



DEVIN PATTON

OTHER VIEWS

United we stand, divided we fall

Humans are communal beings. Healthy communities provide individuals with a sense of meaning, belonging and security. Our innate longing to be part of a community goes back thousands of years and is demonstrated in this present age by the desire to connect with people with whom we share common interests.

Some of the most enthusiastic communities we see today are united around a shared love for a sports team or a political ideology, but virtually any sort of common interest can serve as the impetus for the development of a community.

Until recently, the American Idea was one such common interest. It united individuals with diverse religious, cultural, geographical and political affiliations, and served as an example to the world that a nation can thrive even when its citizens are not united by a shared cultural heritage, religion or geography.

Unfortunately, this sense of unity is being eroded before our very eyes. Tribalism is destroying our nation. If we cannot stop the descent into tribal warfare, we will become an uncivilized nation characterized by warring factions and disharmony.

The human drive for connection is evident at birth and influences human behavior throughout the course of development. As teens, we all witnessed the power of “peer pressure.” Our instinctive need for connection and social acceptance developed over the course of thousands of years and serves to protect us and provide meaning and a sense of belonging. However, because this need for connection is so instinctive, we naturally fall into social groups, cliques and clubs without much conscious thought. We may even find ourselves a member of a “tribe” or gang, pitted against groups that are perceived as threatening.

Consultant and author Alan Weiss, of Summit Consulting Group Inc., makes an apt distinction between communities and tribes, stating: “Communities are inclusionary. They are characterized by common attitudes, interests, and goals. Religion, beliefs, kinship and opinions can differ starkly in communities and, in fact, give them vibrancy and dynamism, allowing for continued experimentation and growth. ... Tribes are exclusionary. They recognize their own members’ similarities and common background ... generally seeing others as enemies at worst and inferiors at best.”

Understanding the differences between healthy community involvement and tribalism is vital to a healthy civilization and protects us from unwittingly becoming perpetrators of dehumanizing behavior.

America, in her prime, was a community of people united around the beliefs that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Lady Liberty and the flag stood for something exceptional — an idea that transcended culture, religion or political affiliation. Even from the beginning, there has always been debate over the relative effectiveness of a centralized government as opposed to a decentralized government emphasizing state sovereignty, but the principles of America’s founding documents were never questioned. Until recently, political discourse centered around how to best live out the tenets set forth in our founding documents — the principles themselves were not criticized or threatened. America was a nation of rich diversity, strengthened by various perspectives about how to achieve our commonly held goal.

Today’s cultural and political climate is quite different. Instead of lively discourse arising within a community united around shared principles, a form of neotribalism has taken root. The political elites have skillfully taken advantage of our desire for connection and have created new tribes, using fear to pit us against one another. They’ve formed these tribes based on characteristics such as race, sexual orientation/gender identity and vaccination status. They garner support by claiming they alone have the solutions to our problems. They encourage us to demonize members of other tribes, reminding us that “the others” are threatening our well-being. It’s the storyline from the Disney movie “Pocahontas,” and it’s pitiful.

What’s worse, tribalism is impacting families and small communities such as our own. We have editorials in our paper that group nearly 40% of the U.S. population into a neat little category called the “unvaxxed,” which is basically the same as being a murderer. Never mind that unvaccinated people may possess natural immunity from a prior infection. Never mind that they have religious beliefs that compel them to decline the vaccine. Never mind that they may lack access to the resources needed to get the vaccine. Never mind that they are humans capable of making their own medical decisions.

We do the same thing with religion, politics, abortion, Black Lives Matter and gay/trans rights; we segregate people into categories created by the political elites, label and dehumanize them, and then disown them from our communities and sometimes even our own families.

