

OUR VIEW

Video provides message of hope

Life lessons for many are hard to come by, but for Pendleton's William Wehrli, dispelling misconceptions about autism and helping others may be his calling.

Recently, Wehrli, who has autism, made a video for social media star, Laura Clery, and put it on TikTok, the social networking service.

Clery, whose son is autistic, is an actress and comedian and Wehrli's message was a simple one. Wehrli's theme is an autism diagnosis shouldn't be the end of the world for parents or loved ones. Doctors said Wehrli predicted he would never be independent or graduate. Yet, he has a master's degree, owns a home, pays rent, cook, cleans and works many jobs.

The video went viral. And Clery responded. Clery shot a video of her and her husband reacting to Wehrli's video where they smiled and held their hands over their hearts. Thousands of people commented as well.

Wehrli was also inundated with messages. Many of those messages expressed similar views regarding how doctors said their child would never succeed. Seeing Wehrli's video gave them hope.

He received so many messages he was eventually overwhelmed.

It is fitting that Wehrli, who is an autism advocate and helps parents navigate the challenges that come with the condition, was able to get his message out and onto such a popular platform as TikTok.

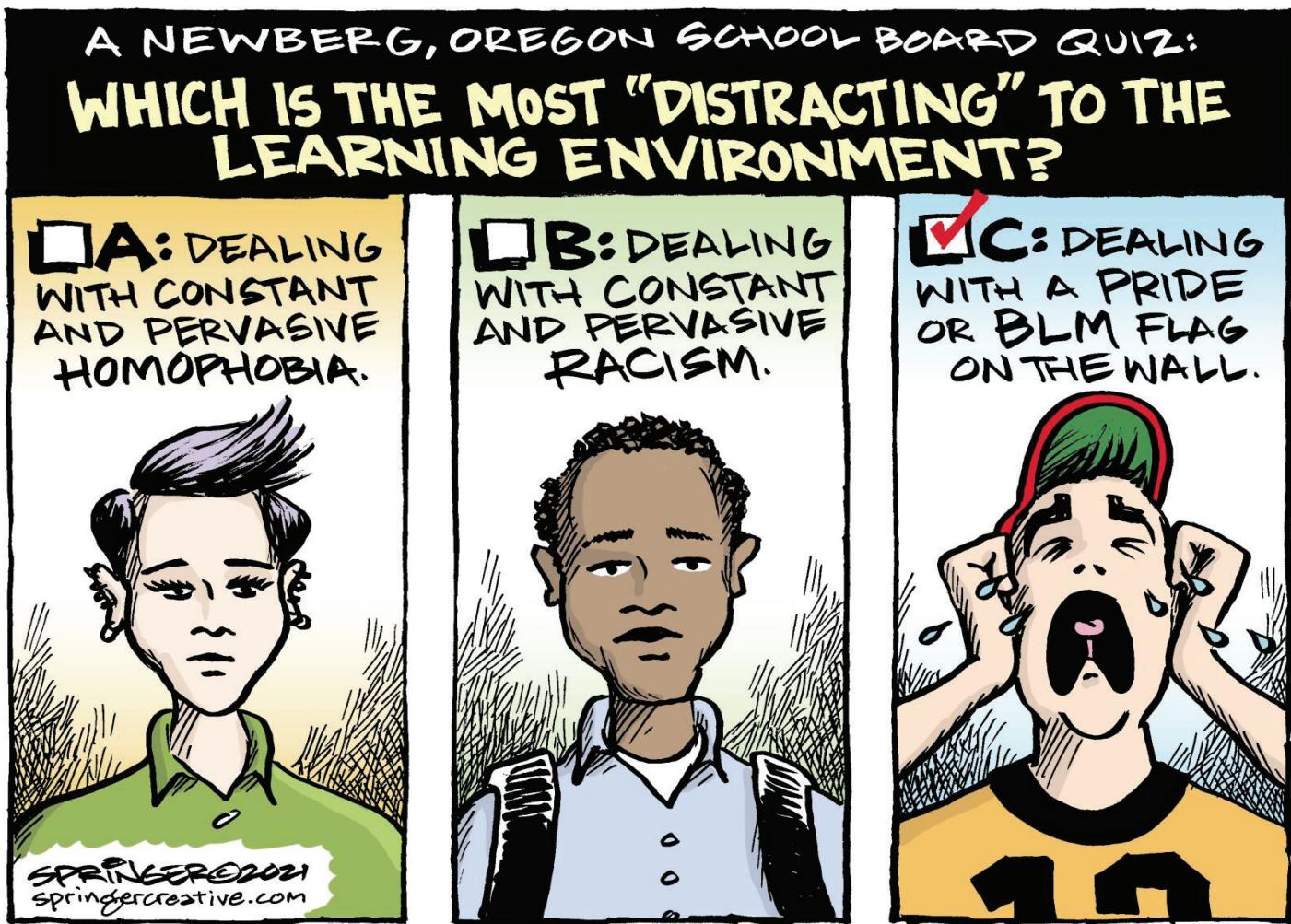
That's because his message is one that needs to be heard by many and because his overall theme — never give up hope — should be disseminated as far as possible.

