

Stories we tell, and listen to, inform our culture



BETTE HUSTED
FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

Barry Lopez once asked tribal elders in the far north Indigenous cultures who had taught him so much, “What do you mean by a storyteller?”

“When the stories you tell help,” they told him.

I thought of these words last week when Americans invaded their own Capitol, some texting about Q-Anon’s promised “Storm,” others brandishing Confederate flags and wearing T-shirts that read “Camp Auschwitz” and “6MWE” (six million wasn’t enough) and “Women belong in the kitchen.”

Clearly, the stories we choose to tell, and the ones we choose to listen to, matter.

This week, I’ve been reading “The Beadworkers,” by Nez Perce writer Beth Piatote. I am not Indigenous. My ancestors were European; I’m as white as most of the faces in that terrifying crowd. But it’s hard to describe

my relief and joy when I opened the book to find that its first word is Kuus, Nez Perce for water. The word that opens and closes each ceremonial feast here on the Umatilla Reservation, and begins and ends each day there, too, for many.

“Water is life,” Piatote writes. “Water is alive. All life begins and ends with water: our mothers, the rivers, the rain. From the beginning of time to the end of time, the word we carry on our breath, the taste of this world on our tongues and our tears, is alive, is life, is Kuus.”

Now that’s a story worth listening to.

It was fun to find familiar names in her stories: Cay-Uma-Wa, Phillip Cash Cash, Pendleton Round-Up, Celilo, St. Anthony Hospital. And names I knew, like Theresa Eagle, the auntie who gave Piatote her first words. But what really helped me were the stories, especially the enduring, ancient ones guiding the newer stories.

The book begins with Feast stories, rich in Nez Perce language, and goes on to include stories set during Wounded Knee and the more recent Fish Wars. I loved the one about creating, as an installation art exhibit, a satiri-

cal game called wIndin! played with Pendleton Blanket and Stick Game cards.

And it was almost as if I was in the room as a woman teaches her niece to make beaded earrings for her mother, feeling some of the same peace I’ve observed as I watch people bead. “When I wrote these stories,” Piatote told Sam Levin at the LA Review of Books, “my audience were people I imagined with me at the beadwork table, telling stories and laughing. ... You come with all of your pain and all of your suffering, you’re bearing it, but it’s not happening in that space.”

The final section of the book is a play inspired, she says, by the 1996 discovery of Kennewick Man, the Ancient One. “I wondered why it was that people could understand things like Greek tragedy and Antigone but couldn’t understand why Native people, or anybody, cared about their ancestors. Doesn’t this literature form the universal values that we’re all supposed to know and understand?”

In her version, Antikoni “steals” bones from a museum supervised by her uncle Kreon; aunties are the chorus. “Everyone’s on the same side. Everyone loves each other. They’re not trying to destroy each other,

but they do ... they all say, ‘I love my people. I’m doing this for my people. I’m sacrificing myself for my people.’ But their vision of sacrifice is different.”

Beth Piatote’s stories helped push back the walls I felt closing around me as I read the news. She says she thinks of her own writing as being like beadwork, putting down one word at a time. “When I’m at the beadwork table, I always find myself wondering how it is that Indian people have survived. And I think surviving is about people continuing to remake their culture.”

Can Americans make a culture free of the idea of white supremacy, a democracy truly based on inclusion and equality? Can we reckon with our past and our present? Langston Hughes said it best: “Let America be America again — the land that never has been yet — and yet must be.”

It will take stories that help.

The next First Draft Zoom is on Jan. 21 — the day after the inauguration — at 7 p.m.

Bette Husted is a writer and a student of T’ai Chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.

Congressman Bentz needs to nip Trump virus in the bud



ROGER WORTHINGTON
OTHER VIEWS

Normally, we would give a grace period to a freshly sworn-in politician. But the actions and words of Rep. Cliff Bentz warrant not patience, but condemnation.

Many of us heard President Trump’s seditious call to incite violence. We heard him telling the terrorist mob that he “loved them.” But in an interview with Oregon Public Broadcasting the day after the storming and looting of the Capitol, Bentz said he wasn’t familiar with what Trump said before or afterward.

Either Bentz is lying, or he’s staggeringly ignorant.

When asked whether he would support invoking the 25th Amendment to the Constitution to remove Trump from office, Bentz said he couldn’t be expected to have read the amendment and know what it means. Yet, in

striking contrast, Bentz voted against certifying the electoral votes of Pennsylvania, showing he’s well-versed in conspiracy theories.

