

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

CHRISTOPHER RUSH
PublisherKATHRYN B. BROWN
OwnerDANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing EditorTIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

Founded October 16, 1875

OUR VIEW

What to do about shrinking frontier Oregon?

There is a problem with funding public safety in rural Oregon, and nowhere is that more clear than in Wheeler County.

Chris Humphreys, who has been sheriff there since 2013, declared his intention to leave the office — and that change in management caused each of his deputies to find work elsewhere. That will leave the rural Oregon county of about 1,400 people without any full-time law enforcement officers on the job when Humphreys exits.

The Oregon Association of Sheriffs is on the case, hoping to recruit people to the position of sheriff (remember, it is an elected position.) Humphreys himself is going through his law enforcement Rolodex to try to find someone who has the skills for a job that he admits pays little, has few resources, requires being on the job 24/7 and makes for a difficult quality of life.

Others are on the case to make it a more attractive position.

Oregon State Representative Daniel Bonham lives in the The Dalles and because of a strange drawing of the legislative map, he represents Wheeler County. Bonham said he understands that the cities of Mitchell and Fossil have little in common with those in Mosier and Maupin, and that he may have to think outside the box to represent Wheeler County wisely.

He has a few ideas about how frontier Oregon can survive as populations age, industry disappears and schools shrink and close.

Bonham has considered making the highway to the John Day Fossil Beds a



The number of visitors to the Painted Hills have jumped considerably in recent years, taxing public safety and law enforcement resources in rural Wheeler County.

toll road, even one that is unmanned with a collection box for visitors to throw in a dollar or two.

He said that hundreds of thousands of visitors trek to the national monument, and often they spend very little in the local economy. And that number of visitors is growing, and public safety officers are responding more often to travelers who run out of gas, get lost, are dehydrated or have some other emergency.

If a percentage of them were to drop a few dollars in the till on their way to fun and adventure, it could be used to support the law enforcement and infrastructure that serves those tourists.

There are other ideas, too, that Bonham has heard from frontier Oregon locals. The Oregon Department of Transportation has rules banning

unregulated advertisements along roadsides.

For some of the small blink-and-you-miss-them Oregon towns, allowing a handmade sign along a state highway to let travelers know they can pull off to buy a can of Coke, a container of worms or a clean bathroom can make all the difference.

“That’s something where rural Oregon needs different rules than the rest of the state,” Bonham said.

Humphreys knows that economic development is really what the county sheriff’s office needs. There is little industry in the county, where mills closed in the 1970s and population numbers have been decreasing since the 1950s. According to the U.S. Census, from 2000 to 2013 the median age in Wheeler County rose from 48 to 56. By contrast,

the median age of Multnomah County is 36.1.

We reported in June about the three-person class of Wheeler County High School. Each of the three will continue to higher education, and each had no plans to return to the Fossil area. If generations are getting smaller, and none are returning, then the small cities still remaining in the county are not long for this world.

That reality may provoke additional rethinking.

What about a tri-county law enforcement operation that covers Wheeler, Gilliam and Sherman counties? Each county is of a similar size and similar population, and are contiguous. It would allow for place-based law enforcement, while also allowing for a better quality of life and perhaps even some time off the clock. The three counties are already looking at departments where they can partner and share resources. It makes plenty of sense.

The real problem here is a lack of economic activity in Oregon’s rural places. Add to that an increase in recreation in our wildest places and you have a recipe for disaster. Our onces-strong volunteer crews are breaking under the additional requirements of the remunerative-less job — and paid public safety officials are become exhausted, too.

With little infrastructure, few resources and no connection to the worldwide economy, places like Wheeler County will continue to shrivel, become more lawless, become more wild, become poorer. Good luck being a sheriff there.

OTHER VIEWS

The quiet death of racial progress

Over the past few months, I’ve been trying to write a comforting column. The thesis was going to be that even though Donald Trump is doing his best to inflame racial division, we are still making gradual progress against racism and racial disparities.

I was going to cite evidence showing a steady decline in racist attitudes. I was going to point to a steady rise in intermarriage rates. In 1967, 3 percent of American newlyweds married outside their race or ethnicity. As of 2015, 17 percent do, including 24 percent of African-American men.

I was going to point out that in 2017, 87 percent of blacks 25 and older had completed high school.

I was even going to note some positive economic statistics, too. The black unemployment rate was at a record low. After you control for parental income, black women now out-earn their white counterparts. In 1960, only 38 percent of black men were members of the middle class or above. Today, 57 percent are. In 1960, more than 40 percent of black men lived in poverty. Now only 18 percent do. Unfortunately, this is not that comforting column. The deeper I dug into the evidence, the more I came to doubt the idea that we are still making progress on race.

Let’s take that statistic about the decline in poverty among black men. It comes from an excellent report by Bradford Wilcox and others at the American Enterprise Institute. As their report clearly shows, the vast bulk of that decline happened between 1960 and 1975. If you look at poverty data since 1980, there’s been little progress.

The recent famous study co-produced by Raj Chetty points to an elemental truth: There is still a strong, steady societal wind pushing against African-American men. Those born into poverty are much less likely to be able to climb out than their counterparts in other races. Those born into affluence are much more likely to fall down the income scale.

