

# EAST OREGONIAN OPINION

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Founded October 16, 1875

## OUR VIEW

## With free speech comes responsibility

The recent controversy about whether conspiracy theorist Alex Jones' absurdities should be removed from media platforms has been shaped by his supporters as both a First Amendment and censorship issue.

It is neither.

It is an integrity issue. The actions of the managers at Facebook, YouTube and Apple in removing his incendiary content are unsurprising. And certainly, they are very easy to justify.

Free speech isn't free from consequences. The First Amendment guarantees only that the government isn't going to arrest you for what you say, with limited exceptions. It doesn't shield you from criticism. It doesn't protect you from being fired for what you say in the workplace. It doesn't mean that anyone has to listen to you. People can boycott you, cancel your television show or ban you from their internet communities.

If you express extreme and reprehensible views, in person or online, you may be ostracized by society.

And the government has no business intervening in that, one way or the other.

### Unworthy martyr

Jones is a Texas-based media pundit whose InfoWars website is a hotbed of bizarre theories detached from any semblance of reality. The only downside we can see of booting him from Facebook, YouTube and Apple is creating a martyr in the eyes of the radical fringe.

Some of his musings:

- The 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing were perpetrated by the U.S. government.
- The 2012 Sandy Hook shootings, in which 20 children and six adults in Connecticut were slaughtered by a

young gunman, were an invention.

• Survivors of the Parkland, Florida, school shootings in February are paid actors, hired to advance a gun-control agenda. (This is popularly known as "Second Amendment fan fiction.")

He has also been censured for promoting "Pizzagate," a bizarre story about human trafficking whose publication led to death threats at a Washington, D.C., restaurant, and a false story about an Idaho food processor importing migrant rapists — both fictions for which Jones has had to apologize.

The problem isn't that Jones holds these views, or tries to disseminate them. The issue is that all too often his pronouncements lead others to threaten, vandalize and harass the subjects of his false stories.

Facebook pages which carried Jones' statements have been removed after evidence that he disseminated hate speech against Robert Mueller, the special counsel who is investigating President Donald Trump and his close associates; so, too, has his YouTube channel, and so has Apple, which hosted his podcasts on its iTunes platform. Mueller's probe reportedly examined whether InfoWars had anything to do with Russian interference in the 2016 presidential elections.

In all cases, these private publishing companies have said the outrageous claims fail to meet their standards and may incite illegal actions.

### Familiar controversy

If this controversy over the First Amendment sounds familiar, it is because it has often been addressed on the opinion page of this newspaper.

The East Oregonian has always had a clear editorial voice, dating back to when E.B. Aldrich set the standard for



Alex Jones speaks at Settlers Landing during the 2016 Republican National Convention in Cleveland.

never sitting on the fence during the first World War.

We keep our opinions on this page and strive to offer a platform for readers and columnists to offer alternate and often conflicting views as well.

But with this offer comes a caveat. We genuinely welcome letters and columns that express viewpoints that are contrary to ours. But we won't publish material that is characterized by name-calling, especially of private citizens, or seeks to broadcast unverifiable claims and complaints against businesses or individuals, or is not useful, relevant or interesting to our readers. We like to cast a wide net.

Because we set and enforce these standards, we have been accused of censorship. No. We simply set standards.

The most important words And as for the First Amendment, that's all about the government improperly trying to set parameters for publications.

It doesn't factor into the Jones case.

Back in 1791, the most important words ever set to paper in the English language were crafted by the founders of this nation. James Madison originally wrote, "The people shall not

be deprived or abridged of their right to speak, to write, or to publish their sentiments; and the freedom of the press, as one of the great bulwarks of liberty, shall be inviolable."

That wording morphed through a careful editing process into those precious words we hold inviolable. "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."

With that freedom comes responsibility.

Just as it is not responsible to yell "fire!" in a crowded theater, it is certainly not responsible comment to inflame or incite by posting obvious falsehoods that cause others to act inappropriately or even illegally.

Sophisticated and community-minded publishers know that — and choose what they print accordingly.

What it says "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." — First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, adopted Dec. 15, 1791

## OTHER VIEWS

## When ads attack

Corvallis Gazette-Times

Oregon voters, if you like political attack ads and negative campaigns, this fall's election campaign could be a little slice of heaven.

State politicians and interest groups have been racing to form political action committees — the sort of entities that claim independence from candidates they support but which often bankroll ads attacking opposing candidates or statewide initiatives. It's an arrangement that lets candidates themselves appear to be taking the high road, secure in the knowledge that other entities are taking care of the mudslinging.

