

KEVIN
FRAZIER

OTHER VIEWS

Urban, younger Oregonians believe they can have more of an impact

A large percentage (43%) of Oregonians do not believe they can make their community a better place to live, according to a recent Oregon Values and Beliefs Center survey. That figure becomes a majority among Oregonians ages 65 and over; just 62% do not believe they can have a big or moderate effect on their community. That percentage is also a majority among rural Oregonians (54%).

Comparatively, urban (64%) and younger (66%) Oregonians feel much more capable of having a positive effect.

What explains these differences?

There's no one answer. Instead a variety of factors have convinced some Oregonians that the system is just too stacked against them to be able to turn the gears in their favor.

One explanatory factor: access to information. Nearly 6 in 10 urban Oregonians have a high degree of trust in the people who publish the news about their community, whereas just 4 in 10 rural Oregonians share that view. There's also a 10 percentage point gap in how much Oregonians in the tri-county area trust broadcast news when compared to Oregonians in the rest of the state (57% versus 47%).

The connection between faith in local news and faith in capacity to incite change makes sense. If you feel confident that you know what's going on in your neck of the woods, then you likely feel capable of getting involved or at least staying informed about major changes in your community.

Another factor impacting the impact gap — personal security. Oregonians 65 and over seem to feel more in control over their personal well-being. A full 85% of these older Oregonians reported they feel able to control what is important in their lives on a majority of days. That number plummets to 65% for Oregonians between 18 and 29 years old. Perhaps insecurity about their own lives spurs younger Oregonians to feel as though it's only through community-wide changes that they can improve their own well-being.

One final factor and more evidence for the thesis: disparities in how much people feel as though community leaders care about their needs. Almost 60% of younger Oregonians agree that "(t)he people running my community don't really care much about what happens to me." On the opposite side of the spectrum, only 44% of older Oregonians doubt the responsiveness of their community leaders.

Why these gaps matter

Our democracy hinges on its perceived legitimacy. If people don't feel as though the levers of change are responsive to their efforts to make their community better, then faith and participation in our democracy understandably decreases. Consider that around half of Oregonians in the tri-county area are somewhat or very satisfied with the way our democracy works, but only 39% of Oregonians in the rest of the state share that level of satisfaction.

The aforementioned factors suggest that we've got a lot of work to do when it comes to giving Oregonians the information and leaders they deserve.

What are some ways to chip away at this impact gap?

First, address news deserts. Oregonians in every community deserve news that's well-funded and well-resourced so that they can keep local officials accountable and share opportunities about how and when to get involved.

Second, make our elected officials more accountable to voters, not special interests. One way this is happening is through campaign finance reform. This will help give all Oregonians a chance to impact an election, while also reducing the extreme sway wealthy individuals and organizations hold over candidates.

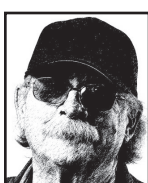
Third, we can end the idea of Oregon exceptionalism when it comes to good governance. This may sound harsh, but Oregon is not living up to its own standards when it comes to being a leader in democracy. Across the urban/rural divide and age spectrum, only 1 out of every 4 Oregonians think the state's democracy has gotten stronger in the last four years. That's abysmal.

To improve our democracy here in Oregon, we have to be more open about the fact that it's flawed and more intentional about instituting meaningful reforms.

Kevin Frazier was raised in Washington County, Oregon. He is pursuing a law degree at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.



Carpenter tales spice up the lunch break

J.D.
SMITHFROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

One good indicator of impending spring is the number of ladders rattling around on pickup racks. The carpenteros are getting back to business while government folks are talking about building more affordable (whatever that means) housing in Umatilla County. That is good. Everyone should have a home.

I have worked as a wood butcher several times, rolling logs to the headworks in an Idaho sawmill, pounding nails for a contractor who was obsessed with hunting geese in the Salmon River Mountains, and as remodeler/handydude in California and Hawaii. During lunch breaks, when the carpenters were chatty, the drywallers were coughing and the painters just sat, chewed and stared into the distance, I gnawed on my Spam sandwiches, listened to my fellow workers and gathered some of their stories. Here are a couple of examples.

Sanity and Jimi Hendrix

"Joe Bung and I were framing tract houses in Caldwell for an old-time, by-the-book guy who believed that job radios slowed things down. He would not let us have tunes except at lunchtime, which was not included in our hourly pay. He was wrong. Anybody who has ever swung a hammer at a 16-penny sinker knows that music is absolutely necessary for the sanity of a person who must do the same thing for a living day after day after day.

"One payday Joe and I invested in a nice big transistor radio when they were new to the market. It had a fairly powerful set of speakers and operated on both house current and four D-cell batteries. We strung a cord from the temporary power pole

to the middle of one of the living rooms in a two-story duplex we were building, plugged it in and cranked it up, figuring that if the boss man showed we would have enough time to shut things down.

"One mid-morning, both of us were up high toenailing rafter tails when, sure enough, here came the old dude in his Oldsmobile Vistacruiser, sliding to a stop on the muddy road. There was no way we had time to climb down to the radio. He came through the cheapo door into the house just as Jimi Hendrix launched into "Purple Haze" at full volume.

"Purple haze all in my brain
"Lately things, they don't seem the same
"Acting funny, but I don't know why
"Scuse me while I kiss the sky"

"The old dude stood there for a while, switching his glare from the radio to us up in the rafters, then tromped over to the radio and jerked its cord it from the splitter. The batteries took over from there. Jimi never missed a beat.

