Expand your silo to avoid surprises

EDITORIAL

From the East Oregonian

Did the results of Tuesday's election surprise you? Did you stay up until late at night, rubbing your disbelieving eyes?

You weren't alone.

Even most data savvy journalists and the country's biggest Trump supporters were caught by surprise. Some found the surprise quite pleasant, others found it jarring.

Yet at a moment where everyone agrees America is as divided as it has been since the Civil War, why is it a surprise that neither side could hear what the other was saying?

In reality, the difference between a Trump win and a Clinton victory was about 2 percentage points. That was enough to tip Florida, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin to the Republican, thus giving him the election. Most data on Election Day eve showed those states were hovering on razor-thin margins, yet most analysis of the race leaned on the fact that Clinton only had to win two of those states to take the White House. Establishment thinkers couldn't comprehend that Clinton might not win two of them, and that Trump had a gambler's chance at winning the race. Something was lost between the data on the page and the thought process of a person who may not have spoken to many Trump supporters.

The division in American is accurate, and it's not just political.

There is physical division — just take a look at the electoral map. Liberals are gathering in population centers and along the coasts. Conservatives in rural areas and the South and Rust Belt. There is generational division, too, as well as a division in education, gender and race.

The media, which is tasked with explaining and bridging that division, has fallen flat. Too much of the campaign coverage dealt with the entertaining but ultimately superficial horse race nature of it — who was up and who was down. Real dissection of policy, and really listening to voters, was noticeably absent.

On the face of it, the near infinite number of online news outlets should help disseminate truth, right? You no longer need a printing press to dissect policy or bullhorn the stories of average Americans. At the very least, there is plenty of space available to check facts.

Farhad Manjoo recently wrote an article in the New York Times titled: "How the internet is loosening our grip on the truth." He argues that while the internet offers plenty of sources of information, it also offers plenty of sources of disinformation. And it makes it difficult to tell the difference between the two.

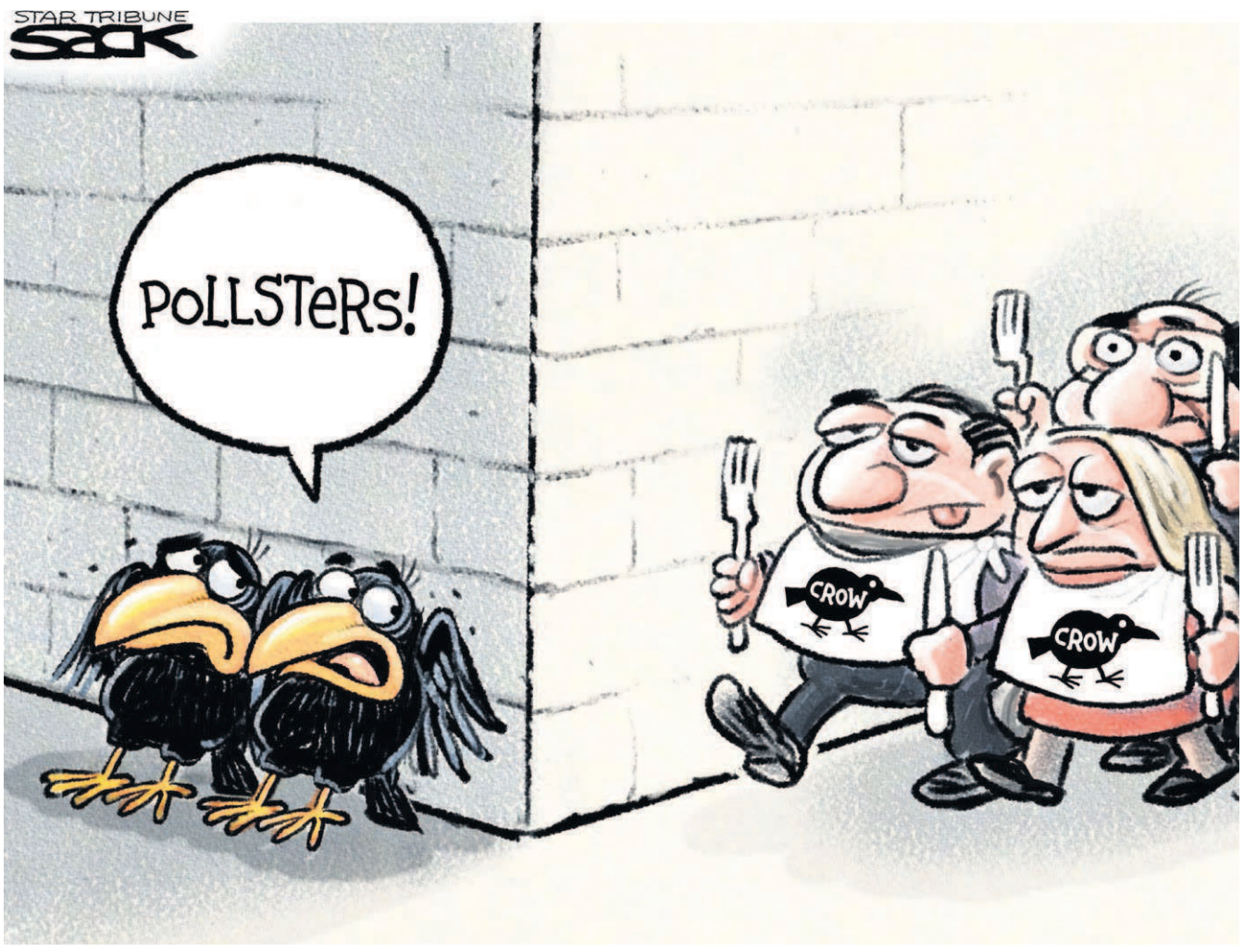
"Psychologists and other social scientists have repeatedly shown that when confronted with diverse information choices, people rarely act like rational, civic-minded automatons," he wrote. "Instead, we are roiled by preconceptions and biases, and we usually do what feels easiest — we gorge on information that confirms our ideas, and we shun what does not."

