

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 their Government for a redress of grievances.



Letters to the Editor Policy

The Sentinel 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anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published.

Letters containing poetry or from outside The Sentinel 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.

Send letters to:

nhickson@cgsentinel.com or cmay@cgsentinel.com

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR REPS

Oregon state representatives

• **Sen. Floyd Prozanski**
District 4 State Senator
PO Box 11511
Eugene, Ore. 97440
Phone: 541-342-2447
Email: sen.floydprozanski@state.or.us

• **Rep. Cedric Hayden**
Republican District 7 State Representative
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Ore. 97301
Phone: 503-986-1407
Website: www.leg.state.or.us/hayden
Email: rep.cedrichayden@state.or.us

Oregon federal representatives

• **Rep. Peter DeFazio**
(House of Representatives)
405 East 8th Ave.
#2030
Eugene, Ore. 97401
Email: defazio.house.gov/contact/email-peter
Phone: 541-465-6732

• **Sen. Ron Wyden**
405 East 8th Ave., Suite 2020
Eugene, Ore. 97401
Email: wyden.senate.gov
Phone: (541) 431-0229

• **Sen. Jeff Merkley**
Email: merkley.senate.gov
Phone: 541-465-6750

Preventing suicide is a collaborative effort



It's not acceptable to discuss it openly and, as a result, people often suffer with thoughts of suicide silently — planning death without anyone ever knowing until it's too late.

Over the years, the media has played its own role in perpetuating those notions by not reporting on suicides except in rare circumstances, such as involving a public official or suicide within a public place. The thought has been that reporting on sui-

cidest can create a "contagion effect," as well as cause additional trauma to surviving family members.

Bottom line? Suicide is a problem that cuts a large swath through our youngest and brightest to oldest and wisest. It isn't limited to a particular set of circumstances, financial status, blue collar or white collar, urban or rural, male or female.

There is, however, one common thread that runs through the sad and growing tapestry woven by victims of suicide: It's the fact that we rarely talk about it. While we champion and openly support those battling life-threatening diseases whose physical impacts are apparent to the eye, we struggle to discuss the less apparent yet equally life-threatening battle that many face each day living in the shadow of depression, despair, personal loss, bullying, drug addiction and psychosis.

That's because talking about feelings of suicide is taboo. It's associated with being weak, overly dramatic or simply isn't taken seriously.

Good reasons to be sure, except that current research indicates that thoughtful reporting can actually help prevent suicides by creating an atmosphere supportive of the kind of dialogue needed to end suicide's deafening silence.

During the week of April 7-14, all Oregon newsrooms have been invited to join in covering this issue through a statewide reporting project called *Breaking the Silence: Shining a Light on Oregon's Suicide Crisis*. During that week, media outlets throughout Oregon will be contributing stories, data and insights to this project, which will be shared and made available through the Portland-based

nonprofit Line for Life. But we've decided to do something more.

In a one-of-a-kind collaborative, we are teaming up with three other newsrooms within our region — *Newport News-Times*, *Siuslaw News* and *The Creswell Chronicle* — in an effort to combine our resources in covering four specific areas on the topic of suicide. The idea behind this special collaboration is simple:

Experts say the best way to prevent suicide is by being aware of the warning signs and encouraging someone we suspect might be contemplating suicide to talk about it. And contrary to past practices within the media, studies show that people do not start thinking about suicide just because someone asks them about it.

Our hope is that this unique collaboration will send a different message than we have in the past, opening a discussion within each of our communities that will turn the perpetual silence of suicide into the sound of hopeful and helpful dialogue.

Sometimes the competitiveness of journalism should take a back seat to the true purpose of journalism: To inform, educate and inspire thoughtful discussion. To that end, each Wednesday in April, our newsrooms will each contribute a different piece that will be shared among the four community newspapers in our collaboration for that week. Topics will include:

• **April 3:** Suicide among school-aged children and teens (Contributed by *The*

Cottage Grove Sentinel)

- **April 10:** Suicides among the homeless and mentally ill (Contributed by the *Newport News-Times*)
- **April 17:** Suicide among senior citizens and veterans (Contributed by the *Siuslaw News*)
- **April 24:** Those left behind: Parents, children and spouses of suicide victims (Contributed by *The Creswell Chronicle*)

As smaller community newspapers, we can accomplish more together than we could ever hope to accomplish alone. Not just in terms of the scope of our reporting but also in the number of readers who can benefit from that reporting.

From the Managing Editor's Desk

Ned Hickson

—Ned Hickson, editor at *Siuslaw News* and *Cottage Grove Sentinel*

—Bret Yager, managing editor at *Newport News-Times*
—Erin Tierney, editor at *The Creswell Chronicle*



Cottage Grove Sentinel

(541) 942-3325

Administration

Jenna Bartlett, Group Publisher
 Gary Manly, General Manager Ext. 1207
gmanly@cgsentinel.com
 Allison Miller, Multi-Media Sales Consultant Ext. 1213
amiller@cgsentinel.com
 Gerald Santana, Multi-Media Sales Consultant Ext. 1216
gsantana@cgsentinel.com
 Gina Nauman, Inside Multi-Media Sales Consultant Ext. 1203
gnauman@cgsentinel.com

Editorial

Ned Hickson, Managing Editor 541-902-3520
nhickson@cgsentinel.com
 Damien Sherwood, Staff Reporter Ext. 1212
dsherwood@cgsentinel.com
 Zach Silva, Sports Editor Ext. 1204
zsilva@cgsentinel.com

Customer Service

Meg Fringer, Office Manager, Legals, Classifieds Ext. 1200
mfringer@cgsentinel.com

Production

Ron Annis, Production Supervisor Ext. 1215
graphics@cgsentinel.com

(USP 133880)

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