"Purple haze all around
"Don't know if I'm comin' up or down
"Am I happy or in misery?
"Whatever it is, that girl put a spell on me"

"Joe and I looked at each other, figuring on getting fired for sure, while the boss stood down there staring at the radio and actually scratching his head. Finally, he looked up at us, kinda grinned and said, 'Well, he is a stout enough boy anyway,' walked back to the station wagon and drove away. We had a job radio from then on."

Don't mess with Claude

Claude spent 30 years as a Forest Service packer, wrangling a string of mules to carry fingerling fish into high country lakes. After retirement he turned to finish carpentry as a supplement to his Social Security. He was a very careful worker, a private person who had worked alone for most of his life, was older than the rest of

us on the crew and didn't much participate in lunchtime chit-chat. This story was told by a fellow carpenter one day when Claude elected to go fishing instead of trimming windows.

"Five years ago, just after Claude retired, they decided to build a new Forest Service headquarters and the low bidder was an outfit from down in the flatlands. The jobsite manager was a young fellow with a lot of book learning and not much actual experience. The rest of us on the job called him Dolittle because that is what he did.

"They advertised for carpenters in the *Star News* and Claude showed up on the job to apply. I was cutting rafters for the framing crew about 20 feet from his interview with Dolittle, so I saw the whole deal go down.

"Claude said that (he) had seen in the paper that they were hiring, that he wanted to hire on as a finish carpenter and asked how much they were paying. Dolittle kinda puffed out his chest and said that they were only hiring rough carpenters, didn't need any finish carpenters.

"Claude looked at the kid for a long time and then said that, well, he could probably be a rough carpenter. What would he be doing? Dolittle said that he would be cutting two-by-sixes into stud lengths and blocking on the big old radial arm saw that was set up by a bunk of lumber, and would welcome Claude showing him what he could do.

"Claude said he would like to try it, walked over to the lumber, pulled out a 10-foot stick of two-by-six, marked off 91½ inches for a double plate, set it up on the saw, cut it half way through, picked it off the saw table, swung it over his head and broke in half over a sawhorse. He smiled at the kid and asked, 'Rough enough for you?' then walked off the job."

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.

Oregonians of all stripes support more Wild and Scenic Rivers

CHERI
HELT

OTHER VIEWS

The pandemic has impacted all of us. At worst, Oregonians have experienced the death of loved ones and friends. For others, it has brought economic pain and the loss of cherished family and community rituals.

The past year has reinforced my appreciation and love for Oregon's incredible natural environment. Even with temporary restrictions on access to certain parks, public lands and recreational activities, Oregonians have enjoyed refuge and rejuvenation in and around our incredible mountains, beaches, trails, forests, rivers, lakes and streams. The incredible devastation from last year's historic wildfires stung all the more because they were piled on top of pandemic-related hardships.

Oregonians have a proud tradition of making common-sense, farsighted decisions to protect our greatest natural treasures for future generations to access and enjoy. The Oregon of today is not an accident. It is the work of leaders and residents, rural and urban, Republican and Democrat, working together to balance the need for economic opportunity with our desire to take special care of very special places. It is a legacy that stretches from

Mount Hood and Crater Lake to hundreds of miles of public beaches and coastline — and beyond.

Nowhere is Oregon's legacy of conservation and access greater than our system of nationally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers. Over 50 years ago, Congress designated Oregon's eight original Wild and Scenic Rivers — including the epic Rogue River in Southern Oregon. Since then, under both Democrat and Republican presidents, 2,173 miles of Oregon rivers have been designated Wild and Scenic, including 250 miles in 2019 signed into law by former President Donald Trump. That may sound like a lot, but it's just a small fraction of Oregon's 110,000 miles of rivers and streams.

This year, Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley have introduced legislation to protect an additional 4,700 miles of Oregon rivers as Wild and Scenic. The plan is called the "River Democracy Act" and it follows more than two years of public listening and input from every corner of the state, with 2,500 Oregonians submitting more than 15,000 nominations of their favorite rivers and streams. While ambitious, if approved by Congress, this plan will still mean less than 4% of Oregon's river land corridors will enjoy Wild and Scenic designation and protections.

Wild and Scenic Rivers are proven to be a catalyst for jobs and outdoor recreation in rural communities. Oregonians and

visitors from across the nation and around the world each year journey to view, hike, fish and raft in and around these special rivers and streams. Outdoor recreation in Oregon supports 224,000 jobs and generates more than \$15 billion in economic activity.

As critical as the jobs and economic benefits are, the common-sense provisions in Wild and Scenic River designations to reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfires and to ensure access to river corridors in the event of devastating wildfire events. Among other fire prevention measures, the River Democracy Act requires federal land managers to assess wildfire risks in Wild and Scenic River corridors and implement plans to reduce those risks to nearby lands, homes and businesses.

During these politically polarized times, protecting Oregon's most beautiful and treasured rivers enjoys broad support among Oregonians. A recent poll revealed that 65% of Oregonians support Congress adding more Wild and Scenic Rivers — including a majority of voters in all five Oregon congressional districts — urban and rural. This broad public support is testament to the love Oregonians share for our natural environment and the many economic and conservation benefits of Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Cheri Helt is a business owner in Bend, a former state representative and a former member of the Bend-La Pine School Board.