It’s impossible to negotiate with someone seeking your demise. Similarly, it’s impossible to engage in productive discourse with people who believe the American Idea is fundamentally corrupt. These people fail to see that it is impossible to improve on the idea that “all men are created equal.” The fundamental principles outlined in our founding documents should be the basis for political discourse and decision making. Without unity around America’s founding principles, we are vulnerable to influence from divisive forces, both internally and externally. We need to unite around a common belief in the American Idea, and save our tribal warring for things of less consequence, like college football.

Devin Patton is a third-generation Willowa County native whose pastimes include the study of ag economics, history and free thought.

Collaboration and community give students opportunity to succeed



DIRK DIRKSON

OTHER VIEWS

Look around the Morrow County School District and you’ll see more than just our teachers and staff having a positive impact on kids. You’ll find an entire community supporting and encouraging our students with their time and resources, making sure they have abundant educational and growth opportunities.

I couldn’t be more grateful for this atmosphere of collaboration in Morrow County. It gives our students the opportunity to thrive and sets a model for responsible citizenship and giving back.

This collaboration takes many forms. Sometimes it’s a local grant to make a school improvement, like the Boardman Chamber of Commerce’s recent funding for new equipment in the Sam Boardman Elementary gymnasium.

Sometimes it’s a community partner looking out for the safety of our students, like the city of Irrigon’s grant-funded walking path along Division Street to give kids a safe path to

get to both schools in the community. Sometimes it’s a club like the Riverside FFA Advisory Board raising funds to purchase a greenhouse kit for the high school FFA program or the North Morrow County Arts Foundation staging professional theatrical performances in Irrigon and Boardman to expose younger students to the arts.

And sometimes it’s a whole group of generous citizens and businesses donating to a cause, like the countless individuals giving to the Heppner Backpack Food Program to provide take-home weekend meals for kids who need them.

The examples are too numerous to list in full detail here, but in both small ways and large, the community steps up time and again to help. These projects enrich the educational and development process and wouldn’t be possible without collaboration.

I’m particularly grateful for our ongoing partnerships with the Port of Morrow to create the Amazon Web Services Think Big Space at the SAGE Center.

This project brings cutting-edge science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs to our students. We’ve been excited to put this space into practice, and this fall our kids have been visiting the labs and had special-

ist educators come to their classrooms. It’s a next-level educational opportunity that not all school districts have.

At the high schools it’s supplemented by initiatives like the Student Internship Program, which brings together business partners in Morrow County to allow students to explore career opportunities through paid internships and earn credits all while building their resumes.

After all, the future is what it’s all about. We’re always keeping in mind the kind of place we hope Morrow County will be decades down the line and how we can help our young people become the leaders they’re meant to be.

The COVID-19 pandemic will be far in the rearview by then. But the growth and development opportunities our students are experiencing now will stick with them. I’m extremely proud of our class of 2021 for finishing strong and maintaining a 92% graduation rate, even under difficult circumstances.

Once again, I want to thank all of the community partners who make this possible and give the students of the Morrow County School District the best opportunity to succeed.

Dirk Dirksen is Morrow County School District’s superintendent.

To our veterans: Thank you for your service



KELLY FITZPATRICK

OTHER VIEWS

And just like that, the calendar, once again, turns to Veterans Day.

For me, like many of my fellow veterans, Oregonians and Americans, it is a time to reflect and take stock. One year ago, we “gathered” for a Veterans Day unlike any before it, in a virtual environment that gave us some flexibilities that we never had before, but we had to forego the warmth of being with other people.

Now, as we cautiously return to an environment more closely resembling normalcy, it’s appropriate to take stock of all that we have to celebrate. We as a country have much to be thankful for, and much of it is thanks to our veterans who fought for freedom and stood guard over our peace, and to our fallen heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice.

We remember our World War II veterans, the sadly dwindling “Greatest Generation,” who have much still teach us about the importance of self-sacrifice to a greater cause. Some 80 years ago, these brave men and women left their homes and families to answer the call — not only for their own country, but the world.

