

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Time to leave the past where it belongs

Sometimes the past needs to be left where it belongs — in the past.

That includes with our elections. Recently, Oregon Congressman Cliff Bentz made a statement at a meeting in La Grande that actually refuted Donald Trump's claim of the 2020 presidential election being stolen.

Instead, he inserted a different word — bought.

Seriously, we need to move past this as a nation and quit bringing up these talking points.

There are plenty on the right who decry the outcome of the 2020 election who claim voter fraud, that Joe Biden stole it, etc.

That was more than a year ago. Get over it. To channel an often-tweeted phrase by Donald Trump, it's sad.

What's also sad is those who look back four years further and still hold that the 2016 election that Trump won was stolen away from Hillary Clinton in an action of collusion with the Russians.

Both of these are narratives from the right and the left, respectively, that need to be dropped. And now.

We are already severely divided as a nation and have enough problems that deserve our attention. Continually rehashing claims of the past, from more than a year ago and five years ago, doesn't do any good to help heal our wounds. If anything, it just stirs up even more bitterness.

Our politicians, our elected leaders, are chosen to serve the public. To help move us in the direction of becoming the "more perfect union" that the U.S. Constitution speaks of.

Continuing to beat the dead horses of "The 2020 election was stolen!" or "There was collusion in the 2016 election!" is a fruitless effort whoever it comes from, whether a politician or an Average Joe next door.

Frankly, it's even exhausting.

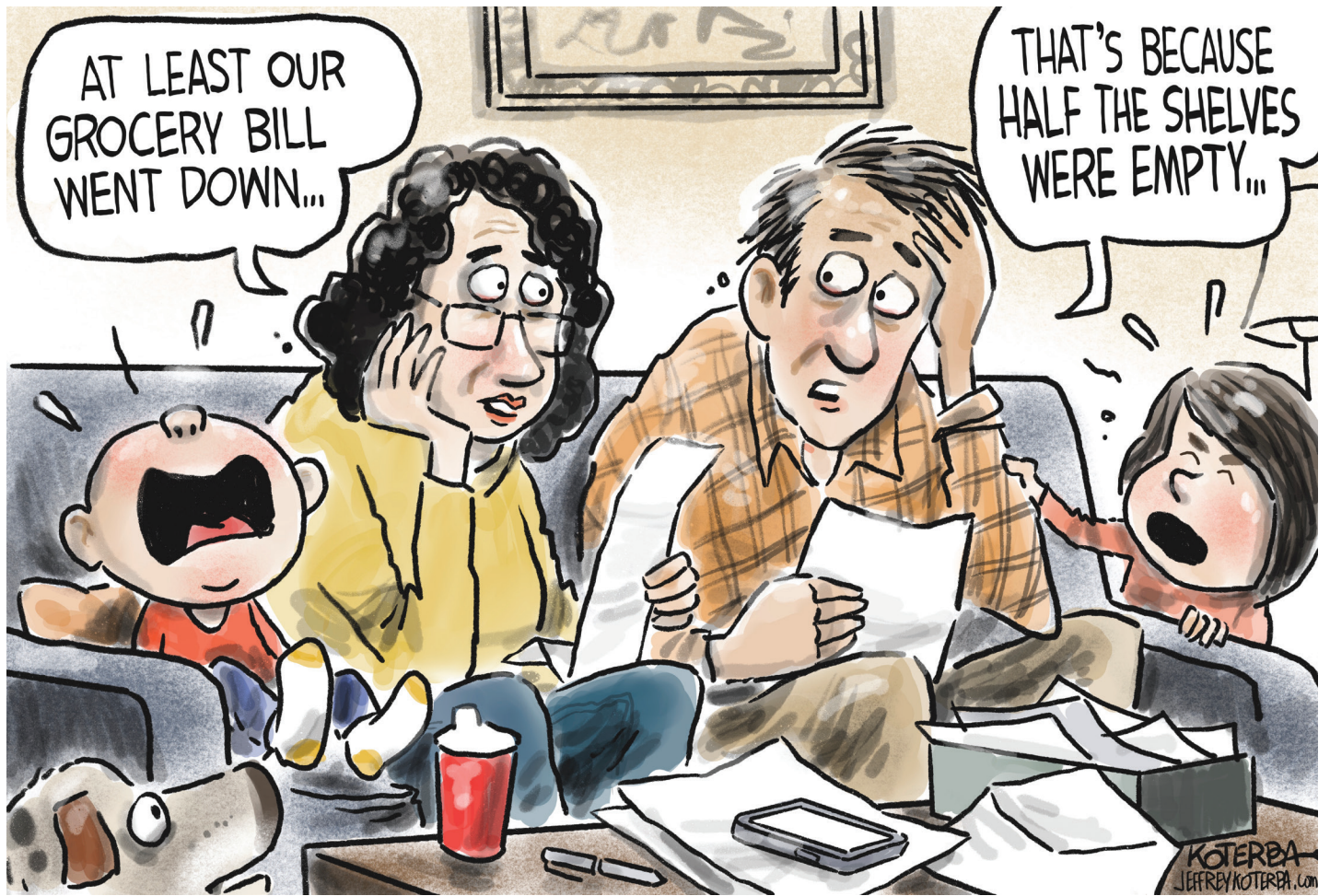
Even if 2020 was proven to be stolen, or 2016 was proven to be rife with collusion, there is nothing to be done now to erase that. By barking those claims, all that is accomplished is that those on the opposite side of the aisle roll their eyes and become more firmly entrenched in their beliefs — true or not.