In July, for example, Gov. Kate Brown formed two separate political action committees, according to news stories in The Oregonian. One of these committees, dubbed Team Oregon, initially financed with \$100,000 from the governor's re-election campaign, seeks to re-elect the governor and to maintain Democratic majorities in the Legislature. The other political action committee Brown formed in July is called Defend Oregon's Values; this committee apparently will bankroll attack ads against her Republican opponent, Knute Buehler.

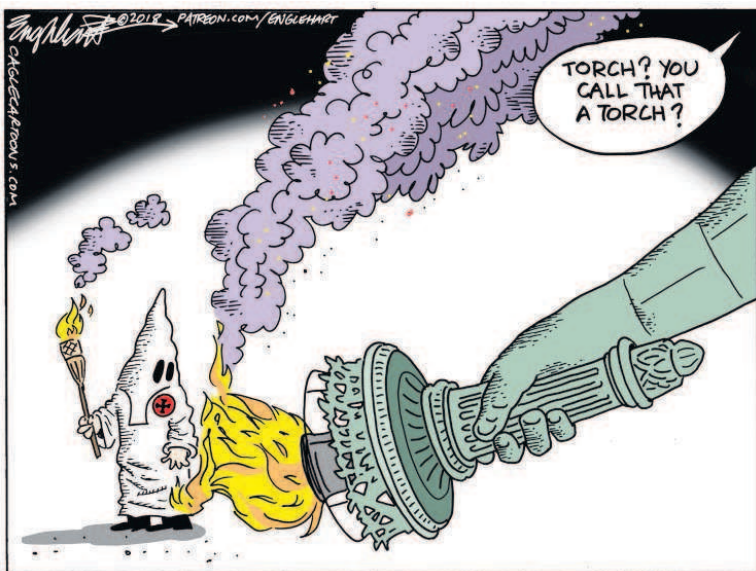
To be fair, Brown already has been the target of attack ads this campaign season. In January, for example, a business-backed group called Priority Oregon launched a negative ad campaign against the governor. Earlier this summer, a nonprofit organization called Oregon Foster Families First paid for a television ad calling for Brown to "start putting our families first." The director of the group declined to tell The Oregonian who had paid for the ads — and, in this case, is not legally required to do so.

For their part, Oregon Republicans have formed a political action committee called No Supermajorities PAC, which seeks to prevent Democrats from gaining the three-fifths supermajority they need to raise taxes without any Republican support. (Democrats need to win just one additional seat in each chamber to get the supermajority.)

It's a good bet that Brown's supporters will spend some PAC money creating attack ads targeting Buehler, and you can expect the same from political action committees for Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice, which already have targeted the Republican candidate. Public employee unions are also supporting Brown, including through the political nonprofit Our Oregon. And we've just scratched the surface of the political action committees that aim to make noise during the fall elections.

It's all going to add up to a considerable amount of electoral clamor this fall, which could drown out reasoned conversation and reflection about the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate and the five statewide measures on the ballot.

But you can strike a blow against this kind of campaigning by doing something revolutionary this election: Ignore the clamor. Turn down the volume on the screaming sound bites on TV and radio. Dig a little deeper. Take the time to do your own assessment of the candidates and the ballot measures (with only five statewide measures on the ballot, this would be a good election to get into that habit.) Which candidates are the best match for your own beliefs? Which candidates seem to be best equipped to offer real leadership? Which candidates seem to demonstrate that independent streak that Oregon voters value?



## YOUR VIEWS

### Support Walden, Trump

Representative Greg Walden is again running for our United States Representative position. Greg has shown us that he supports not only the efforts listed below but efforts of our farmers, our forests, and our oceans and the fishing industry. Rep. Walden understands the balance needed in supporting the agricultural markets, and fair trade as well as the farm workers on the ground providing our food, grain fuel, and animal feed. Greg has always been a huge proponent in helping our veterans, and small business people. He is a people's person and always willing to listen and help. You must answer the question before voting — what would someone else do better? Vote for Greg Walden for U.S. Representative.

It has come to the attention of us who are not enthralled with the Democrats lack of a positive message for any of our elections as well as current Democrats who are part of our state and national congress, that it is now time to stand up and say

enough is enough with their obstruction and lack of support for our President.

Democrats say he is not my president. The facts are — he is all U.S.A.'s legal citizens' president whether you personally like him or not. Regardless of what we thought about Obama, he was still our president and the highest elected position in our land, and that position deserves respect.

As long as President Trump's positions are America first, economy, energy, veterans, training people to get off of welfare and putting America back to work, limiting government and government's exposure into our lives, fair trade, strong military, secure borders, a world limiting nuclear weapons, and as much as anything getting into print or the media reporting on that which is facts and not agendas, we support President Trump as well as does Representative Walden.

Thank you Hermiston for the strong support during the Umatilla County Fair Parade for our Umatilla County Republican Party float.

Patricia Maier  
Hermiston