We honor our Korean War veterans, who fought in the “Forgotten War,” which came so soon after the Second World War that it is often overlooked. In a foreign land, they endured freezing conditions and disease in addition to an unrelenting enemy, often against impossible odds, and made a lasting contribution to world peace and prosperity.

We thank our Vietnam War veterans, who, regrettably, did not receive the heroes’ welcome that they deserved upon returning home from battle, and

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this remains a painful stain on our national memory that we must work hard to erase. Yet, these remarkable men and women refused to turn their backs on their fellow veterans. Vowing that another generation of service members would never face what they had to endure, many of them remain engaged in serving their fellow veterans.

We remember our veterans who represent the peacetime era, serving under the near-constant specter of the Cold War and prepared to confront any enemy that might threaten national security around the globe. Many of them engaged in so-called “small wars” in Grenada, or other military operations in far-flung nations such as Bosnia, Somalia and a host of other nations on the African continent.

And, we honor our veterans of the conflicts of the Middle East and Afghanistan. Many of these veterans entered the Armed Forces in the wake of the terrible attack on September 11, 2001, and fought and sacrificed to ensure that the United States would not experience similar attacks.

Heeding McCall’s words, Oregon needs two types of courage



KEVIN FRAZIER

OTHER VIEWS

“You could say that my administration produced a classic continuing example of bullet-biting. In fact, we’ve bitten the bullet so often, it’s a wonder we haven’t contracted lead poisoning.”

Tom McCall, the two-time governor of Oregon, offered that quip during a farewell speech in 1974. He then lamented the seemingly incessant presence of “reactors (to innovative government ideas) who are barren of imagination and courage in their own right, that knock down everything you try, with the languid flick of a finger.” In those lines, McCall outlined two characteristics that seem as hard to find as a Nintendo Wii during Christmas 2012.

The first characteristic is the courage to think over a long-term horizon. Gov. McCall did not shy away from challenging the idea that the government could solve every problem. Time and again, he called for better coordination between government agencies, for more transparent government and for more accountability in government. All of these

suggestions — requiring the hard and time-intensive work of rigorously asking which aspects of the government have become too rusted to even turn — are not short-term political winners.

Few communities mobilize around the vague concept of “good governance.” That’s why upending ossified state bureaucracies requires a deep appreciation for the future well-being of Oregonians. Yet, in recent decades, few champions of an honest and thorough reform of government have emerged. Few have been willing to bite the bullet.

McCall went a step further than just calling out the government for inefficiencies. He also broke what appears to be a modern rule — asking civil society and citizens in general to help solve public problems. In calling for an “age of volunteerism,” McCall celebrated more than 2,000 Oregonians volunteering to assist the Department of Human Services.

The people could have rejected Gov. McCall’s invitation to serve, but they instead welcomed the opportunity to do work that’s likely best suited for community members rather than bureaucrats unfamiliar with the community norms and values that exist around the state. The second characteristic is a willingness to call out those who prefer to obstruct rather than experiment. One of the greatest threats to solving a

problem is allowing too many parties to veto any proposal ... in an age of special interests, that power has been extended to far too many groups and individuals these days.

As McCall pointed out, improvement and innovation require courage, but that courage is in short supply these days.

Too often, it seems we prefer to imagine worst case scenarios rather than those which could unlock greater human flourishing across Oregon.

McCall was not a perfect governor, but he was a governor that leaned into these two characteristics, which Oregonians desperately need to see from our next leader. If we bite the bullet on things such as heavily investing in early childhood education, workforce development and public health, and if we channel the courage to again be a model of good governance, then we can all “feel certain that Oregon has a place in the destiny of the world leadership ... that this state is a lodestar for the waver- ing pace of the American society.”

Kevin Frazier formerly led Passport Oregon, which helped young Oregonians explore the state’s outdoors. He operates No One Left Offline, which has distributed nearly 100 Wi-Fi hot spots throughout Oregon. Kevin will graduate from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law in May 2022.