

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Discovering new places, seeking out backroads

Whenever I've had the pleasure of moving to a new town, I've always tried to be very receptive to the good advice offered by folks who have lived there for awhile and know the ways and customs of their community.

That is certainly true of my first few weeks here in northeast Oregon.

I relocated here in May after spending three years on the west (and wetter) side of the state in Coos Bay/North Bend. Prior to that, my 26-year newspaper career has taken my family to small cities like Bentonville, Ark., Aberdeen, Wash., and Bartlesville, Okla. Although dramatically different in climate, culture and economic fortunes, each of the communities in which I have lived and worked shared something in common: They are all fiercely proud of their unique heritage and the niche they occupy in the world.

I have discovered this to be true here in northeast Oregon as well. In the brief time I have been here, I've had the opportunity to visit numerous towns in the region: Pendleton, Hermiston, Stanfield, Umatilla, Echo, Milton-Freewater, Athena, Weston, Tollgate, Elgin, Wallowa, Lostine,

Enterprise, Joseph, Pilot Rock, Ukiah, Long Creek, Mount Vernon, John Day and La Grande. I still have Irrigon, Boardman, Helix, Heppner, Lexington, Baker City and other towns on my to-visit list.

Each community usually hangs its proverbial hat on something that sets it apart. For instance, I now know that watermelons play an important part of Hermiston's branding identity: "Where life is sweet."

Of course, everyone identifies Pendleton with a bronc-riding — "Let 'er Buck" — cowboy image, but as Mayor John Turner pointed out to me recently, the actual city seal honors the city's woolen products heritage with an image of a sheep.

I see that the hamlet of Athena honors its 19th-century Scottish settlers with the annual Caledonian Games "to preserve and perpetuate Scottish social manners and customs." The event is scheduled for July 13-15 this year, by the way.

According to Wikipedia, Wallowa County's Lostine was named after a short-lived place by the same name in Cherokee

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Comment

County, Kansas. Further down the road, the tourist town of Joseph, originally named Silver Lake or Lake City, eventually adopted its name for the legendary chief of the Nez Perce.

In Grant County, John Day takes its name for a member of the famous 1811 Astor Expedition. A renowned hunter and fur trapper, his name is well remembered in the state as it is attached to multiple river branches in Oregon as well as the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument.

But perhaps my favorite name so far is the quaint hamlet of Echo, "Where History Blooms." It was named by one of the town's founding fathers, J. H. Koontz, for his then three-year-old daughter in 1880. Her Victorian image, as an adult, still adorns the city's signage and marketing materials.

But beyond the cities and towns, it is clear to me that the land of Eastern Oregon is a special place. I've taken the opportunity on weekends to steer my four-wheel drive down some unpaved and unmarked roads in the beautiful Blue Mountains that surround

us. The views from a mountain meadow at 4,000 feet in elevation can be breathtaking.

Most recently, I discovered the joy of taking the slow route from Deadman Pass down Cabbage Hill via the narrow and winding Poverty Flat Road (now, there's some interesting names for you!). If you're not in a hurry and the weather is clear, I highly recommend it.

Once down the mountain and back onto the gently rolling plains of golden wheat fields, the drive through the Umatilla Indian Reservation is enlightening. The Confederated Tribes are doing some extraordinary things with their facilities and services. And I truly believe I'm getting closer every day to the correct pronunciation of "Tamastlikt."

It's clear that we live in an incredibly rich and diverse area and I can't wait to continue my education and exploration here.

Here's to a safe and happy Independence Day holiday to everyone!

Chris Rush is regional publisher of the East Oregonian, Hermiston Herald, Wallowa County Chieftain and Blue Mountain Eagle newspapers.

OTHER VIEWS

Anthony Kennedy and the privatization of meaning

America's founders certainly believed in individual liberty, but they believed that liberty happens within a shared community. They began the Constitution with the phrase, "We the People." We are all one thing — a people, a nation, a collective.

That people shares a moral order — rules that are true for all people in all times and that govern us in our freedom. Among them, for example, is the idea that all people are created equal.

That people shares a common enterprise. We are a self-governing nation, and we all play a role in that enterprise by fulfilling the roles that define us — father, mother, neighbor, citizen and legislator. We are parts of a covenant and pass down our shared order to our posterity.