Living with a condition such as autism can be and surely is a challenge. And it can be especially discouraging when a subject-matter expert, such as a physician, outlines a particularly onerous future for a loved one living autism.

That's why Wehrli's message is so important. His life, his accomplishments stand in stark contrast to the opinions of "experts" and signify that the human will can never be discounted. The doctors in Wehrli's case were certain his life would be one without education or valid accomplishments. They were wrong.

Wehrli and his parent could have given up hope but, instead, they found a way to win. Wehrli's message should not be allowed to fade away. We need such stories, such tales of overcoming adversity, now more than ever.

Wehrli's actions and his life are a testament to never giving up and trying to always be the best you can be.



Balanced maps, untouched by human hands



DANIEL WATTENBURGER
HOMEGROWN

From our bleacher seats in Eastern Oregon, the redistricting process can seem labored and, ultimately, futile.

Sure, we have new proposed electoral maps that reflect our state's changing population. That means, among other things, a sixth representative in Congress.

The maps may still be challenged in court and revised. Or they may go into effect and set the parameters for Oregon elections for the next decade. We'll know before November.

Either way, we in Eastern Oregon are still squarely in the 2nd Congressional District, which was and still is the only predictably Republican district in the state. Our representatives in the Oregon legislature will continue to serve roughly the same cities and counties.

So why get riled up? Watching the floor speeches by many Democrats, you'd think the maps were ordained by the collective spirit of the Oregon people. To hear the more outspoken Republicans tell it, Democrats have undermined every interest except their own and have doomed the state to a decade of inequal political representation.

Let's be fair and agree the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Of course Democrats, who control both chambers and all executive seats in Oregon, baked their priorities in the new maps. And of course Republicans were going to call

foul, no matter what the maps looked like.

It's worth remembering 2001, when Republicans controlled both chambers and presented a map that Democrats deemed so unacceptable they orchestrated a walkout to prevent its passage. This put the process in the hands of Secretary of State Bill Bradbury, a Democrat, who drew up a map that Republicans opposed but failed to overturn in court. It also set a walkout precedent that still hangs over every legislative session.

All this to say, when a map is drafted by politicians, the politicians of the opposing party will oppose it. And they'll get as much mileage out of it as they can.

But where does this leave the voters, the people who electoral districts are meant to empower?

There are public hearings to give us the opportunity to share our thoughts. There are also rules requiring the districts to follow existing boundaries, protect communities of common interest, and not to favor a party, politician, or any individual. But whether the input is heeded, and how fair the maps are, is difficult to gauge.

With a decade to go before our next predictable tussle, we have time to enlist the help of a truly impartial observer: artificial intelligence.

The old axiom goes that voters should choose their representatives and not the other way around. Inserting a neutral entity with no ties to any party or agenda is the best way to make that happen.

