



ANDREW CLARK



BARBARA CLARK

A SLICE OF LIFE

## Life is rich with friends like these

**F**riendship. What does that mean? Who is a friend and what does this person do to deserve that title?

We came to Pendleton from East Africa in 1973 and bought a small house in town. The idea was to get acquainted with the area and then find a place in the country. We especially wanted space for our five kids to do what kids do — run around and learn about whatever comes their way. We found a church and met many wonderful people, some of whom have become lifelong friends over these nearly 50 years.

But, what makes a lifelong friend? I immediately think of loyalty as a primary component of friendship, a sort of umbrella characteristic with many secondary implications. Being accessible when help of any sort is needed. Being steady, dependable, supportive and sharing of oneself.

Being pleasant, fun or frivolous depending on the situation. Being thoughtful and concerned, and expressing it when things aren't going well. Being honest when you need to be sorted out. Being empathetic when there are serious problems like health concerns. And also, being accepting even when you are acting like a jerk.

Finally in 1975, we found our home in the country about 10 miles north of town. It had all the characteristics we needed lots of space all around and no other human habitation in sight. Bedrooms for all of us. Large outbuildings for shop and storage. Fresh air and far enough from the highway to be silent — no anthropogenic sounds.

The ranch originated in the 1880s so the house and outbuildings were old enough to need lots of maintenance. This gave me opportunities to teach our four sons useful skills — carpentry, plumbing, electricity, painting, repairing anything broken, auto mechanics, forever maintenance — and our daughter learned the necessary household management skills.

And now the friendship element. Our nearest neighbors were about 1 mile away on an established wheat farm. They were in the same church we attended, and with their wheat truck helped us move to our new country home. They invited neighbors from miles around to welcome us with a party featuring homemade ice cream and strawberry shortcake.

Soon their daughter was babysitting our kids and we were enjoying meals together and each others company. With my work on ranches all over Eastern Oregon, these friends were there when Barbara needed emergency health care and while she recovered they took care of the kids. Another time when I was away working, our St. Bernard tangled with a porcupine and our friend came to figure out how to confine that hurting dog and get the quills pulled out of his mouth and nose.

They were always available if we needed a hand for anything — spring, summer, fall and winter. The loan of the truck for graveling our lane, or a tool I didn't have and advice on how to fix things. And on early winter mornings when the snow was deep we'd hear the clack-clack-clack of his Oliver bulldozer plowing out our lane so that we could get to work and the kids to school. Another special surprise was when these friends gifted us with three days of vacation. They took all five of our kids and sent us off in their pickup camper to go wherever we wanted, just the two of us! Talk about thoughtful, creative, sharing, caring and supportive.

Time passed, our boys got older and our friends hired them for farm work. My work often required me to be gone for several days and I might come home in the afternoon and our friend would be doing field work. I'd hustle home, make a big thermos of tea, grab some cookies, then flag him down for a take-a-break tea party, just the us two out there in the wheat field.

More time went by, they retired and moved to the coast, then McMinnville, and our friendship continued with visits, birthday and anniversary celebrations and more.

Those friends were Ray and MaryLea Bowman. Many of you who read this have known them. For us they were truly forever friends. MaryLea died late in 2020 and Ray died last Sunday. Life is rich when you have friends like Ray and MaryLea and their family.

*Dr. Andrew Clark is a livestock veterinarian with both domestic and international work experience who lives in Pendleton. Barbara Clark is a teacher with a broad variety of experience internationally and domestically at primary and secondary levels. Blue Mountain Community College and Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.*



## To get past red vs. blue Oregon, let's try MAGRA



TIM NESBITT

OTHER VIEWS

**W**hat does it mean for our nation and our state when three of every four of us in Oregon think our democracy now is “more at risk”? And what can we do to fix it?

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center's February survey, which elicited a long list of thoughts on those questions, captures insights into why Oregonians have become more pessimistic about how we govern ourselves and what they think we should do to counter the forces that threaten our democracy.

After diving deep into the survey numbers, and reading more than 2,000 comments from respondents, I came away troubled by Oregonians' lack of confidence in the health of our democracy, but also encouraged that we can still find common ground on how to restore its vitality.

Let's begin with the 74% who think our democracy is either “a lot more at risk” (58%) or “a little more at risk” (16%). Their comments on why they see such risk reflect both predictable partisan anger and a more widely shared concern about the parties themselves, the effects of divisive partisanship and the failures of government.

- Among respondents who pointed a finger at either party, those blaming Republicans outnumbered those blaming Democrats by a ratio of 3 to 1.

- But the larger share, representing more than half of all those who provided comments, looked beyond the parties to bemoan a sense of divisiveness, loss of civility, an increase in hate and violence as well as the failures and even corruption of government.

As someone who worked in, and still believes in, government, that's hard to hear. But, it also signals an opening to move beyond “my side-ism” and look for shared solutions with appeal across the political spectrum.

Another bright spot: respondents are less likely to see division in Oregon than in the U.S. (74% vs. 88%) and notably fewer of us are “very worried” about this development here vs. what we see in the nation as a whole (35% vs. 53%).

### Steps to ‘a healthy government’

We also can find some modestly hopeful signs in Oregonians' views of the hot button issues of a stolen Presidential election (only 19% hold that view) and the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol (a similar 18% think of it as a “reasonable protest” or a false flag event fomented by Trump's opponents). That still may be concerning to some, but to me it's a “super minority.”

However, the views I found most revealing emerged from a deeper dive into what respondents perceive at the core of what ails our democracy and what they favor to restore “a healthy government.”

Leading the list of what ails us:

- “The American economy is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful” (78% agree strongly or somewhat agree); and,
- “Traditional parties and politicians don't care.”

