

## OPINION

### VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

# Everyone has a right to free speech

It is unfortunate, though not unexpected, that today's supercharged political discourse can find its way into just about any venue.

An excellent case in point is the recent mini-controversy — and even that label is a big push — regarding comments made by the announcer and the rodeo clown at the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo.

Some people objected — and wrote about it to the Chieftain — and some vowed never to return to the event.

The rodeo clown and announcer defended their apparently pro-Trump remarks.

Terry Jones, Chief Joseph Days Rodeo Board president, vowed he would talk to the announcer about the remarks.

Lost in all of this, at least to some extent, are two items. One, the First Amendment doesn't just count for some and not for others. One of the beautiful attributes of our nation is the notion that all of us have a right to free speech. That doesn't mean we all have to like it. In fact, when the rhetoric is especially off-putting is when the First Amendment should be recognized.

A second point is the clear illustration that the cracks in our country now regarding a political discourse are evident even in the heartland.

We are also becoming a society that embraces the cancel-type culture. That has to change. Also, what must change is the thick and deep dividing lines between political parties and those with differing views. Part of the problem — and it is a major one — is the constant barrage from self-proclaimed all-knowing pundits who consume the airwaves and spew highly toxic venom. These individuals usually are nothing more than modern-day snake oil salesmen distorting the truth and engineering dissent.

These individuals are not the loyal opposition but dangers to democracy. Educated and sensible voters of a Republic should be able to listen to whom they choose but they also have a responsibility. An obligation to not simply take what some TV pundit says at face value but to check out the so-called "facts" these people deliver. A Republic needs a loyal opposition in politics, which is true, yet that is a far cry from some of the rhetoric spilled across TV screens nightly.

Whether the comments made at the rodeo were right or wrong isn't really the point. Were they appropriate during a family-style event? Probably not. Yet we must remember that America is built upon the ideal that we might not like what someone has to say but we believe their right to say it.



### LETTERS to the EDITOR

#### Rodeo announcer too political

I would like to thank Mike Mercer for his comments last week on the Joseph rodeo.

My wife and I and friends have attended two rodeos since moving to the county five years ago, but we no longer do so because of the attitude and commentary of the announcer. It sounds like the trend continues.

While the Joseph rodeo is a great event and I think it has great potential to bring people together and showcase cowboy culture, I have no interest in hearing the announcer's political views. He may think it is cute to put his divisive rhetoric out there, but many of us are turned off by that.

Is it not possible to have the biggest public event in this county free of propaganda and political opinions? Don't we get enough of that every day

on our news feeds? How about a female announcer?

**John Chlopek  
Lostine**

#### Rodeo no place for 'dog-whistle political commentary'

I'll take my rodeo served up without a side of jingoistic, dog-whistle political commentary, with a sprinkling of misogynistic and racial tropes by the announcer and rodeo "clown."

I now understand the lukewarm reception given the rodeo by locals. Had I been aware that what I would experience Saturday, July 30, was part rodeo, part political rally, I would have differently spent the nearly \$200 after-tax dollars the rodeo tickets cost me.

I've heard from other people that what occurred at the rodeo was not reflective of

the community of Joseph. (In other words, it's not just me.) This wasn't my first rodeo, but I promise you it is my last of your rodeo I'll attend.

**Eric Pippert  
Joseph**

#### A rodeo, not a Trump rally

I attended the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo on Friday, July 29, and Saturday, July 30 and it was a great event. However, there was one exception: the rodeo announcer who saw this as an opportunity to spew his political views on attendees.

I drove more than five hours each way to watch a rodeo and contribute to the local economy by dining and lodging in Joseph. Not to listen to some guy spout his views on "there are people trying to destroy our country," freedom of religion and prayer, and saying the code

phrase "Let's Go Brandon." Keep your political views to yourself. It's a rodeo, not a Trump rally, pardner.

I am as patriotic and proud of America as the next person. But while many in your crowd may respond to this announcer's dog-whistle remarks, others don't. Let the riders carry the American flag, pledge allegiance to that flag and celebrate America — but leave the nasty, angry political remarks for your friends and family. We don't all agree with you — and this politicizing has no place at a family rodeo event that attracts people from many parts of Oregon and states beyond.

We loved our visit to beautiful Joseph, but won't be coming back to Chief Joseph Days until you get back in the saddle of showing respect to all of your patrons.

**David Olmos  
Portland**

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