponent that can match his rhetoric, he can't afford to have NAFTA in the loss column.

Whether true or not, maybe a deal that more or less maintains the status quo is for the best.

American farmers can't afford to lose NAFTA.



## YOUR VIEWS

### Inconceivable doesn't mean what Hansell thinks it does

I take issue with state Senator Bill Hansell's potshot at Governor Kate Brown in "A tale of Princess/Governor Kate in OregonMyOregon" on two counts: First, it showed more disrespect than I naively expect our taxes to support in a public servant. Second, Sen. Hansell chose as his rhetorical vehicle a treasured fairy tale "The Princess Bride," to lodge his complaint against a governor and legislature from the opposing party. "Inconceivable," writes Mr. Hansell. I don't think that word means what he thinks it means.

To summarize the scene in question, Vizzini is a Sicilian mercenary hired by Prince Humperdinck (heir to the Florin crown) to kidnap Buttercup and stage a "false flag" operation, place blame on Florin's sworn enemy Guilder, and trigger a war. Buttercup — aka Princess Bride — inconceivably escapes but only to a second plot to kill her. She isn't exactly signing self-serving decrees concocted by royal courtiers (I suspect Mr. Hansell couldn't resist calling the governor a princess).

Sen. Hansell's analogy might have been reduced to a single sentence: It's unfair being in the minority party. Meanwhile uphill, a perfectly fine fairy tale was playing out in the Castle of Trump. Donald I, with great fanfare, had signed into law a bill drafted and passed with scant deliberation by, yes, his majority party. This law would balloon the national debt to pay for tax cuts promising meager aid for small-scale merchants to justify further enrichment of the nobility already in the process of purchasing government. Despite royal mathematicians' doubts, the king promised all a happy ending. Downhill, territorial governors were wringing hands over the effects of this law on their subjects. Many commoners sided with the King's court, perfectly content to believe in his magic fairy dust over budget analysts' less rosy predictions.

It would appear Sen. Hansell might prefer spinning tortured parables to actual problem-solving (like spending time instead on a bipartisan solution to PERS, a true budgetary puzzle). He's hardly the first politician to engage in petty political

posturing. But senator, in the future, when you want to poke fun at the governor, beware the perils of irony. If you are partial to moral lessons in your grandchildren's bedtime stories, consider something less ambitious. "The Emperor's New Clothes" comes to mind.

Bill Grigsby  
La Grande

### Vote for Rob Collins for Circuit Court position

I am writing to urge you to vote for Rob Collins for Circuit Court judge.

I've known Rob for more than 40 years and have had the opportunity to work with him of a professional level during that time. Rob has the knowledge and temperament it takes to be a fair and impartial judge.

Because of his successful private law practice, I have no doubt that Rob would make a smooth transition to the bench and it is vital to the residents of Umatilla County that this position be filled by someone who can hit the ground running — and Rob Collins is that person.

Please join me in voting for Rob Collins as Umatilla County Circuit Court judge.

Dennis Hunt  
Pendleton

### Vote Jake Cambier for Pendleton city council

Vote for Jake Cambier for Pendleton City Council at-large position.

Jake has been a Pendleton resident since 1978. He practiced medicine and raised a family. He is very involved in the community and served as a school board member. He serves as a Rotarian and remains active in our community.

He is very qualified for the city council position. Jake will look at council issues with an open mind, listen to anyone who expresses concerns and will make logical decisions based on the best information available.

Pendleton's future will be well served with Jake Cambier as a city councilor.

Thank you for your support.

Bruce and Margaret Gianotti  
Pendleton

## OTHER VIEWS

# The blindness of social wealth

Bob Hall was a rancher. In 1936, in the midst of the Depression, he was suffering from a cancer that was eating the flesh on the side of his face. His ranch had dwindled to nearly nothing, and weeks after bankers took the last of his livestock, Hall died, leaving his family deeply in debt.

His sons pleaded with anybody they could find to make a loan and save the family ranch. No one would do it. Finally, in desperation, they went to their neighbor, Buzz Newton, who was known for his miserliness, and asked him to co-sign a loan. "I always thought so much of your dad; he was the most generous man I have known," Newton answered. "Yes, I'll co-sign the note."

Bob Hall's grandson, also named Robert Hall, drew out the lesson in his book "This Land of Strangers," noting: "The truth is, relationships are the most valuable and value-creating resource of any society. They are our lifelines to survive, grow and thrive."

There's a mountain of evidence suggesting that the quality of our relationships has been in steady decline for decades. In the 1980s, 20 percent of Americans said they were often lonely. Now it's 40 percent. Suicide rates are now at a 30-year high. Depression rates have increased tenfold since 1960, which is not only a result of greater reporting. Most children born to mothers under 30 are born outside marriage. There's been a steady 30-year decline in Americans' satisfaction with the peer-to-peer relationships at work.

Former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy summarized his experience as a doctor in an article in September in *The Harvard Business Review*: "During my years caring for patients, the most common pathology I saw was not heart disease or diabetes; it was loneliness."

Patients came to see him partly because they were lonely, partly because loneliness made them sick. Weak social connections have health effects similar to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and a greater negative effect than obesity, he said.

Over the past five years, such trends have abruptly gotten worse. In 2012, 5.9 percent of young people suffered from severe mental health issues. By 2015 it was 8.2 percent.

Last year, Jean Twenge wrote a much-discussed article for *The Atlantic*, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation," charting the accelerating social collapse. Teenagers are suddenly less likely to date, less likely to leave the home without their parents, more likely to put off the activities of adulthood. They are spending more time alone with their digital screens, and the greater the screen time, the greater the unhappiness. Eighth-graders who are heavy users of social media are 27 percent more likely to be depressed.

I summarize all this because loneliness and social isolation are the problem that



DAVID BROOKS  
Comment

undergird many of our other problems. More Americans are socially poor. And yet it is very hard for the socially wealthy to even see this fact. It is the very nature of loneliness and social isolation to be invisible. We talk as if the lonely don't exist.

I was really struck by this last week, when Mark Zuckerberg came through Washington. Most of the questions he faced at the congressional hearings and most

of the analysis in the press were about Facebook's failure to protect privacy. That's the sort of thing that may be uppermost on your mind if you are socially wealthy, if, like most successful politicians and analysts, you live within a thick web of connection and feel as if your social schedule is too full.

But the big issue surrounding Facebook is not privacy. It's that Facebook and other social media companies are feeding this epidemic of loneliness and social isolation. It's not only that heavy social media users are sadder. It's not only that online life seems to heighten painful comparisons and both inflate and threaten the ego. It's that heavy internet users are much less likely to have contact with their proximate neighbors to exchange favors and extend care. There's something big happening to the social structure of neighborhoods.

British anthropologist Robin Dunbar observes that human societies exist on three levels: the clan (your family and close friends), the village (your local community) and the tribe (your larger group). In America today you would say that the clans have polarized, the villages have been decimated and the tribes have become weaponized.

That is, some highly educated families have helicopter parents while less fortunate families have absent parents. The middle ring cross-class associations of town and neighborhood have fallen apart. People try to compensate for the lack of intimate connection by placing their moral and emotional longings on their political, ethnic and other tribes, turning them viciously on each other.

The mass migration to online life is not the only force driving these trends, but it is a big one. Such big subjects didn't come up in the Zuckerberg hearings because socially wealthy and socially poor people experience Facebook differently and perceive reality and social problems differently. It's hard to quantify and communicate the decline in quality of relationships. But it is nonetheless true that many of us who are socially wealthy don't really know how the other half lives.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in 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.