

**Siuslaw News**  
 P.O. Box 10  
 Florence, OR 97439

# Opinion

**The First Amendment**  
 Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)

## Thank you to all who made the Class of 2020 special

**(Editor's Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)**

The Siuslaw High School Class of 2020 graduated on Friday, June 5, 2020. When a student graduates, the ceremony is the final event of their time on campus.

Too often, the commencement service is viewed as an ending — but it notes a new beginning. Members of the class are moving forward onto the next phase of their lives.

Some students will go forward to a college or university, others will prepare at a career training institute, many chose military service, some are off to work in the community now, and some are still searching for their path in the world.

Each September, graduation seems a million miles away, and June always arrives faster than anyone expects. This year, the Class of 2020 had a global pan-

demically alter its course to graduation. There were other traditional milestones and rites of passage that were lost or altered in the course of their senior year, but they persevered to keep their eyes on the grand prize of graduation.

### GUEST VIEWPOINT By Andrew Grzeskowiak Superintendent, Siuslaw SD 97J

And this group of students has adapted and overcome all the associated obstacles of the last few months to end this phase of life and move on to the next with courage and dignity.

This year's graduation ceremony was made special by the efforts of many in the community as everyone wanted to make this year especially memorable in the wake of the pandemic.

It is hard to list each and everybody that chipped in to assist in making the Class of 2020 graduation ceremony special — Mike Harklerode for organizing the parade of graduates; members of

the Rhody Cruisers for volunteering to transport seniors in the parade; the City of Florence for approving the parade route and giving the community an extra chance to share in the celebration; Florence Police Department and Siuslaw Valley Fire & Rescue; KCST for broadcasting the ceremony; Bob Sneddon and Steve Moser for calling the ceremony on the radio; Chris Rowbotham for live casting the graduation and compiling the ceremony video; Siuslaw HS Student Leadership Class & advisor Anna Moser; Laurel Bay Gardens by providing ornamental plants to dress up the occasion; and all of the Class of 2020 parents that came to decorate stadium and turn the Hans Petersen Memorial Field into a special place to graduate.

The Class of 2020 is moving onward and upward, and they would not be doing so without the assistance of the community over the years.

All assistance provided, no matter how big or small, has been appreciated by the students and the school district.

## LETTERS

### IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER HOW FAR EQUALITY HAS COME

I find myself confused and, frankly, concerned about the aftermath of the George Floyd murder. As an immigrant, I was not raised in the U.S. and admittedly still have limited understanding of some aspects of American society so I'm only working with what I can observe.

It seems like pretty much 100 percent of the population already agree that the Floyd murder was wrong. The bad guy is in jail on murder charges; the other participating cops, two of whom are minorities themselves, are facing charges as well.

To me, that sounds like justice being served.

The riots and looting are supposedly because of "systemic racism." It is true that racism was a big issue in the past, like pretty much everywhere in the world. The slave trade in Africa and the Arab world was a huge, established business that the American colonies tapped into for cheap labor.

But America voluntarily ended slavery long before any of the African or Arab countries.

Slavery ended in Saudi Arabia and Yemen as late as 1962; Mauretania and UAE are accused of maintaining the practice to this day.

And it bears repeating that America did it by choice, not by force — because it was the right thing to do. Many, many white men died for it.

As we honored the fallen of D-Day recently, it should not be forgotten

how many white American men died to stop Adolf either. If America truly was so keen on white supremacy, it seems odd that over 400,000 whites gave their lives fighting it.

The Jim Crow-era was bad, but decidedly better than what came before it. The following decades saw continuous improvement, culminating in the first black President. If we were to plot a timeline of race relations, most can agree that America started with "Really bad" back in the days of the first plantations. This has gradually improved through hard work and determination by whites and blacks alike, and today we have moved maybe 95 percent of the way to "Good."

In my mind, this is a great achievement to be celebrated. Perhaps it would be more constructive to keep our eyes on what made the 95 percent happen and let the last 5 percent heal in peace?

—Matt Danielsson  
 Florence

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT IS KEY TO NOT REPEATING RACIST PAST

I'm writing in response to Joel Marks' letter (General Lee's Greatness Should Not Be Disposed Of," June 10).

