

Who defines rural America?

Anyone who follows the New York Times probably noticed that within days of each other the nationally influential paper published columns by two icons of contemporary journalism: David Brooks and Paul Krugman. The authors, coming from opposite sides of the political spectrum each analyze the state of rural America.

The author's diverging worldview are apparent from the start — just look at the respective titles. Brooks: "What America has to Teach Us." And Krugman: "Getting Real About Rural America."

While both are insightful they are instructive, it's when examined should-to-shoulder that their value truly shines. An important message rests between the lines. Their opposing ways of thinking — even more their differing conclusions can be seen as an asset.

The ever humble Brooks, with his optimistic disposition and educational background in Humanities conveys a perspective emphasizing human values and hope.

As East Oregonian publisher

Chris Rush observed, Brooks "spent time with his subjects, got to know them, their motivations, their aspirations . . ." Brooks challenges the contention that rural America is in a state of decline by reshaping the analytical framework.

Rather than emphasizing the decline in population or the lagging industrial challenges that face rural communities, Brooks tells a story of strength of character and civic responsibility. He notes importance of community identity and the sense of place.

In contrast, the left-leaning, Nobel Prize winning economist, Krugman analyzes his subject in terms of numbers, data-points, empirical trends and comparative analysis. Admittedly more cynical than his counterpart, Krugman's assessment urges a reality-check for rural America.

If, as Brooks asserts, rural America's identity and integrity remain strong, the economist Krugman aptly observes that the of industry driving of rural economies is not. He observes that between the mid-1950s and now, the 6 million jobs have evaporated to 2 million. Coal mining jobs have dropped from 150,000 to 50,000 in that time.

Contrary to the face-value of the two pieces, they shouldn't be seen as mutually exclusive. The two intellectuals observe their subject through varying points of view and value their research in different ways. The message of each author at their most basic level seem to be this:

Brooks and his optimism values human virtue and community engagement then asks: "How can we spread the civic mind-set they (in rural America) have in abundance?"

Meanwhile, Krugman's realism values the observation of concerning trends and concludes: "We can't help rural America without understanding that the role it used to play in our nation is being undermined by powerful economic forces that nobody knows how to stop."

What Brooks gets right and Krugman neglects is the unquantifiable values embedded in rural life: The grit and innovative drive in communities like Wallowa County, where residents take care of their neighbors — in good times and in bad.

On the other hand, Krugman's analytical approach serves as a much needed sound of alarm for the overly optimistic among us. If rural America isn't in decline, it's trending tendency to lag behind its urban counterpart is more than a cyclical economic downturn.