Online businesses are dependent on clicks — not the truth — and too often people click on what they want to believe instead of what they should believe. When we silo ourselves around friendly information and people who share our view of the world, we do ourselves a disservice. And we set ourselves up for that shocking moment when we peek out of our silo and see that the rest of our state, country or world is different than we thought.

As we've argued in this space previously, it takes a stronger kind of person to confront facts that challenge their opinions. It is much easier to lend credence to vague conspiracies, to throw rocks at the wall of truth instead of doing the backbreaking work of building your own with supporting facts and studies and impassioned defense. Build that wall, Mr. Trump.

Media is, generally, conservative. And we mean conservative with a small c. We're biased toward long resumes, established practices, data that proves the point and historical comparisons. We're cynical of big promises without proof, we don't take a candidate's word for it, and we're wary of leaping without looking.

Like you, we are invested in our philosophy, our view and hope for the world. But filling that arsenal with facts, admitting mistakes and sensing advantage is the way to move forward, win over skeptics and restore trust and truth.



Living — and voting — in fear

MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider

American elections, even those we call sweeps, are determined by relatively few votes, hundreds in fields of tens of thousands, fewer than a million in tens of millions. Our democracy has forever ebbed and flowed on a bubble of one or two percentage points. In this one, Hillary actually won the popular vote, but that was because she piled up votes in California, Washington and Oregon; Trump easily won the electoral vote by gaining victories — sometimes with slim margins — in several key states that Democrats have carried in the past.

The standard explanation is that it was about the loss of good jobs among white coal and steel workers and other working-class folks in the heartland. But most people in this big grand country, including the heartland, do have jobs and families and houses and iPhones, even when the unemployment rate hits 10 percent.

And what does it mean here in Wallowa County, which Trump carried with 65 percent of the vote and where the latest statistics put unemployment at 4.5 percent? Where all the carpenters, plumbers, electricians and odd-job folks I know are busy and retail businesses are having trouble finding help? Wheat prices might be down, but cattle prices are good, and local farmers and ranchers are meeting changing markets and conditions with a variety of innovative moves. We are growing and selling grass-fed beef, goats, buffalo, hand-made soaps and cheeses, quinoa, triticale, organic potatoes, etc.

Trump's big tag line, and one that excited a lot of voters, was that he is going to Make America Great Again. We never got, from him, an exact statement of when that was, but most people assume we are talking about the post-WWII years, the '50s and maybe part of the '60s. If you were a vet with the G.I. Bill, the government program that many say created the middle class in America, times were good. Not so good for inner cities, African Americans, women, American Indians and others on the margins.

In Wallowa County and in rural areas across the country, it wasn't all roses. We lost population, beginning in the '20s and continuing beyond WWII. Although logging was good with the push in G.I. housing, agriculture was moving from horses to horsepower. Tractors took over in the mid-'50s, and one-man chain saws meant more timber production with fewer workers. My bet is that most of us who live here now cannot trace county roots that far back. Check your neighborhood.

In the '30s, '40s and '50s, Wallowa Countians voted with their feet, moved to jobs in suburbs and cities. It's what's happening in the rust belt now, and even supporters admit that coal mines and steel mills do not require the labor force they once did.

President Truman, that unlikely vice president and president with murky political roots who found himself in the White House when Roosevelt died, made the decision to drop the bomb on Japan, beat Dewey in a 1948 upset as big as Trump's to win his own term, integrated the military, fired General McArthur over the possibility of war with China, and, at the end of his presidency, went with Bess back to her Missouri family home with the white picket fence.