Gen. Lee was an outstanding military tactician. Not just during the Civil War, he also served the U.S. honorably during an earlier American war. However, we need to understand the historical context regarding

his statue.

1. Many have said that the Civil War was about state's rights. However, at the top of that list of state's rights was the ability to grant its citizens the right to own, buy and sell human beings (now known as "human trafficking.") Lee did fight bravely and brilliantly for this cause. But the cause — in and of itself — is one I feel should not be celebrated by our country.

2. This statue was undoubtedly erected when hundreds upon hundreds of other monuments to the Confederacy were erected. This period started with the passing of "Jim Crow" laws, from about 1890-1910 and lasted decades afterward. State legislators across the South revised state constitutions to disenfranchise African-Americans.

These monuments were erected to broadcast the belief in white supremacy. The primary purpose of these monuments was not so much to honor the specific named individuals but to publicly announce white rule.

I'm also a bit torn about the destruction of Confederacy monuments (I may need to hand in my "liberal" card.) Sadly, they celebrate human trafficking. But still, if they are given the full and complete historical context of the racism represented by them, they may help educate future generations about the troubled history of our beloved country.

—Rob Welles  
 Florence

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### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or documented will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside the Siuslaw News readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

### POLITICAL/ELECTION LETTERS:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) Explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

Email letters to:  
 nhickson@thesiuslawnews.com

## We do better together as a community

**(Editor's Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)**

I am writing with a heavy heart and deep concern regarding the national events triggered by racism and the senseless killing of George Floyd.

The past few weeks have been hard for our country and our community. Like many past events, the death of an unarmed person of color in police custody did not occur here — but it is felt here, and everywhere.

These violent acts against people of color have an effect on all of us: students, staff, families and community members, as we mourn, experience confusion and fear, and try to make sense of what is happening in the world around us.

In these times, more than ever, we must ensure our commitment against racism and violence in our schools and community.

As educators, all district staff are committed to creating an environment where diversity is welcomed and appreciated, all perspectives are heard and listened to, and all students thrive. We can no longer just celebrate diversity; we must take actions aimed at removing inequities and biases in our system.

Anti-racism is something that, as a district, we actively work on and are

committed to continuing to work on. We understand that there is so much more work to be done to teach anti-racism, tolerance and empathy.

An important part of moving forward with that work is listening to learn and then acting to teach. We invite your questions about how Mapleton School District addresses racism, as well as your thoughts and input on how Mapleton School District can continue to improve its teaching of tolerance and empathy

### GUEST VIEWPOINT By Jodi O'Mara Superintendent, Mapleton School District

To engage in this discussion, contact me at jomara@mapleton.k12.or.us, or Mizu Burruss, School Board Chair, at mizukinney@gmail.com.

In this time when we are physically separated from our students, it can be especially difficult to provide opportunities to discuss emotional events in an environment where they can process their feelings and trauma with peers.

Even though we are physically apart, we can and will get through this together.

In times of unrest, teachers and parents can help children feel safe by establishing a sense of normalcy and security, and talking with them openly about issues that are impacting them, their questions, their anger and their fears.]

Here are some helpful links:

- National Association of School Psychologists – Talking to Children about Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers: <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/school-violence-resources/talking-to-children-about-violence-tips-for-parents-and-teachers>
  - Anti-Defamation League Table Talk: <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/george-floyd-racism-and-law-enforcement>
  - Anti-Defamation League Lessons for Middle Schoolers: [https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/lessons?ed\\_cat\\_id%5b176%5d=176&ed\\_cat\\_id%5b216%5d=216&ed\\_cat\\_id%5b230%5d=230&grd\\_lvl%5bmiddle-school%5d=middle-school](https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/lessons?ed_cat_id%5b176%5d=176&ed_cat_id%5b216%5d=216&ed_cat_id%5b230%5d=230&grd_lvl%5bmiddle-school%5d=middle-school)
  - NPR – How White Parents Can Talk About Race: <https://www.npr.org/2020/05/31/866426170/raising-white-kids-author-on-how-white-parents-can-talk-about-race>
  - Teaching Tolerance resources on Teaching About Race, Racism and Police Violence: <https://www.tolerance.org/moment/racism-and-police-violence>
- It is time for us to be better prompted by poet Maya Angelou's words: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

## WHERE TO WRITE

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