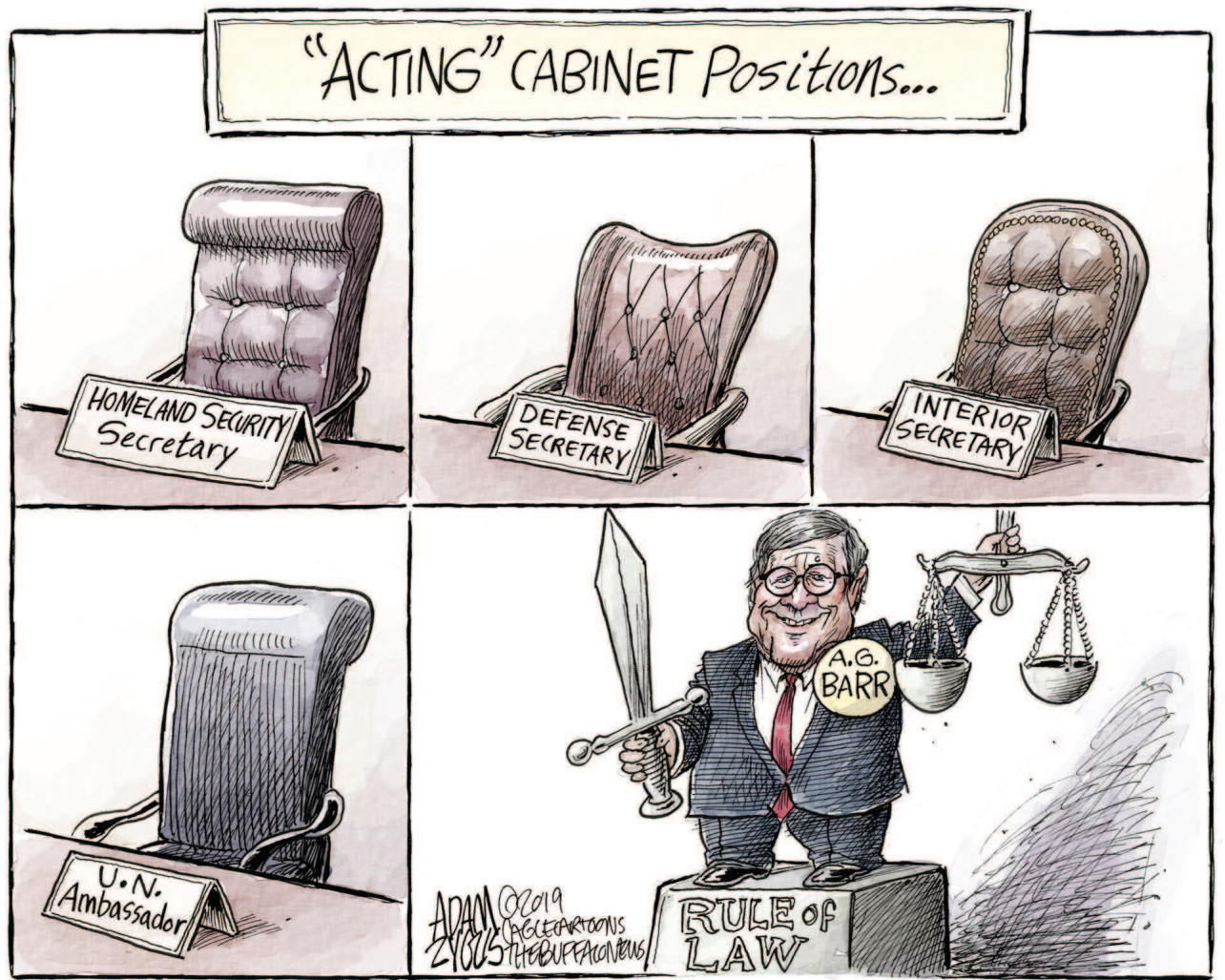
If communities like Wallowa County remain asleep at the wheel and neglect accept change now, Krugman's grim warning will ring true in the history books.

Perhaps both provide an accurate assessment of rural America.

Through contemporary science we now understand that political disposition is largely a product of genetic brain chemistry. Think on that for a moment. Consider Brooks and Krugman: two unquestionably intelligent and thoughtful people; both well educated, incisive and accomplished with radically different ways of thinking clearly linked to radically different outcomes.

We need to utilize the sometimes conflicting qualities for the common good rather than fight over their merits. If we do, through communication and dialogue we can solve the problems of today and prepare for tomorrow.

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VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Help and hope for Oregon's suicide crisis

That 825 Oregonians died in a single year by suicide is a sobering assessment of our collective ability to help those who feel trapped in their own despair.

That it's such a hidden statistic, however, is an embarrassing reflection of our collective ignorance. Hundreds more people died by suicide in Oregon in 2017 than by traffic crashes, firearms or drug overdose. The suicide rate in Oregon is well above the national average, as it has been for the past three decades. Yet this undeniable public health issue has lacked the public attention and sustained outcry that it desperately needs.

Some of that stems from the stigma that persists around mental illness and suicide, shutting off conversation or even acknowledgment that a suicide has occurred. Some may stem from the fear of encouraging "copy-cat" behavior. Regardless of the motivation, however, our families, schools, communities and media organizations have too often chosen the easy way out by simply keeping silent. Meanwhile, the suicide rate in Oregon and the United States has continued to climb.

Clearly, silence hasn't worked. This week, news organizations around the state are collaborating to bring attention to the problem of suicide, report on populations at highest risk and

share resources on how to prevent it. While the "Breaking the Silence" project won't necessarily provide answers, it aims to start a statewide effort to confront it. Using responsible reporting practices that examine, not sensationalize, suicide, these stories can provide the common understanding, motivation, tools and questions that can help the community mobilize against this public health threat.

The data show just how widespread a problem this is. Oregon's suicide rate is 14th highest in the country and suicide is the second leading cause of death for those ages 10 to 34, according to the Oregon Health Authority. One fifth of those who kill themselves are veterans. More than half the deaths are caused by firearms.