President-elect Joe Biden won the election and every state certified its electors. In fact, Biden received 81.3 million votes, a historic number. He pummeled Trump by more than 7 million votes. Biden’s win in the Electoral College was not even close — at 306 to 232. Voter fraud? Rigged election? Nearly 60 courts heard the claims and unanimously concluded — there’s no evidence.

Jan. 6 was supposed to be a ceremonial duty. By joining in with the other Republicans in the attempt to overturn the results of a fair election simply because they were angry with the result, Bentz must accept responsibility for the terrorism that ensued.

No, Bentz, you do not get a pass by your constituents of Eastern Oregon, including my hometown of Bend. You may have entered the office as a Trump loyalist, but you took an oath to defend the U.S. Constitution, not a despot. You swore to defend our country against all enemies, both

foreign and domestic.

In order to lead, we need to trust your judgment. You knew before being sworn in that Trump had completely failed to control the spread of the coronavirus. You knew the havoc the virus was unleashing on our economy, as well as the horrendous and mounting loss of lives. You knew his record on rejecting science, denying climate change, abusing women, undermining civil rights, bullying allies, spreading self-serving misinformation, thwarting the rule of law, and fanning the flames of hate and division.

Congressman Bentz, after today, how can we trust you? If we’ve learned anything from the last four years, it’s this: If we know or suspect of a cancer on the body politic, we must intervene early to stop it before it metastasizes. We can no longer assume that a malignant political neophyte will, with time and patience, mature into a healthy and mature statesman. Recall Maine Sen. Susan Collins’ infamous prediction after her no vote — now that he’s been impeached, Trump has learned his lesson

and will now act more presidential.

I call on you, Rep. Bentz, to unequivocally renounce Trump and all he stands for. Apologize for your vote to overturn the will of the people. Apologize for fomenting lies that stirred up extremists to attempt a coup d’état.

The health and life of our democracy is on the line. Trump may be out, but his stain remains. Is Bentz stained by the Trump virus of hatred, bigotry, willful ignorance, despotism and sedition? So far, the diagnosis is affirmative. We can’t wait two years for rehabilitation.

I implore Bentz to read the 25th Amendment. Show us you are capable of self-healing by joining the growing numbers of Democrats and Republicans who are advocating for the swift removal of our unfit commander-in-chief. Every moment that the maniacal Trump remains in office is a grave danger to the security of this nation and the world.

Roger Worthington, an asbestos cancer lawyer, is the owner of Worthy Brewing in Bend.

Oregon, the most expensive place to farm



MIKE MCCARTHY
OTHER VIEWS

COVID-19 has brought difficult challenges for food producers. It has also brought a heightened realization by the public of how essential food production is and how important farmers and farmworkers are. What I wish more people realized is how burgeoning labor and regulatory costs are driving Oregon family farmers out of business.

Even before these challenging times, underlying economic problems have been increasing, particularly for family farms in Oregon that raise labor-intensive crops like vegetables, fruit, wine grapes, nursery stock, and dairy products. On these farms, labor can cost 60% of total farm expenses. While market forces impact producers in most states about the same, government-imposed costs have made Oregon the most expensive state in the U.S. to farm in if you have employees.

Farmworkers certainly deserve a decent living wage for the hard work they perform, and also for the incredible contributions they make to our vibrant, abundant and sustainable food supply. USDA determines the “regional weighted average hourly rate for crops and livestock” (prevailing wage) annually. It found wages paid in Oregon and Washington were the highest in the U.S. for the last three years pushed up by our minimum wage. Oregon wages at \$15.83 for 2019 were a full \$2 per hour more than the U.S. average for farmworkers — and even \$4 per hour more than some states.

This prevailing wage is what the Department of Labor uses to set the wage rate or Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) for the agricultural guestworker program for the next year. From 2010 to 2020, the AEWR increased 50% in Oregon, making \$15.83 the starting wage for guestworkers and the minimum wage for any farmworkers working on a farm with an H-2a guestworker program. During the same period, wage growth was only 25% across the U.S. economy. Unfortunately for farm employers, commodity prices are not increasing to cover these enormous labor costs.

Base wages are only part of the cost of farm labor. Other Oregon-mandated programs, such as Paid Sick Leave, add additional costs to our farms and are not paid in most other states. Also because of housing shortages and the high cost of housing in Oregon, many farmers are providing housing rent free with utilities paid, which equates to an employee benefit (and

employer cost) of up to \$10 per hour.