Over the decades, that sense of we-ness began to turn into a sense of I-ness or you-ness. You can see it in today's commencement clichés:

Follow your passion, march to the beat of your own drummer, listen to your own heart, you do you.

Justice Anthony Kennedy didn't invent the shift from community to autonomy, but in 1992 he articulated it more crisply than anyone else: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

In this sentence, which became famous as the "mystery of life" passage, there is no sense that individuals are embedded in a social order. There is no acknowledgment of the parts of ourselves that we don't choose but inherit — family, race, social roles, historical legacies of oppression, our bodies, the habits that are handed down to us by our common culture.

There's no we. We are all monads who walk around with our own individual opinions about existence, meaning and the universe. Each person is a self-created choosing individual, pursuing individual desires. There is no sense that we are part of a common flow connecting the past, present and future; instead, each of us creates our own worldview anew.

The first problem with this definition of freedom is that it pushes society toward a tepid relativism. There are no truths, only "concepts." You define your concept of the meaning of the universe, and I define mine, and who are any of us to judge, let alone impinge upon, that of another? Furthermore, it's a short road from getting to define your own truth to getting to define your own facts.

The second problem is that Professor Kennedy gives us a homework assignment that almost none of us can actually fulfill. Each of us has to define our own "concept

of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

Wow! That requires a lot of background reading. If your name is Aristotle or Nietzsche, maybe you can do it, but for the rest of us it's going to be tough. We're busy!

You wind up with a society in which the schools, the public culture, even the parents say: It's not our job to instill a shared morality and worldview from scratch. That's

something you have to do on your own. The practical result, given this impossible task, is that most people wind up without a moral vocabulary, with only scattered shards of values, with no firm foundations for when times get tough.

Moreover, we're much more problematic creatures than Kennedy's sentence seems to acknowledge. The old philosophers realized that the first threat to liberty is actually the tyranny of our own desires. People get enchained to alcohol, to drugs, to empty calories. They get enchained by their own selfishness, vanity and greed.

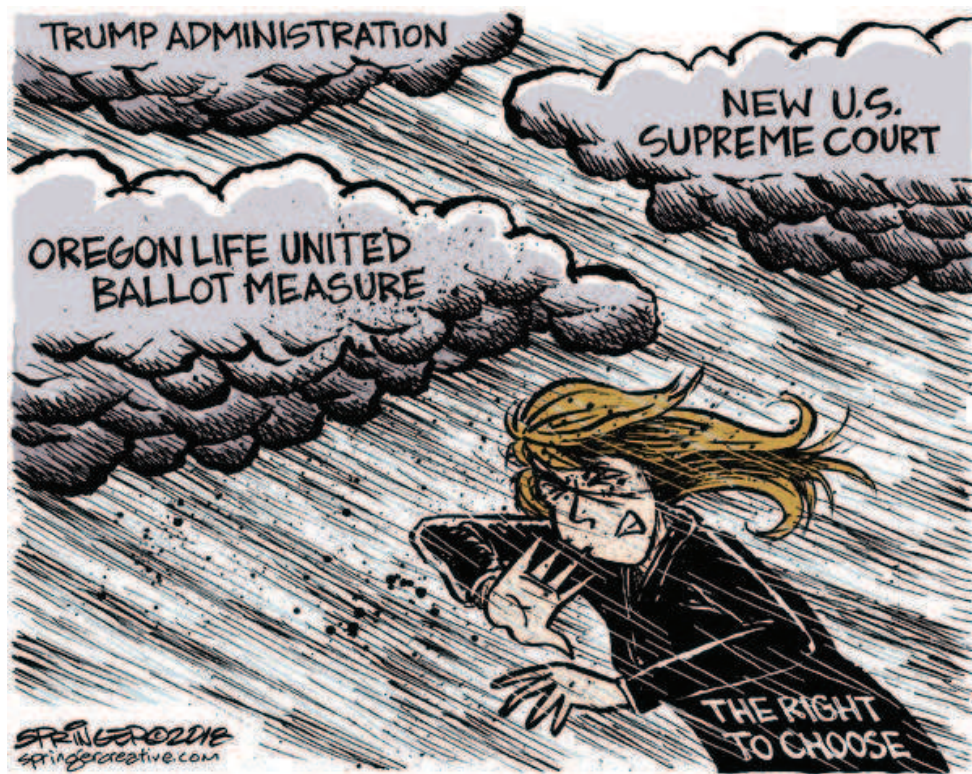
Most of us require communal patterns and shared cultural norms and certain enforced guardrails to help us restrain our desires and keep us free.