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Ranchers hold up their end of wolf deal

GUEST COLUMN

Jim and Connie Dunham

We have seen much success with the current Oregon Wolf Plan, currently under its five-year review. We now have at least 110 wolves in the state, and likely more than that just in Wallowa County. What we are seeing now with the letters being submitted to the State Wolf Commission by those favoring the wolves is the same old rhetoric. The fact that they have the time to write letters based on emotion and submit thousands of them should have no bearing on the correct science that was heavily relied on to write the original wolf plan.

The fact that these wolf-protecting organizations have spread across the country and have encouraged emotional responses from citizens in states as far away as New Jersey, which have no skin in our game, and are basing their letters on irrelevant, quasi-religious attachments to cute baby wolves, and savagely injurious lies about ranchers, should have no bearing on how any decision is made on amending the wolf plan.

Regardless of how numbers of people "feel" about the situation of wolves being reintroduced in domesticated, human-populated areas, the fact remains that the commission is obligated under our state and federal constitutions to provide for the safety and welfare of its citizens, not its wolves. As wolf numbers increase, the incidences of wolf/human contact will increase, as will the likelihood of a loss of life — human, that is.

We already have lost a significant number of cattle, horses, mules, sheep and llamas due to wolf depredation in our county, in spite of the fact that we have a large and healthy population of elk and deer. These animals are private property that humans have the right and responsibility to protect, yet there have been no retaliatory killings of wolves in this county by ranchers who have stuck to the provisions of the wolf plan, expecting that the other side would do the same.

Unfortunately, we see the same pushback, the same whining, the same lies, the same attacks against landowners, as if we have never done anything right.

We personally lost three healthy calves to the wolves this year. That is a minimum loss of income of $5,000. It is illogical to say that there is a small percentage of livestock lost to wolves. The percentage will increase as wolf numbers increase. If a thief stole $5,000 in cash out of your house, you would not be saying that there is just a percentage of people who will be robbed so just buck up. You would be reporting the theft to the police and expecting that the perpetrator would be caught and your money returned. Private property where most of the kills have occurred in this county, is just that — private property. No different than any house and yard in town. I defy any town resident to stand back and say nothing if they walked into their yard and saw the grievous evidence that a wolf had just consumed their favorite pet.

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Rail with Trail headline misleading

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Your headline, "Chamber poll shows broad support for Rail with Trail project" (Oct. 11) is misleading. The true story, gleaned from information within the article and the poll fact sheet, is that Chamber of Commerce members who chose to participate in the "Support for the Joseph Branch Rails with Trails Poll" is slightly over one-third (34 percent) of its total membership, hardly a majority or consensus.

However, a true majority (71 percent) of members opposed the entire trail, had no opinion or failed to participate in the poll.

Speaking of the poll: Of 125 members who chose to participate, 70 voted "strong support" for the trail. That's only 19 percent of the Chamber's total membership. Even collapsing votes in categories of "support" and "support only segments of the trail" with those who voted "strong support" musters only 29 percent in favor — hardly "broad" in any sense.

A more accurate headline: "Fewer than one-third of Chamber currently supports Rail with Trail Project." Or perhaps, sadly, "We are pushing a trail whether you like it or not."

Gail Aschenbrenner West
Spokane

Editor's note: *Of the 125 Chamber members who participated in the online poll, 56 percent said they "strongly support" the Joseph Branch Rail with Trail Project. Another 16.8 percent said they "support" the project. Another 10.4 percent said they "oppose the entire trail," while 5.6 percent said they had no opinion. It's true that only 34 percent of members participated, and that was made clear in the article.*

Community makes a big difference to food bank

This October was the FFA-Les Schwab End Hunger Initiative. Wallowa County residents helped support the Enterprise, Joseph and Wallowa FFA chapters in raising food for our local food bank at Community Connection in Enterprise. Businesses also stepped up to support, including Les Schwab and The Chieftain. In all, 1,680 pounds of food was donated — 680 pounds from the Enterprise Elementary School and another 1,000 pounds from the community. Acts like this show how strong our community is. It reminds me that in all the bleak, dark things that the media portrays, we still are Americans. We still support each other and have values. My generation salutes this past generation for raising us with great morals and values. Serving others is the solution to any problem. Let's strive to do this every day.

Wade Isley
Joseph

Great gesture from Chief Joseph Days court

What a great rodeo night out for our foster/adopt family thanks to Queen Lauren Makin. How very kind to remember our special children with complimentary tickets to such a fun event.

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WALLOWA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

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P.O. Box 338 • Enterprise, OR 97828
Office: 209 NW First St., Enterprise, Ore.
Phone: 541-426-4567 • Fax: 541-426-3921

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Publisher **Marissa Williams, marissa@bmeagle.com**
Editor **Scot Heisel, editor@wallowa.com**
Reporter **Stephen Tool, stool@wallowa.com**
Reporter **Kathleen Ellyn, kellyn@wallowa.com**
Newsroom assistant **editor@wallowa.com**
Ad Sales consultant **Jennifer Powell, jpowell@wallowa.com**
Office manager **Cheryl Jenkins, cjenkins@wallowa.com**

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