Connecting these two systemic criticisms is a more personal concern: “We can no longer share honest opinions with each other in our workplaces, schools and social gatherings” (71%).

These views are corroborated in responses to another question asked of those (53%) who are very or somewhat dissatisfied with “the United States federal form of government.” Their reasons range from “built on classism, controlled with those with the most money” (30%), “unable to get

common sense things done” (19%), “plagued by partisan infighting” (15%) and “beholden to special interests” (12%).

And, if the strongly felt need to “share honest opinions with each other” is a compelling plea for more open dialogue, a later question highlighted what we should be talking about. Here's what Oregonians think are very or critically important features that can contribute to a healthy government:

- “Equal opportunity to participate in elections and representation” (87%).
- “Officials and institutions are accountable to the public” (86%).
- “Equal participation, equal treatment and due process for all” (86%).
- “A legal framework that is enforced equally, impartially and uniformly” (84%).
- “Institutions are responsive to problems in a reasonable time” (81%).

- Principles such as these can be easy to agree to but harder to advance in the form of concrete reforms. But I'd advertise the agenda for a big-tent conversation about fixing our democracy, not in terms of MAGA vs. anti-MAGA, but, instead, of MAGRA — Make American Government Responsible and Accountable.

Once in the tent, we can begin the sharing of honest opinions about some of the more specific ideas advanced by the comments I read through in this survey:

- Campaign finance reform.
- Open primaries and/or other forms of more representative choices in elections.
- Controls on the excesses of social media.

That last item surprised me, but it fits with the desire for a more honest and balanced sharing of opinions.

Let the MAGRA discussions begin.

*Tim Nesbitt, a former union leader in Oregon, served as an adviser to Govs. Ted Kulongoski and John Kitzhaber and later helped to design Measure 98 in 2016, which provided extra, targeted funding for Oregon's high schools.*

## Seeking compromisers who care about ‘The Oregon Way’



DICK HUGHES

OTHER VIEWS

**”C**ompromise, compromise, compromise. Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate.”

These are the qualities that Brian Clem seeks in legislative candidates this spring — “compromisers who care about ‘The Oregon Way.’”

Clem speaks from experience. He served in the state House for nearly 15 years until last fall, was a legislative aide, ran campaigns and worked for U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden.

“The country definitely has gotten more divided and Oregon has gotten more divided,” Clem said, yet “there are people who believe you should try really, really hard to get a consensus.”

He and five former Democratic colleagues in the Legislature want to support such candidates. Last week they launched a new political action committee — Oregonians Are Ready, or OAR PAC. They are Democrats, after all, so the initial goal is to back Democratic legislative candidates in the May primary who will be more centrist, more willing to compromise than their opponents.

I find this development relevant not for any ideological position but for what it says about our state, including the need for hearing rural voices in Salem. Three of the founders have links to Coos Bay, including Clem, who grew up there. They have watched as decisions made in Salem and Washington, D.C., helped turn a thriving

community into an impoverished one — and have stymied local attempts to rebound.

Clem, a Salem businessman, seeded the PAC with \$500,000. The other founders are former state Sen. Arnie Roblan, of Coos Bay, and former Reps. Jeff Barker, of Aloha; Deborah Boone, of Cannon Beach; Betty Komp, of Gates; and Caddy McKeown, of Coos Bay.

They don't necessarily align on every issue. But, Clem said, “I think we're all united on that Oregon has lost its way.”

All six were considered moderate Democrats. In 2016, they began to hold Tuesday night dinners with colleagues in search of middle-ground solutions on complex topics such as raising the minimum wage.

However, as the Democrats expanded their House and Senate majorities in recent years, there was less need for consensus with moderates, or with Republicans at all.

Meanwhile, primary elections draw the most partisan of voters. That is why Democrats often go to the left and Republicans to the right instead of campaigning as moderates. Too often, legislators also lean away from the center to avoid drawing primary challengers from their Democratic left or Republican right.

The new PAC aims to support compromise-willing Democrats who face such opponents.

“I don't believe compromise is a bad word,” McKeown said. “The fringes push ideas. But when you listen to everybody and you work with everybody, I think you come up with good legislation.”

That was a lesson McKeown honed growing up in a small town and later representing a purple district in the Legislature: Learn to work together with everyone. You must give a little to get a little. You can't

afford to burn bridges.

Clem put it another way: Stay at the table until everyone gets what they need. Help them save face instead of rolling over them.

Clem said in his dozen or so years chairing a legislative committee, there never was a party-line vote on a bill. He led such issues as protecting the Metolius River headwaters, resolving a Washington County land use battle, limiting class sizes in public schools, and helping residents recover from the 2020 Labor Day wildfires.

As another example of collaboration, he cited Rep. Janelle Bynum, D-Happy Valley, who chairs the House Judiciary Committee. She could have rolled over Republican Rep. Ron Noble, a former police chief in McMinnville. Instead, they worked together on law enforcement reforms.

The 2011 Legislature, with the House evenly split between Republicans and Democrats, underscored for Clem the immense power of compromise and collaboration. That legislative session — in which Roblan and Rep. Bruce Hanna, R-Roseburg, served as co-House speakers — is regarded among Oregon's most successful. Though discussions often were difficult, lawmakers reached bipartisan agreements on such contentious issues as redistricting, education reform and the state budget.

In this year's legislative session, Clem said, farmworker overtime seemed to offer an opportunity for a similar bipartisan victory, though with significant give-and-take. That didn't happen. House Bill 4002 passed on a party-line vote, with exception of retiring Democratic Sen. Lee Beyer, of Springfield, who voted “no.”

*Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.*