

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Smith’s principles are good for Salem

As much as we love life in Eastern Oregon, there are certain challenges that come with living as far as we do from the state capital.

Technology can help bridge the gap, but it’s difficult getting inside the sphere of influence when statewide decisions are being made. We have fewer voters and taxpayers, and even though our challenges look different than those in metro areas, they’re just as plentiful.

That’s why it’s important to have strong elected representation in the halls and the floor of the Capitol. And it’s why Rep. Greg Smith, though running unopposed, gets our full endorsement for the position.

Smith is the elder statesman of the Oregon House, if you can believe it. He won his first term in the Legislature in 2000 when he was 32 years old and his energy belies the 17 years he has spent representing the district.

We’ve said it before, but if there were more people like Smith in politics, a lot more would get done — and the people’s will would be better represented. During his tenure he has learned valuable lessons on where to leave ideology at the door and embrace cooperation. When we as voters and taxpayers send a representative to Salem, we want them to deliver our message on how we’d like the state to operate, and bring back the most good they can for the district.

Smith has learned those aren’t mutually exclusive, and because of his hard work and alliance building has earned the co-vice chair position on the powerful Ways and Means Committee. It’s the purse strings of the state, so to speak, and funding for projects in deep Portland to the far reaches of Malheur County must receive that committee’s approval. His district — including the largest cities of Hermiston, Umatilla and Milton-Freewater and



Rep. Greg Smith smiles during his acceptance speech for the Nobel Laureate Award at the Hermiston Distinguished Citizens Award Banquet on Feb. 21 at the Hermiston Community Center.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris

all of Morrow, Gilliam and Wheeler counties — has benefited greatly from his ability to find agreement with legislators regardless of party or constituency. His reputation alone gives District 57 clout.

In these highly charged political times, it’s refreshing to have a representative who can present a well-reasoned conservative argument and continue working toward the good of

his more liberal state, but especially his increasingly diverse constituency.

We typically don’t endorse candidates running unopposed, but feel Smith’s work has earned him the full support of this editorial board. And we’d bet that if you ask around his district and the Capitol, you’ll find a majority that agrees.

We’re proud to send Greg Smith back to Salem.

OTHER VIEWS

The new Cold War of isolation

There’s always a pile of bodies at these massacre sites.

Whether it’s at a synagogue, church, nightclub or school, there’s always an assault weapon, or a bunch of them. There’s always the survivors clutching each other, weeping in little clumps outside. And there’s always one other thing.

A lonely man.

There’s always one guy, who fell through the cracks of society, who lived a life of solitary disappointment and who one day decided to try to make a blood-drenched leap from insignificance to infamy.

There’s always a guy like Pittsburgh synagogue attacker Robert Bowers, who, according to *New York Times* reporting, was friendless in high school and a solitary ghost as an adult, who spent his evenings sitting in his car smoking, listening to the radio, and living, as one acquaintance put it, “in his own little world.”

Guys like that are drawn to extremist ideologies, which explain their disappointments and give them a sense that they are connected to something. Guys like that convince themselves that by massacring the innocents they are serving as a warrior in some righteous cause.

These mass killings are about many things — guns, demagoguery, etc. — but they



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are also about social isolation and the spreading derangement of the American mind.

Killing rampages are just one manifestation of the fact that millions of Americans find themselves isolated and alone. But there are other manifestations of this isolation, which involve far more carnage.

The suicide epidemic is a manifestation. The suicide rate is dropping across Europe. But it has risen 30 percent in the United States this century. The suicide rate for Americans between ages 10 and 17 rose more than 70 percent between 2006 and 2016 — surely one of the most shocking trends in America today.

Every year nearly 45,000 Americans respond to isolation and despair by ending their lives. Every year an additional 60,000 die of drug addiction. Nearly twice as many people die each year of these two maladies as were killed in the entire Vietnam War.

The rising levels of depression and mental health issues are yet another manifestation. People used to say that depression and other mental health challenges were primarily about chemical imbalances in the brain.

But as Johann Hari argues in his book “Lost Connections,” these mental health issues are at least as much about problems in life as one’s neurochemistry. They are at

least as much about protracted loneliness, loss of meaningful work, feeling pressured and stressed in the absence of community.

“Protracted loneliness causes you to shut down socially, and to be more suspicious of any social contact,” Hari writes. “You become hypervigilant. You start to be more likely to take offense where none was intended, and to be afraid of strangers. You start to be afraid of the very thing you need most.”

This sounds like a pretty good summary of American politics in 2018.

I keep coming back to this topic because the chief struggle of the day is sociological and psychological, not ideological or economic. The substrate layer of American society — the network of relationships and connection and trust that everything else relies upon — is failing. And the results are as bloody as any war.

Maybe it’s time we began to see this as a war. On the one side are those forces that sow division, discord and isolation. On the other side there are all those forces in society that nurture attachment, connection and solidarity. It’s as if we’re witnessing this vast showdown between the rippers and weavers.

