

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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TUESDAY, JUNE 21, 2022

Founded October 16, 1875

A4

OUR VIEW

Actions speak louder than words

State lawmakers said all the right things during a forum at the Eastern Oregon Economic Summit in Hermiston last week, including vowing to cooperate with each other and try to eliminate partisanship.

Those vows should be good news for voters but unfortunately talk, at least in this modern political era — is cheap.

Making bold promises to work together and making a big show regarding cooperation makes for good theater but it only takes a single flash-point issue — just pick one as they are legion now — and all the smiling pledges will vanish like wheat dust in an Umatilla County wheat field during harvest.

Frankly, voters have heard it all before and what usually occurs is — after assurances of bipartisanship — yet another political dog fight that gets no one anywhere but placates only the lunatic fringe of both parties.

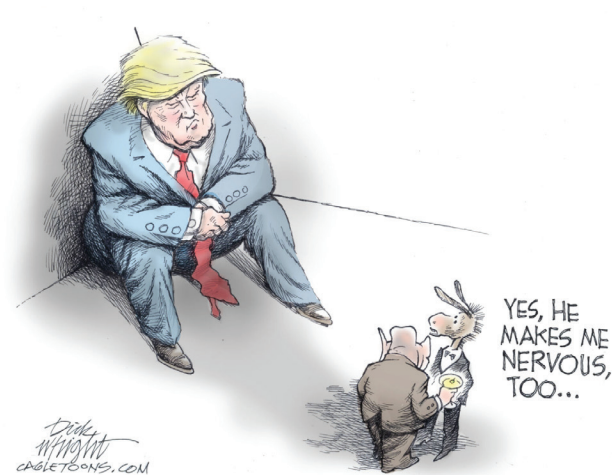
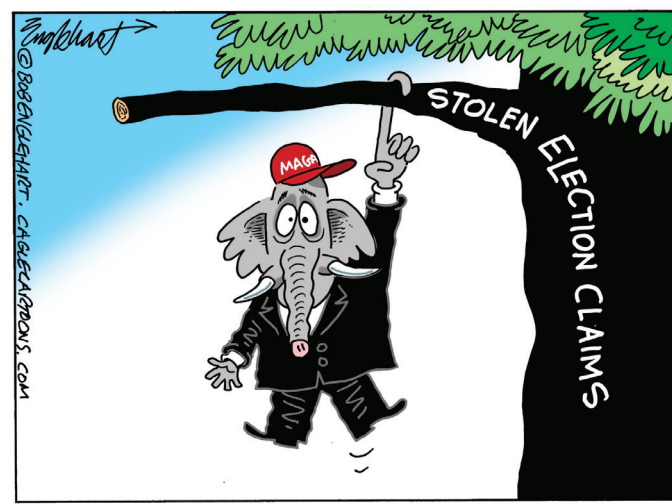
The bottom line is voters in this state — and in Eastern Oregon — deserve better.

They deserve lawmakers who can put aside the bellowing rhetoric of the fanatics in each party. Lawmakers who can find a middle ground, regardless of how controversial a particular issue may be, and move things forward.

Walking out of a legislative session isn't productive. Yet, neither is political bullying by a majority party in a blind obedience to views and policies that work for only a select few. Neither one is democracy. Both are symptoms of a far more insidious disease that haunts our great Republic now. A malady rooted in prejudice, misinformation and the ambitions of individuals who do not have the best interests of the Republic in their hearts. Individuals who tap into a general angst perpetrated by TV personalities who care only for growing size of their paychecks, not what is best for democracy.

We are a great nation that is capable of so many great things, but you wouldn't know it by glancing back over the past few years at the American political arena. Instead of reasoned, productive political discourse, we've been a captive audience to riots, scandals and outlandish federal spending. As much as Americans like a good spectacle, at some point the one-trick pony of partisanship becomes just yet another bizarre — and meaningless — circus act.

Lawmakers in this state need to back up their lofty words of unity and cooperation. That means they must do so with not just the countless minor legislative issues that arise, but also on the controversial themes that can quickly divide.



Unfettered access to firearms means none of us are truly free



ALEX HOBBS
PASTURES OF PLENTY

The first active shooter drill my oldest son participated in occurred when he was 3 years old.

He was enrolled in an all-day child care center on my college campus and each morning we would cut a swathe through the Willamette Valley fog, hand in hand, his penguin backpack strapped to his tiny frame. The contents of this little bag consisted of his blanket, a pull-up in case of accidents at nap time and various trinkets that appeal only to the littlest among us. Belongings to tether him back home where things are known and safe.

On drill day, as I did every day, I lingered outside the classroom viewing window savoring the marvel of watching your child interact with the wider world without your presence. During those moments it is entirely unthinkable that they could be halted by anything other than the marching of time.

I was not notified the drill would be taking place, and had I not dressed my son in the shirt he was wearing that day, I am not sure I would have ever known.

"Teacher L and I were laughing today about Jack's shirt," Teacher D told me as I completed the checkout process. My son was bent over the table at the door signing himself out; a blocky, left-

handed scrawl appeared across the page.

She explained that afternoon the entire class of 3- and 4-year-olds huddled together on the food prep room floor in pitch black. The objective: to practice how to respond in the event of an active shooter. But during this drill, glowing in the darkness, was an inconceivably tiny shirt dotted with planets and stars. My son's shirt. They had laughed because the only thing that could be seen in that room was my toddler's illuminated chest.

That evening, after dinners and baths and books, I gathered the day's laundry. As I worked my way through the load, I finally arrived at the shirt. The one that shone out of the dark. I would not take that shirt from the washing machine that evening or fold it come morning. Instead, I would think of the 20 children murdered in their classrooms at Sandy Hook Elementary just months prior and throw it away.

Years later, as a sixth grade teacher, taped to the wall behind my desk is a sign instructing what to do in various states of emergency. It ranges from evacuation to lockout, to lockdown. The signal could arrive during math or reading, but inevitably the words "lockdown: locks, lights, out of sight," pour into our classroom from overhead. The kids already know what to do. I hear the dull scraping of chair legs moving across the carpet, the hurried shuffle of feet. Someone has flipped the panel of light switches off. Another has removed the magnet from the door

frame and I can hear the other doors slam shut in the hallway. A morbid drumbeat. The kids pack themselves tightly into the corner beyond the line of sight from the door window. I join them with my radio, knees to chest. Soon the safety resource officer comes and rattles the door handle. It's locked. Some students jump, others crack jokes. A coping mechanism in a world that has spiraled beyond their control.

This year, more American children have been shot and killed at school than law enforcement officers in the line of duty. In an April 20 letter written to the New England Journal of Medicine, a group of doctors from the University of Michigan pointed out that firearms are now the leading cause of death in children and adolescents.

I won't pretend to deny the complicated equation that has delivered us to this current moment. But this is not simply a question of godlessness (Japan would like a word regarding their gun violence rates and religious adherence), or lack of access to adequate mental health care. Yes, people kill people. But those people are able to kill more people, more efficiently, when they have virtually unfettered access to firearms. This is a fact. And as long as this is a fact, none of us, especially the most innocent among us are truly free.

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