When it comes to segregation, the story is even worse. One of the things we’ve learned over the past decades is that place really matters — the nature of your neighborhood and surroundings.



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

American neighborhoods are desegregating slightly, but the situation is worse for children. The percentage of black students who are attending schools that are 90 to 100 percent minority went down in the South in the 1980s, but now is shooting up.

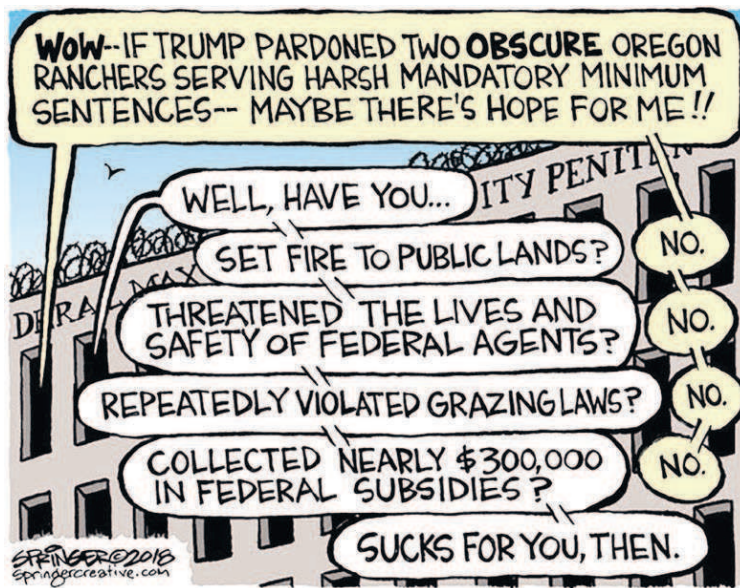
As a nation we seem to have lost all enthusiasm for racial integration. A culture of individualism has led people to focus more on individual outcomes and less on the components of each community. We have settled into a reality that is separate and unequal, and we seem not too alarmed about that. I’d say the correct response is an attitude I encounter a lot among people who are working in these communities, which you might call left on structural racism and right on cultural accountability.

That is to say, the left-wingers have it correct when they point to the systems of oppression that pervade society: the legacy of residential segregation; the racist attitudes in the workplace that demonstrably make it much harder for African-American men to get jobs; the prejudices — in the schools, in the streets and in the judicial system — that make it much more likely that African-American males will be punished, incarcerated and marginalized.

But conservatives are right to point to the importance of bourgeois norms. Three institutions do an impressive job of reducing racial disparity: the military, marriage and church. As the AEI study shows, black men who served in the military are more likely to be in the middle class than those who did not. Black men who attended religious services are 76 percent more likely to attain at least middle-class status than those who did not. The general presence of fathers — not just one’s own — in the community is a powerful determinant of whether young men will be able to rise and thrive.

We’ve fallen into a bonus logjam in which progressives emphasize systems of oppression and conservatives emphasize cultural norms. Both critiques are correct. If we’re going to do something about this appalling retrogression on race, we probably need to be radical on both ends.

— David Brooks, *New York Times*



OTHER VIEWS

A denunciation of Donald Trump

The Scotsman
Edinburgh, Scotland

Donald Trump, due to arrive in the UK Friday, is a racist, a serial liar, and either a sex abuser or someone who falsely brags about being one in the apparent belief that this will impress other men in a metaphorical “locker room.”

To take each of these charges in turn, when black American football players protested against police shootings of innocent people of color by refusing to stand for the national anthem, Trump said the players “maybe ... shouldn’t be in the country.”

And when white supremacists, neo-Nazis and armed militia groups demonstrated in Charlottesville, Virginia, over plans to remove a statue of a Confederate general — and a counter-protester was killed and others injured as a car was driven deliberately into them — Mr. Trump claimed there were “very fine people” on both sides.

Trump persistently pushed the lie that Barack Obama, the first African American president, was not born in the U.S.

He has called for “total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States,” claimed Mexican immigrants were rapists and criminals, said Nigerians would never go back to “their huts” after seeing the U.S. and described African countries,

along with El Salvador and Haiti, as “s***holes.”

Trump also argued that an Indiana-born judge handling a lawsuit against “Trump University” was biased against him and unfit to take the case because he was a “Mexican.”

One of Trump’s favourite pastimes is decrying “fake news.”

But, according to one count by *The Washington Post*, the president lies an average of 6.5 times a day.

In May, Rex Tillerson, sacked as U.S. Secretary of State in a Trump tweet, warned: “If our leaders seek to conceal the truth, or we as people become accepting of alternative realities that are no longer grounded in facts, then we as American citizens are on a pathway to relinquishing our freedom.”

Before his presidency, Trump was recorded saying he was able to grope women whenever he liked because “when you’re a star they let you do it.”

When the tape emerged, Trump said his boast was untrue and just “locker room” talk. And when several women came forward to say he had done this to them, he insisted they were lying.

So, as British politicians hide their distaste in an attempt to get a much-needed post-Brexit trade deal, we should all remember what kind of man Trump really is.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

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. 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.