

## OUR VIEW

# Idea to convert motel a good one

The local area received some good news last week with the announcement that the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon will receive a large grant to help transform a former local hotel into a facility to help provide housing for the homeless and the housing insecure.

A \$1.3 million grant of state funding administered by the Oregon Community Foundation will drive a plan to refurbish The Whiskey Inn on Dorion Avenue. The facility is a first-of-its-kind in the eastern portion of the state and it will hopefully go a long way toward helping those in the community most in need.

Like all such facilities anywhere, it probably won't escape scrutiny and, perhaps, criticism by neighbors. That isn't unexpected and nearby residents surely have the right to give their opinions and express their fears about blight and potential illegal activity.

Yet, CAPECO Chief Executive Officer Paula Hall said steps are already in the works — including the formation of a neighborhood committee — to tackle key concerns.

The grant allows the city and, by extension, the county to take on a persistent problem. Residents who are homeless or housing insecure isn't a new challenge, but it is a growing one not only in Oregon but across the nation.

Realistically, rural areas, such as Pendleton, were the least prepared to overcome housing insecurity and homeless issues. That's not because of a lack of empathy, but rests chiefly on the limited resources rural counties and cities can rely on.

The number of people who are housing insecure continues to climb each year and is becoming a challenge not only in small rural towns like Pendleton but in place like Ontario, in Malheur County, and other places throughout the state.

The new future for the former motel is a concrete example of progress toward addressing that problem. Rather than platitudes or endless tomes of studies on the problem of the housing insecure, this effort provides a way forward.

Hall also emphasized in a story last week in this newspaper that in the future some rooms of the former motel will be used to help the housing insecure for up to two years, while they search to find permanent housing.

That's also good news because it means the facility won't be a "forever home" but a way station, a place for people to get back on their feet.

The plan to convert the old motel is a good one and the local community should be satisfied with this solution.



## A year in retrospect — abundant collectivism



ALEX HOBBS  
PASTURES OF PLENTY

We have arrived at the one-year marker of lockdown, and I figured now would be a good time as any to attempt to distill the jumbled thoughts I've collected over the past year into a single coherent worldview.

The past 365 days have offered me the chance to declutter, rearrange and categorize the changes I've accrued. Because what are seismic shifts in our collective and individual thought if not the opportunity to realign our value systems? To fully realize the fleeting nature of our lives, and to fully embody the sheer luck of making it to the other side of 365 with my health and the health of my loved ones. In other words, I owe it to myself to take the current moment to reconcile the past with the present.

For example, over the past year I have been brainstorming ways in which I can break free of the isolating effects of what I can only refer to as the pathological worship of the individual. Collectivism versus Individualism is certainly not a new argument, but it has manifested itself in new ways, particularly through all our very-online existences.

Last year, whenever glitches in the Matrix appeared, whether in the form of Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign or mass Black Lives Matter protests, the powers that be ensured those movements

of the collective would meet their demise. Real-world movements that enshrined mutual justice and equity morphed into online culture war spats as COVID-19 deaths were hyper-normalized and the presidential election took up most of the air in the room.

So, ironically enough, in order to arrive at that place of collective connection, I turned inward to focus on myself and my family. After all, what better place to start breaking down beliefs than in the self?

I began at the most fundamental of human urges — the belief in the divine. I have never been a devoutly religious person despite being raised in the Catholic church. I have stepped foot in Notre Dame in Paris and felt the weight of 1,000 years of worship, but did not feel magic until I happened upon a small garden tucked away behind a bookstore, secluded from the bustle of the city. At its center stood a well that had long run dry, its ancient wooden pulley smoothed by time — a sacred grove in the middle of a metropolis.

In pre-Christian belief systems, sacred groves and springs were primary places to connect to animistic spirits, to practice rituals, or to cleanse. Today, I find myself drawn to these sacred groves more as an act of worship, connectedness, and as a radical departure from my previous belief system. Sitting in silence with my own thoughts, with a book in hand, makes no difference because the act of simultaneous connection and disconnect is the purpose.