And here’s the hard part of the war: It’s not between one group of good people and another group of bad people. The war runs down the middle of every heart. Most of us

are part of the problem we complain about.

Most of us bought into a radical individualism that, as Tocqueville predicted, cuts each secluded self off from other secluded selves. Most of us buy into a workaholic ethos that leaves us with little time for community. Most of us live in insular media and social bubbles that provide us with Pravda-like affirmations of our own moral superiority. Most of us hew to a code of privacy that leads us to not know our neighbors.

The good news is that most of us are part of the solution as well. Most of us admire and want to be the teacher who reaches out to the lonely boy. Most of us mentor and serve people unlike ourselves. Most of us are part of the chosen families that Americans are constructing to replace the decimated biological ones.

It’s easier to destroy trust than to build it, so the rippers have an advantage. But there are many more weavers, people who yearn to live in loving relationships and trusting communities. The weavers just need what any side in a war needs: training so we know how to wage it, strategies so we know how to win it and a call to arms so we know why we’re in it.

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David Brooks is a columnist for the *New York Times*.

A day of reckoning for Michael Avenatti

Michael Avenatti, the lawyer for porn star Stormy Daniels and a 2020 Democratic presidential hopeful, jumped into the Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court confirmation battle on the afternoon of Sept. 23. On that day, *The New Yorker* had published the allegations of a woman named Deborah Ramirez, who claimed that a drunken Kavanaugh exposed himself to her during a party at Yale sometime in 1983 or 1984. Almost immediately, Avenatti took to Twitter with an allegation of his own.

Avenatti said he had a client, “a woman with credible information regarding Judge Kavanaugh and Mark Judge.” He did not reveal her name.

Within minutes, Mike Davis, chief counsel for nominations at the Senate Judiciary Committee, sent an email to Avenatti. “You claim to have information you consider credible regarding Judge Kavanaugh and Mark Judge,” Davis wrote. “Please advise of this information immediately so that Senate investigators may promptly begin an inquiry.”

Avenatti responded quickly. “We are aware of significant evidence of multiple house parties in the Washington, D.C., area during the early 1980s during which Brett



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Kavanaugh, Mark Judge and others would participate in the targeting of women with alcohol/drugs in order to allow a ‘train’ of men to subsequently gang rape them,” Avenatti wrote. “There are multiple witnesses that will corroborate these facts and each of them must be called to testify publicly.” Avenatti supplied a list of questions Senate investigators should ask Kavanaugh, and also said he would “provide additional evidence” to the committee in the days to follow.

Of course, it wasn’t true. Still, Avenatti’s allegation poured fuel on an already raging partisan fire over the Kavanaugh nomination. First there was the Christine Ford allegation. Then came the Ramirez accusation, which, coming after Ford, gave Kavanaugh’s opponents the occasion to claim a “pattern” of Kavanaugh’s alleged abuse of women. Then Avenatti’s allegation — gang rape — sent it into another dimension.

Avenatti’s client was identified as Julie Swetnick, who had lived in the Washington area during Kavanaugh’s high school years. Avenatti sent the committee an affidavit in which Swetnick made her claims. Beyond that, he provided no other evidence to support the allegation — beyond

the promise of “multiple witnesses.” Nevertheless, Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee took it very seriously.

“In light of shocking new allegations detailed by Julie Swetnick in a sworn affidavit, we write to request that the committee vote on Brett Kavanaugh be immediately canceled and that you support the re-opening of the FBI investigation,” committee Democrats wrote Republican chairman Charles Grassley.

The committee immediately began investigating Avenatti’s claim, using staff time and resources it could have devoted to other parts of the Kavanaugh matter. According to Grassley, the committee interviewed 10 associates of Swetnick, working late nights and a weekend in the process. “Committee staff sought to interview Ms. Swetnick,” Grassley later wrote, “but Mr. Avenatti refused.”

Not long after, NBC aired an interview with Swetnick in which she backed away from her most incendiary accusations. Avenatti also gave the committee a declaration from an anonymous “witness” who said that in 1981 to 1982, she personally saw Kavanaugh “spike” the “punch” at house parties I attended with Quaaludes and/or grain alcohol. I understood this was being done for the purpose of making girls more likely to

engage in sexual acts and less likely to say “No.”

Avenatti would not tell the committee who the “witness” was. But, recently, NBC reported that its journalists talked to the witness, who did not back up the declaration that Avenatti gave the committee on her behalf. “It is incorrect that I saw Brett ‘spike’ the punch,” the woman told NBC. “I didn’t see anyone spike the punch ... I was very clear with Michael Avenatti from day one.”

On Oct. 25, Grassley formally referred Avenatti (and Swetnick) to the Justice Department for a criminal investigation into their conduct. “When charlatans make false claims to the committee — claims that may earn them short-term media exposure and financial gain, but which hinder the committee’s ability to do its job — there should be consequences,” Grassley wrote in the referral.

With Avenatti, there have so far been no consequences, beyond the loss of whatever credibility some cable TV news organizations conferred on him in repeated appearances over the last several months. Now, with the Grassley referral, that could finally change.

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Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

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