Further undermining farm profitability is the cost of regulatory compliance. Regulation is important to ensure the safety of employees, our food supply, and our environment. But the continual onslaught of new and revised regulations imposes such challenges that many are leaving farming. Fifty mandated local, state, federal and international regulatory programs are required for farmers. Many of these programs are unique to farming and are not a burden on other businesses. Costs for a medium-sized farm can be between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year for compliance materials, supplies and particularly a farmer’s time, much of that unpaid. Even modest family farms now need to hire HR, tax and regulatory professionals to keep up.

This hostile regulatory environment hurts family farms in Oregon. Oregon had the greatest increase of all Western states in farm bankruptcies in the last year. Most Western states have higher on-farm income than Oregon, and Oregon’s individual farm income is much less than the average for U.S. farms. USDA data shows Net Cash Income for Oregon farms was less in 2019 than in 2015. Further burdening farms, the Oregon Legislature over this same period imposed a tax on gross income in Oregon.

Farmers can seldom, if ever, push these additional costs up the “food chain.” Some farms can help profitability with direct or niche marketing, but these are small markets for only a few farmers. Most Americans buy food at supermarkets, so most farms have to sell to those chains. Just five supermarket chains buy half of the U.S. produce; this monopolistic market pushes down the prices paid to farmers.

The low prices consumers pay for food in the U.S. (just 9% of disposable income, the lowest in the world) create an imbalance for farmers between what they pay for labor, farm supplies, and regulatory compliance and what they receive for food produced.

Every elected official in Oregon says they love and support family farms. But Oregon’s constantly increasing burdens of new taxes, government-imposed wage rates and labor policies, and regulatory costs are pushing family farms out of existence.

We want to keep farming, but if our state government policies continue to make us non-profitable and non-competitive, we are left with a sad choice. Leave farming or leave Oregon.

Mike McCarthy is a first-generation farmer in Hood River County, and has raised apples, pears, cherries and cattle for 40 years. He is a member of the Oregon Farm Bureau State Board and has a master’s degree from Oregon State University and a Ph.D. from Michigan State University, both in agriculture.



Google’s monopoly isn’t a game for newspapers



DEAN RIDINGS
OTHER VIEWS

It is no secret that Google has secured a near monopoly in the search and local advertising world. However, the impact on newspapers hasn’t been quite as obvious.

A number of lawsuits have recently been brought that call Google to task for its practices. These lawsuits signal the government’s acknowledgement of Google’s unfair practices and initiate steps to hold them accountable.

The first suit, an antitrust action filed by the Justice Department in October 2020, accuses Google of abusing its position over smaller rivals by operating like an illegal monopoly through exclusionary agreements that have hurt consumers and competitors.

The second suit, an antitrust suit filed in mid-December 2020 by Texas and nine other states, alleges the company has stifled competition and enjoys monopolistic power, specifically as it relates to digital advertising.

The third suit, filed just days after the second suit by 38 U.S. states and territories, accuses Google of abusing its market power to maintain its search engine dominance. The suit doesn’t seek monetary damages, but instead seeks broader remedies and an order to end any agreements or other behavior that it finds to be exclusionary.

But why does this matter, and what does it mean to you or to your community?

Almost everyone uses Google in some way or another. It has become part of our lives, and Google has used this to its advantage. Google games the marketplace through search algorithms to its financial gain. The result is an uneven and often unfair playing field for small and local businesses. At a time

when local businesses are struggling to overcome the impacts of COVID, the need to be able to compete fairly has never been greater.

But what it means to local news, including this newspaper, is that Google uses content from newspapers and other news providers without compensating the publisher. If you use Google to seek information about current events in your community, chances are, the results will be from your local newspaper and other news providers. Google monetizes the content produced by the publishers, creating even more problems for an industry that was already challenged as a result of changing news consumption habits in an internet-connected world.

The shift to digital readership has been inevitable. However, the use of locally produced content by Google without adequate compensation has accelerated a financial crisis in the newspaper industry — forcing newspapers to make reductions. If the local newspaper goes away, Google doesn’t replace the content. It just has less viable responses to searches for local information. The ultimate result is significantly diminished coverage in local communities on the issues that matter most — local government, schools, health, environment and all the issues that impact local citizens day in and day out.

A successful newspaper is critical to the health of a local community. Encourage your representatives in Congress to support legislative action to require Google to play by the rules and fairly compensate newspapers for the content they develop. If Google is allowed to continue its unfair business practices, there is no passing go or collecting \$200 as it continues to monopolize the board.

Dean Ridings is CEO of America’s Newspapers, an association committed to explaining, defending and advancing the vital role of newspapers in democracy and civil life.