In these moments, I find myself giving in to the urge to occupy the mindset of

my own pre-Christian, pre-industrialized ancestors. What rituals, and stories, and practices had they undertaken to connect to the collective — both human and natural — back before brands and the alienation of global capital turned us all into consumers?

My Slavic ancestors believed in Domovoi, a household god who protected the family from harm. They probably tended to it by leaving small offerings and keeping a tidy house. On the other side of my family, my Scottish ancestors might have partaken in the act of Saining — a ritual where juniper smoke was spread throughout the house to cleanse and bless. Both practices offer me an alternative path toward embracing the collective in totality.

Deconstructing and rebuilding a spiritual foundation of my own has been one of the gifts to emerge from the primordial ooze of the past year — one in which I see a place for myself and for my children in a world that grows increasingly isolating and factionalized. It has been the first step in the thought distillation process.

Does my new worldview mean that I no longer consider myself Christian? I suppose so, but that label is really beside the point. What is more important is that for the first time I feel connected to something bigger than myself — something that extends beyond political or community affiliations and reaches toward abundance.

*Alex Hobbs lives in Irrigon and is a former educator turned full-time homeschooling mom. She has a degree in political science from Oregon State University.*

## YOUR VIEWS

### Understanding legislation takes effort

Maybe you say, "The government is making too many regulations that interfere with running my business the way I want." But really, who makes those decisions?

First, we voters vote for the politicians who we believe will work for us. We contribute to their campaign funds and write to the winners. At the same time, corporations and organizations also contribute campaign funds; however, with their money, they can hire lobbyists to influence legislation for their benefit. (This is what "Citizens United" is about.) Much of the time, the lobbyists construct bills and hand them to the legislators who submit them for the decision process. Do you think the lobbyists are promoting and writing legislation that benefits everyone? No, they propose and write legislation to benefit their employers. Do these employers and lobbyists stop to think about the effect their legislation will have on others? Who will benefit if their bill is put into law? Who will be hurt?

What about the bureaucrats, those who work for the government and do the "grunt work" to enable the decisions made by the politicians? Do they make too many decisions? For whom do they make decisions? My experience as a former state bureaucrat is that my job

was to do what the politicians assigned me to do. Almost every assignment was unpopular with various segments of the population because people have differing needs and expectations.

My advice to anyone who is unhappy with a regulation is to find out who influenced the passing of the bill that included the problem regulation, who it benefits, and why was the regulation included in the implementation of the legislation. What is your representative's position? Did you follow the legislation, and did you inform your representative of your point of view? And why did you vote for or against that representative, and did you vote? So you see, it all circles back to the responsible parties — the voters.

Being a responsible citizen is not easy.

Evelyn Swart  
Joseph

### Leave partisan politics out of redistricting

In 2019, state Sen. Michael Dembrow made the following remarks about the GOP walkout protesting cap and trade: "We know that the voters want us to be creating this program. Every legislator that was in a contested race in 2018 ran on this issue. The governor ran on this issue. We picked up seats in both cham-

bers in part over this issue."

In 2018, Democrats won 38 House seats and 11 Senate seats. In 40 House seats, Democrats had a voter registration advantage over Republicans at an average of 9,357.13, while Republicans had a voter registration advantage in just 20 House seats at an average of 5,160.5. Fourteen House seats had a Democratic voter registration advantage greater than 10,000, versus just one House District with a Republican voter registration advantage that size. House District 43 had a Democratic advantage of 31,000.

Decades of partisan redistricting created a system where the majority party picks and chooses voters. Oregon House Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney have used the power of their office to deny nonpartisan redistricting proposals. Oregonians deserve a system that allows voters, not parties, to choose the candidates who best represent their communities.

While the authority to draw district maps remains with the Oregon Legislature, legislators must look beyond their electoral interests and ensure all possible districts are equally divided between Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Voter registration advantages should be in the dozens, not tens of thousands. This is the only road forward to unity and honest policymaking.

Alex McHaddad  
La Grande

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