While those statistics may seem daunting, they can also provide possible avenues where leaders can make a difference. Such data, in the aggregate, can help build support for increased funding for veterans' health services or provide tangible prevention options, such as the 2017 law that allows family members and police officers to petition a court to take away firearms from someone at risk for suicide or causing harm to others.

We also need to recognize that Oregon's youth are struggling. Nearly 9% of eighth-graders self-reported having tried to kill themselves one or more

times in the previous year and nearly double that percentage considered it, according to Oregon Health Authority data. That children just entering their teen years would even think of suicide as an option should be its own open-and-shut case for more counseling, support and training in schools. And health officials can lead by providing guidance for families, schools, health departments, physicians and nonprofits on how to talk about suicide both as a general public health issue and on an individual basis.

This is not an insurmountable problem. Resources already exist and show that crisis counseling lines and other outreach efforts make a difference. Even friends and family members can take steps to help a loved one who is struggling by asking a series of questions about whether they have wished they were dead, thought about killing themselves or made any plans toward killing themselves. But it requires the willingness to have those uncomfortable conversations in the first place.

The effects of suicide reach far beyond the individual. The injury is borne by families, friends, communities and the public at large. It's long past time to start treating it that way.

This editorial first appeared in The Oregonian and is being published in newspapers across the state this week.

People move when they are hungry

Or scared. My grandfather left Norway about 1900, when he was 18, following an older brother to America, because the farm had been broken up too many times and could no longer support the growing family. Years later, after my grandfather died, in Minnesota, I visited the farm in Norway. The youngest brother he'd never met, retired now, watched as his youngest son worked the farm; the rest of that generation too is scattered over Norway and America.

The Germans were the scared ones. My grandfather on that side was just two when his family made it to Minnesota in the late 1890s. From the 1840s on, right through the Civil War, Germans made up the largest share of American immigrants. Borders shifted, people moved and were moved by bigger powers, and men feared serving in the Kaiser's army. They came to America, made sausages and beer in Milwaukee and St. Louis, farmed and started small businesses across the Midwest.

We're taught that the earliest Anglo and European immigrants to America were fleeing religious persecution, but odds are that more of them were hungry. Over half who came before the founding were indentured servants, taken to the docks by their fathers, handed over to ships' captains to be sold into servitude in America. Maybe the parents and remaining siblings would make it on diminished agricultural crops in a

MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider



Europe cold with the Little Ice Age.

The Irish were hungry too when the potato blight hit and ruined their staple crop; millions fled to America; thousands filled the Catholic priesthood across the world.

Today, some 3 million Syrian refugees are in Turkey, a million or more in Jordan. Two or three times that many are internally displaced. We think of them as war refugees, and although that is likely the immediate cause, drought and hunger is what drove them from farms to Aleppo and Damascus where they looked for work and food and jumped in when demonstrators demanded political change. Odds are that the Arab Spring in Egypt and Tunisia and across the Middle East was fueled or inflamed by similar rural to urban pressures.

In Europe the refugees—and there are millions—are primarily from Africa. Families split up when drought and hunger comes, gather resources and send a few to seek relief in Europe and send remittances to Africa. And this is pretty much the situation at our southern border. Remittances have been important sources of income in Mexico and Cen-

tral America for some time. The situation in Honduras now is probably the worst. The New York Times profiled coffee farmers there, and said yesterday that "gradually rising temperatures, more extreme weather events and increasingly unpredictable patterns — like rain not falling when it should, or pouring when it shouldn't — have disrupted growing cycles and promoted the relentless spread of pests."

"The obstacles have cut crop production or wiped out entire harvests, leaving already poor families destitute," it continues. Look for coffee prices and refugee numbers to rise. We're going to have to find a way to deal with it—it might be a way to fill places left by a shrinking population in many parts of the US.

Here's where it gets interesting. The US right now is experiencing major internal dislocations, and if you watched the recent weather news from Nebraska, have followed the land loss into the Gulf in Louisiana and Florida, growing fire events in California, and this week-end's tornados in Texas, we can expect some large movements of people within the country. The look on the Nebraska farmer's face as he surveys dead cows on land inundated by flood is resignation—he says he'll rebuild, but will his children take up the farm? The faces in flooded Texas and Louisiana and smoke-filled California are more terror than resignation. People are leaving.

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