And while this editorial happens to be focusing on the election, one could easily insert their favorite divisive topic and make the discussion about it.

Bitterness over many of these topics is part of what is tearing at the fabric of our already damaged republic.

As we have written in this space before, the only way forward is working together to find solutions for our problems.

Let's instead do that, and leave the past in the past.



Kristof should be ready to serve in the long run

MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider



Nick Kristof for chief of staff ... or something Oregon at some future time.

Nicholas Kristof is a longtime New York Times reporter and columnist and, with his wife and writing partner, Sheryl WuDunn, the author of several books, including "Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope." The book was published in 2020, right before the pandemic and right before their daughter, Caroline, graduated "virtually" from Harvard.

Nick — that was his name growing up in Yamhill on a 100-acre farm that specialized in pie cherries — and the family retreated to the farm. They had spent summers there as the children grew and Nicholas and Sheryl covered the democracy movement in China and political and economic upheaval across Asia. The husband-and-wife team won a Pulitzer Prize for their reporting on Tiananmen Square in 1989. Sheryl moved from journalism to business, and Nicholas from reporter to columnist after 9/11. He won a Pulitzer for bringing the world's attention to genocide in Darfur in 2006. Together again in 2009, they published "Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide." He's used his column to bring attention to human trafficking, poverty, and injustice in this country and across the world, exposing corruption and misdeeds in government and business along the way. He's been called the "conscience of American journalism."

Back in Yamhill, where his mother

still lives on the family farm that was always summer home for the children, Caroline is the CEO of Kristof Farms, now specializing in cider apples and wine grapes. (The first batch of cider was a hit; wine grapes are not yet mature.) And Nick has announced as a candidate for governor. The secretary of state says that he does not meet the three-year continuous residency requirement; Kristof is appealing.

What to make of it?

I doubt there is anyone in the entire country who knows more about the impacts of poverty, racism, sexism, pharmaceutical greed, the building and hollowing of the middle class — and the positive impacts that timely and well-run educational and rehabilitation programs can have on individuals and communities — than Nick Kristof. In "Tightrope," Nick and Sheryl trace the lives of classmates that he grew up with in Yamhill. They follow the school dropouts, loss of high-paying union jobs, health problems and drug addictions of once-promising Yamhill students as they slide into illness, family breakups, and poverty that a previous, post-World War II generation had seemingly left behind. They recite interviews, attend funerals and give the muddy details of old friends' collapses and deaths by drugs, illness and suicide.

They go to other places where rehab, early education and vocational training programs are changing lives. They look at Portugal, which long ago moved the drug problem from law enforcement to health departments. They advocate for universal health care and major prison reform and criticize an economy and tax structure gone wrong enough so that just three Americans — Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates and Warren Buffet — "now possess as much wealth as the entire bottom half of the population."

The intimate stories of old friends and classmates, and the worldwide search for

answers to the challenges that stumped and crippled those once upwardly mobile families, represent an incredible amount of research and a vast reservoir of human connections and knowledge gained over decades of reporting and engaging in the world. He might make a great governor.

I doubt that he can get there — and especially not now, with the controversy about his residential status. Add to that the knee-jerk rejection of anything New York Times, and the fact that his immediate huge war chest came mostly from out of state, and he will be fighting a steep uphill battle.

But what if Tina Kotek, or whoever gets the Democratic nomination — or gets elected, for that matter — signs Kristof on as chief of staff? The political gossips couldn't slam him with "carpet-bagger," couldn't trip him up on knowledge of what's going on in Lake County, and couldn't complain about out-of-state financing.

And if we need someone or new ideas to run health care, prisons, human services, or universities, Nick could turn to his rolodex. If we need a grant to move along a new program for recovering opioid users, he'll know who to call, and if he needs to find an Oregonian who has climbed out of one abyss or another, he has them among old friends in Yamhill.

I'm reminded that Chris Dudley, a Portland Trail Blazer who'd done good community work and enjoyed popularity with fans and a wider public, ran for Oregon governor in 2010, losing to John Kitzhaber by only 22,000 votes. Dudley's was a one-shot affair, and he's since moved to California.

I suggest Nick — and Caroline — dig their heels in and be ready to serve Oregon for the long run.

Rich Wandschneider is the director of the Josephy Library of Western History and Culture.

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