

United we stand, divided we fall

ON LIBERTY

Devin Patton



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 evi-

dent 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 like 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 like 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 Wallowa County native whose pastimes include the study of ag economics, history and free thought.

Guess what is coming to a bank near you?

LAYIN’ IT ON THE LINE

Steve Kerby



Changes are coming to our banking system and to us. Maybe it is time to embrace the future, since the future is now.

What appears to be foreign will become commonplace, and you might as well get ready for it. Cryptocurrencies and decentralized finance are all the rage right now, and you’ve probably heard of things like Bitcoin or Ethereum.

However, the real story lies in the mechanism that drives these new technologies and forever changes the digital landscape. This is where blockchain enters the picture, the novel technology that enables things like cryptocurrency to exist in the way they do.

What is a blockchain, and what is with all the hype?

To put it simply, a blockchain is a type of digital database that can be used to catalog all kinds of information (e.g., money, goods, properties, services and votes).

Digital databases are powered by a network of computers that are either part of a centralized or decentralized network. A blockchain database is fundamentally different from a traditional database because instead of organizing data into tables, it creates blocks of data that are then chained together. Each of these blocks is timestamped and is connected to the chain before and after it.

Bitcoin uses blockchain to record

peer-to-peer transactions through a distributed database. This distributed database exists between the computers of all users of the cryptocurrency. The idea is that having the database distributed amongst all the users allows for greater transparency and enhanced security. It gives users the ability to access, audit, trace, and verify digital assets without having to work through a middleman. By cutting down on intermediaries, blockchain cryptocurrencies put the power to control data back in consumers’ hands.

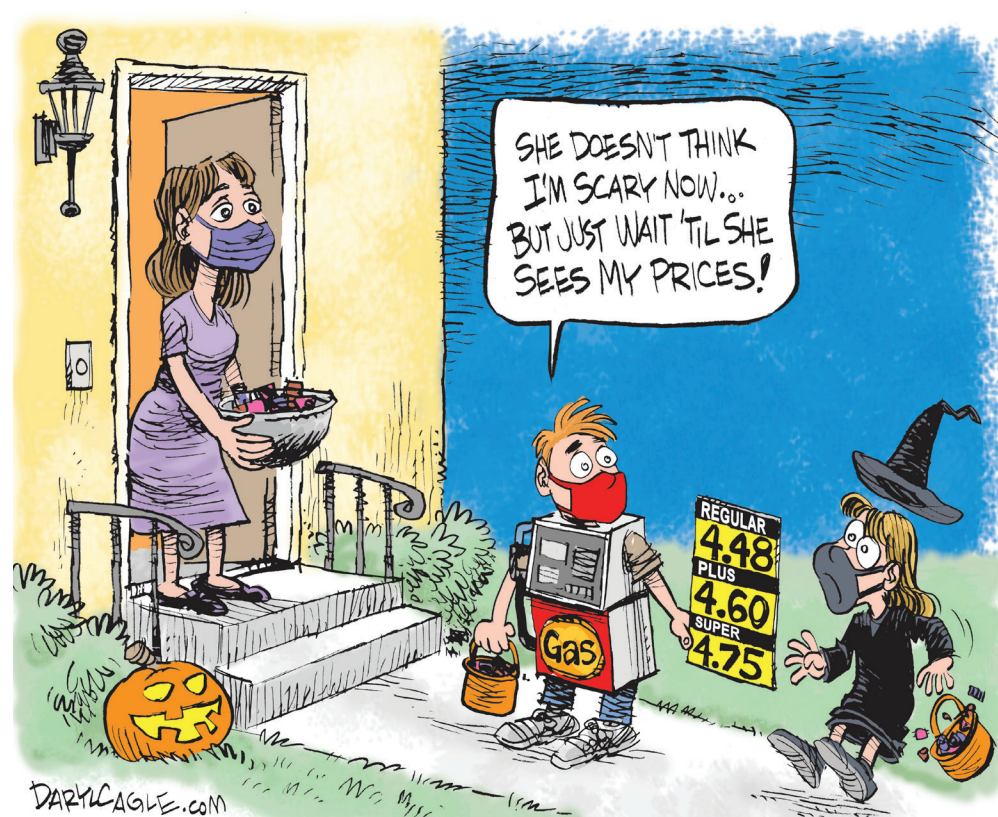
Why are cryptocurrencies more secure?

The old adage “don’t put all of your eggs in one basket” sums it up. Like banks and universities, many institutions that possess valuable and personal consumer information operate using a central database. This information is stored within a centralized network of computers that are housed in one location.

All that data is controlled by one entity and is more vulnerable to hacks because it would require only a single point of failure to gain access. For a potential attacker to compromise a distributed database like Bitcoin, they would have to gain control of at least 50% of the computers within that network. Even then, the other 50% can fact check and sniff out discrepancies, making it very unlikely that a hack would ever occur.

Why is this important when it comes to managing digital assets?