A.I. would be more than capable of taking in relevant data — demographic, geographic, historical — and creating maps that are evenly balanced with no

concessions to individual interests. It could even pump out a hundred iterations, or a thousand, and randomly select one to serve as a base map for the public to review and comment on. If there is sufficient reason to alter the map, it would have to be done transparently.

This would account for the countless ways the state could be divided, show no preference to any of them, and give the public the first say on what the maps should look like. At the very least, it would take power away from partisan leaders and allow them to focus on legislation that we need actual humans to make.

The North Carolina Senate already took a step down this road in 2019. When ordered to redistrict badly gerrymandered maps by the state court, the legislature turned the process over to a computer algorithm that drew up 1,000 versions. Staffers selected five, which were put into a lottery drawing to randomly select the final one.

It wasn't perfect. The final map was still contested by Democrats, and they've gone back to the old style of committee-drawn maps.

Oregon is a state that has shown a willingness to lead. Just look at mail-in voting. This is our opportunity to improve the system we have now, take advantage of technological efficiency, and show we're serious about empowering voters.

Daniel Wattenburger is the former managing editor of the East Oregonian. He lives in Hermiston with his wife and children and is an account manager for Pac/West Lobby Group. Contact him at danielwattenburger@gmail.com.

YOUR VIEWS

Letter: Masking up protects our children

Last September, when there were 28,000 daily infections, schools closed to stop the spread and classes were moved online. Today there are 150,000 daily cases and children are back in the classroom.

Unfortunately, children account for 26% of new infections, totaling 250,000 in the past week; 2,500 are in the hospital and tens of thousands are being sent home to quarantine — with fewer online options for learning.

And still, there are anti-mask protests across the nation. Recently, Wallowa County protesters were pictured front page in the Wallowa County Chieftain encouraging parents to send their kids to school unmasked in violation of the governor's mandate. "Don't be sheep!" one speaker said.

Delta has created another dangerous surge in the pandemic and 100,000 more people may die before this terrible year ends. I am reminded of the parable shared by pastors and priests about the dying man who wonders why God has abandoned him. When he reaches the pearly gates he asks why his faith did not save him.

God replies (and I paraphrase): I created science to help you evolve

beyond suffering but you were focused on fear. I inspired doctors to help you stay safe but you were filled with disdain. I even sent a new vaccine but you turned away, demanding personal freedom. So yes, you are here of your own free will, which is also a gift ... but faith in my plan could have saved you.

We are sheep. We mask up to protect the lambs.

Janet Graham
Enterprise

River Democracy Act authors have vision

I am writing to give voice to those who have none, our nonhuman relatives, and many other members of our community who support protections that would be provided by Sen. Ron Wyden's River Democracy Act.

As a resident of Halfway — Nimii-puu Lands — I am happy to be joined in that support by many friends, neighbors and, importantly, the Nez Perce Tribe.

Clean, cold waters sustain rich aquatic habitats that produce fish and wildlife in diversity and abundance. That so many rural voices have nominated not just big iconic rivers, but also smaller tributaries for protection bespeaks a collective wisdom in seeing our water cycle in a holistic manner.

Opposition to including these reaches is not unlike treating a cardiovascular problem by solely focusing on the arteries; a bad practice with a likely sorry outcome.

I invite readers to consider a case study I observed in the mid-2000s while working on salmon recovery with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Pendleton.

Studies of the Umatilla River demonstrated railroads and highways blocked the flow of surface and groundwater into the main channel. This disconnection prevented the mixing of cooler waters with the warming waters of the main stream and degraded the habitat for cold water fish species.

The tribe's salmon restoration strategy aimed to reconnect these flows by protecting headwaters and breaching barriers across the flood plain.

Thermal pollution is a leading factor impairing the quality of our surface waters. This is a problem for humans and nonhumans alike. If we genuinely care about protecting the values of our waterways, it would be irresponsible to exclude tributaries, intermittent streams and wetlands from the protections of the River Democracy Act. I applaud Wyden and his river nominators for their vision.

Michael Beaty
Halfway

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