

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

“We have always had so much more in common with each other than in disagreement.”

— Sen. John McCain, in final statement before his death, released posthumously

McCain might have been last of his kind

Perhaps nothing personifies the late Sen. John McCain better than this episode from his 2008 presidential campaign.

At a campaign rally, a woman said she did not trust Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama because “he’s an Arab.”

McCain, a Republican, quickly responded. “No, ma’am. He’s a decent family man, a citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues.”

Ten years later, such civility and such accuracy seem uncommon. McCain, who died Saturday, August 25 of brain cancer at age 81, might have been the last of his kind. If so, that would be truly unfortunate.

This is not to canonize McCain, or to immediately jump on the bandwagon for renaming the Russell Senate Office Building after McCain, as Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley and others have proposed.

McCain may well be deserving of that honor. But it’s too early to objectively assess his legacy. Indeed, that building where many U.S. senators have their offices is named after a Democratic senator from Georgia — Richard B. Russell, who served from 1933 to 1971 — whose segregationist views and strident opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would be anathema to most people today.

“The history books will be kind to John McCain because our country is so much better for his straight talk,



Cindy McCain, wife of the late Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., lays her head on his casket during a memorial service at the Arizona Capitol.

common sense, maverick ways and passionate service,” said former Oregon Sen. Gordon Smith, who served in the Senate with McCain, though they did not always agree, and who now heads the National Association of Broadcasters.

McCain, like the rest of us, was flawed. He made mistakes. But what he did with his life was extraordinary.

A Navy aviator, his fidelity to the U.S. and his courage while a North Vietnamese prisoner of war became the stuff of legend. Elected to Congress

in 1982, he was chosen by Arizonans four years later to succeed the equally legendary and erstwhile Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater.

McCain generally was conservative, but like Goldwater, he held broad views that defied simplistic labels.

He teamed with Democrat Russ Feingold to successfully push campaign reform, only to have it partially undone by the courts. He ardently supported a strong U.S. military while tenaciously fighting pork-barrel spending by the Pentagon. He worked to restore U.S.

diplomatic relations with Vietnam, the country that caused him so much pain. He was a leader on immigration reform, which Congress unwisely let fail. He took a chance on a little-known Alaskan governor, Sarah Palin, choosing her as his vice presidential running mate. He voted to uphold Obamacare.

And not to avoid the obvious, in recent times he defied President Donald Trump’s shallow disdain for him.

Character, commitment and a maverick sensibility defined McCain. Let us remember his final words to Americans, released after his death.

“... We weaken our greatness when we confuse our patriotism with tribal rivalries that have sown resentment and hatred and violence in all the corners of the globe. We weaken it when we hide behind walls, rather than tear them down, when we doubt the power of our ideals, rather than trust them to be the great force for change they have always been.

“We are 325 million opinionated, vociferous individuals. We argue and compete and sometimes even vilify each other in our raucous public debates. But we have always had so much more in common with each other than in disagreement. If only we remember that and give each other the benefit of the presumption that we all love our country, we will get through these challenging times. We will come through them stronger than before. We always do. ...”

YOUR VIEWS

Searching for an immigration solution

The issues of illegal immigration continue to plague our country. I have been employed in law enforcement for over 40 years, with much of that time spent in Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Since I have been sheriff, I have been invited several times to visit the southern U.S. border to see firsthand the crime issues along the border states, issues of drug running, human trafficking, the extreme violence of the drug cartels and gangs. I’ve visited the ranches with little or no border security and spoke with the people who live there with the constant threat of armed violence. I’ve seen the evidence of the rapes, robberies and murders of the people who are victimized as they make their way to the United States. I’ve attended the daily briefings of the multi-agency task forces.

Border sheriffs have an expression: “What happens at the border doesn’t stay at the border.” All the issues of drug smuggling, violence, human trafficking, illegal immigration and cartel expansion is carried throughout our country. Morrow County experiences



the same type of issues other jurisdictions experience, except at a smaller scale. The large marijuana grows in south Morrow County were known to be controlled by the Mexican cartels here, too.

Who is responsible for most of the blame for all these years of our broken immigration system? It’s not simple, but the bottom line is that both political parties are responsible. When the one party was in control, it was building, expanding, making money and finding labor. It was about new businesses, larger plants and where to find the labor force to fill those new fields

and factories.

When the other party came to power it was about political clout. The political party was viewed as the party of the little people — the disadvantaged and the new arrivals. The immigrants who were able to get legal status and then citizenship if they were lucky leaned toward this political party. Our political divide grew as our parties traded the lead back and forth. Some states were becoming involved in the federal government issue of immigration law.

The system has been allowed to go unfixed for so long that it appears to be unfixable.

Next week, the

White House has invited sheriffs from each state, including myself, to come and talk about their experiences on issues of immigration and how it has impacted their communities in their local jurisdictions. The president is expected to host the group and wants to hear from the sheriffs as he goes forward in finding solutions to our broken immigration system.

Perhaps he may hear a few new ideas on working to repair our broken immigration system.

Kenneth W. Matlack
Morrow County Sheriff
Irrigon

Farewell, Pendleton

One of the great privileges of journalism is the opportunity to become embedded in the communities we cover. At this point, we are no longer tourists dropping in on a town, but we become in-tune with the issues, angst and victories felt within the public atmosphere. It has been a wonderful summer venturing into Pendleton and learning about a small town on the other side of the state.

When I first found out I was offered an internship through the Charles Snowden Program for Excellence in Journalism, I visited my photojournalism professor’s office to tell him the good news. It was still early in the selection process and I didn’t know where I would be spending my summer yet. My professor mused that if he were to receive one of these internships, he would like to be placed at a newspaper in a rural community.

“Wouldn’t it be cool to go to a place where it’s normal to wear cowboy hats and boots every day?” he asked.

“Yeah, I guess that would be pretty cool.” I thought to myself.

Lo and behold, a couple weeks later I learned I would be interning at the *East Oregonian*.

I’d never really been to Eastern Oregon before. I’d driven through it on road trips to Utah and Montana, but I never stopped to see what this half of the state has to offer. During my time here, I often found myself wishing I were able to see the world through my photojournalism professor’s eyes. I know that if he were here he would be able to take deeply moving photographs of the little things that make Pendleton.

When I left Eugene I wasn’t



BRITTANY NORTON
Comment

sure what I would find. As the evergreen forests that have been so familiar to me since childhood gave way to the tawny color of never-ending plains, I experienced equal parts nostalgia and excitement. It certainly seemed like a new adventure.

I once had a source ask me how I was adjusting to the culture in Pendleton.

“Well, people wear cowboy hats every day, and that’s different,” I said.

But as far as political differences between my hometown of Eugene, which is seemingly liberal, and Pendleton, which is seemingly conservative, it didn’t seem like too much change at all.

As a journalist, I don’t talk about my political ideologies. I just try to listen. But what I really noticed is that both places are made up of people, and that is the crux of it all. We are all imperfect humans who nonetheless have heart and soul.

In a transforming country that appears as if it becomes more divisive every day, I remembered the one thing that binds us all together is our own humanity. I once had a journalism professor tell me, “People are complicated.” And that’s the truth.

So when it feels like red versus blue, us versus them or East versus West, it’s important to keep in mind that we all want to feel accepted, loved and important.

Thank you to the *East Oregonian* for allowing me to join in on a summer I will never forget. And thank you to Pendleton for offering friendly faces, kindness and open arms.

Onwards.

■

Brittany Norton was the summer intern for the *East Oregonian*.

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