- No third-party involvement.
- Transactions of authenticated digital assets made via blockchain are typically available in 10 minutes.
- A traditional bank transaction can take 24 hours or more to complete, not including weekends and holidays.
- Blockchain technology guarantees the integrity of all the data through



cryptography and through a distributed database.

Why is this important to us now? This is the evolution of our data future, and the future of all banks is being reshaped by new technology and it is happening now.

Protecting and maintaining control of data is more critical now than ever. Just in the past few years, we have seen major companies like Facebook, LinkedIn and Morgan Stanley impacted by massive data breaches affecting millions of users. Blockchain technology is making waves in the digital world by providing much

needed security measures and by giving them the power to control data back to consumers.

Digital? Yes, your bank is now 100% digital; it is now our future.

Be informed.

As an avid outdoorsman, Joseph and the Wallowa area have been a big part of Steve Kerby's life since 1964. Steve is a Syndicated Columnist member, a national organization committed to a transparent approach to money management. Visit stevekerby.retirevillage.com or call 503-936-3535 for more.

The River Democracy Act spells trouble for Wallowa County’s future

OTHER VIEWS

Alicia Andrus



I’m a retired Forest Service employee with decades of experience writing environmental documents about Wallowa County. I’m uniquely qualified to understand what Sen. Ron Wyden’s River Democracy Act means for our county. When a batch of Wild and Scenic rivers were designated in 1988, I helped write river management plans and later formed projects to comply with those plans.

I can readily state that Wild and Scenic river designations will further limit logging, fuels reduction, livestock grazing, recreation and public access on public lands, despite the senator’s claim to the contrary. For the private lands that get swept up into Wild and Scenic designation, landowners will see limits on how they manage their own property. This bill will destabilize our already shaky agriculture and farm-based economy, not at first, but incrementally over time in ways that we’ll only recognize in the rear-view mirror.

The River Democracy Act is promoted as protection for our important water resources. We all love the idea of

clean water, but how much protection is enough? Because of our already intact and healthy streams, Wallowa County is home base for many threatened and endangered ocean-going and resident fish. We have so much habitat that more and more of it goes unoccupied. Despite ambitious hatchery programs, a dwindling number of ocean-going fish survive their trip to the ocean and back. Fewer and fewer even make it back to the first dam at Bonneville. Fisheries biologists now talk about extirpation for several fish runs, which means extinction is on the horizon. Meanwhile, the resident fish populations of Wallowa County are stable. The problem is not Wallowa County water quality — something’s happening downstream.

I outlined many concerns about the bill in a letter to the senator, but my letter was never acknowledged. So I attended the Senate Natural Resource subcommittee video hearing on this proposed bill. With enthusiasm, the senator described the process used to form this bill as a new way for citizens in his far-away state to participate in Washington, D.C., government through the wonders of the internet. He named it The Oregon Way.

I’ve concluded that The Oregon Way is just a means for the laptop class to force legislation on an unsuspecting working class. Here’s how it appears to work.

In October 2019, the senator announces an opportunity to nominate

streams as Wild and Scenic rivers. Done without a lot of fanfare, but with extra circulation to tribal staff and environmental activist groups, the senator receives a robust response of nominated streams. No one objects to the idea of adding streams to the Wild and Scenic system because they don’t hear about it. He claims to compile and whittle down the nominations, although he won’t substantiate that claim now with any evidence.

He reads a draft bill into the Senate record in February 2021, which is the first alert to rural counties that substantial portions of public and private land are subject to this bill. He holds a Senate hearing and recruits one enthusiastic supporter with a side-hustle as a livestock operator to speak for the entire grazing industry and repeatedly amplifies her statements of support with “and she’s a rancher!”

After the hearing, his staffers go through the motions of talking with those in opposition, but change nothing in the bill. The senator hosts a video conference to supposedly listen to opposing opinions, but only the preapproved are allowed to speak, most of whom support the bill. Anyone daring to question the bill in the online chat session gets swarmed by bill supporters.

Such is Sen. Wyden’s Oregon Way. Even more alarming is that he told the Senate subcommittee that he plans to use this process on future legislation.

Residents often share that they enjoy

Wallowa County for its high-quality environmental resources and for its family-friendly communities.

Without natural resource-based jobs, our family friendly communities wither. Sen. Wyden’s bill is unraveling the very fabric of Wallowa County that its residents hold dear.

For those of you who support this bill because it promises to give us clean, cool water, you might pause and consider whether we already have clean, cool water. You might be advocating for a bill that will incrementally improve water quality at the price of our family-owned farms, tree farms and ranches that are an integral part of our custom and culture. Dissolved family farms are usually taken over by trophy homes, corporate farming or government land acquisition.

Is this the future you want for Wallowa County?

I thank our county commissioners who see the risks and are informing the senator and his staff that Wallowa County wants none of its streams included in the River Democracy Act. I also question Sen. Wyden’s intentions and want no part of his perverse distortion of representative government that he calls The Oregon Way.

Alicia Andrus was attracted to Wallowa County for the scenery and has stayed 40 years for the people. She’s retired from her Forest Service job as a planner and her private practice as a land surveyor.