Which leads to the third big problem with the "mystery of life" passage. You'd think it would lead to a very small state that would leave a lot of freedom for people. In fact, it leads to a big, intrusive state. If you strip away all the communal commitments that help people govern themselves from within, then very soon you find you have to pass all sorts of laws to govern them from without. If you privatize meaning so that people get to follow their unrestrained desires, they immediately start trampling on one another, and public pressure grows for restrictive laws, like hate speech regulation, to keep things from getting out of control.

Any society has to perform at least two big related tasks — raising the young and pursuing of the good. It takes a village to do both these things. As Yuval Levin reminded us in an essay in First Things a few years ago, people are only capable of exercising responsible freedom when they are embedded in and formed by social institutions — like family, schools that take morality seriously and a shared civic order. It's not a do-it-yourself job.

The autonomy ethos forgets this. Kennedy channeled it in its purest form.

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



YOUR VIEWS

Rep. Greg Walden has led his flock astray

This week Greg Walden sent me a letter to tell me how he was instrumental in passing the Federal Right to Try Act. Forgive my skepticism for thinking your actions were more motivated by your Big Pharma donors rather than your compassion. You compound the irony by quoting the Bible and parable of the lost sheep and telling me that every opportunity to save a life matters.

Where are you now when children are being used as pawns in a manipulated crisis at our borders? A refugee crisis has become a humanitarian crisis. As Walden tells me, the shepherd cares about every one of us. Those people fleeing violence in Guatemala are us. Trump and Fox News would have you believe they are all criminals.

How soon we forget that we are a nation of refugees and immigrants. How soon we forget the shameful past of Japanese-American internment and turning away Jewish refugees in World War II. The blatant hypocrisy of a President whose grandfather, mother, and wives are all immigrants and refugees.

"What would Jesus do?" still holds up pretty well as a test for right and wrong. I am not a churchgoer, but having been raised with what I assumed were universal Christian values, I continue to try and live my life according to those teachings. What has happened to us? When did we stop being the good guys?

Every day Trump attacks our core values, our institutions, our allies and anyone who dares to disagree with him. His petty attacks are not based on fact but are slimy and vulgar attacks on the person. He repeats lie after lie until we are numb to it. For those who say everybody does it, there is simply no comparison or moral equivalent for the sheer volume of his lies and attacks. He has turned the Republicans into a party of grievance and revenge.

I hear no pushback when he says things daily that if uttered by a Democrat would cause an insurrection. Winning an election or stacking the Supreme Court with conservatives seems to be worth any

degradation or adherence to societal norms. If we inflict unnecessary suffering on others in our quest, we can turn away and blame the victims. Sadly, I feel evangelical conservatives in particular have lost the argument for the type of society they say they want. And at what price to their spiritual souls? At what price to our nation?

Somewhere, Greg Walden, we have become the sheep that have lost their way.

Anita Burrows
Pendleton

Rep. Walden serves, supports military veterans

I recently heard an ad via an internet news link that is grossly inaccurate. "News" such as this sickens me. I ask the veteran whose voice is on the radio ad to do better research before attacking our representative. I too am a veteran and proud of it, and my integrity is important to me.

You say Greg Walden voted against the Clay Hunt SAV Act. The truth is he voted for it. Twice. The second time it became law. You say he has done nothing to help veterans, but he led the fight in Congress to end veteran homelessness. He has fought for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, leading the effort to increase funding for it each year until this year — when he succeeded in receiving full funding for this program for the first time in its history.

Under his leadership the VA has seen more funding than ever before, and he fought to bring technology and practices most doctors outside the VA use to help veteran care become more effective and efficient.

Sir, as a veteran, we must hold ourselves to higher standards. I have met with Congressman Walden in his D.C. office, at town hall meetings, and emailed him for support. His response? He continues to support veterans and currently serving military personnel. Check his voting record. You will see he is a very strong supporter for all veterans in our great state.

John Wrinkle
Redmond

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