

Cottage Grove Sentinel
116 N. Sixth St.
Cottage Grove, Ore. 97424

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)



The dangers of social media without consequence

would be used towards those ends. "Otherwise," he said, "it is merely wires and lights in a box." In the months leading up to the 2016 Presiden-

wielding of misinformation, conspiracy theories and outright lies weaponized into creating division among us. As a result, we have entered an era of social

windows into the lives or outright lies of others. We can leave comments and engage in the conversations of strangers without consequence or accountability. It's an era of communication unlike any other, and the ultimate repercussions on our culture remain to be seen — though I think many of us have already

From the Editor's Desk Ned Hickson

In the late 1950s, iconic newsman Edward R. Murrow recognized a paradox developing as the advent of television was transforming news reporting from the purely word-driven medium of radio into a much more powerful visual medium available in homes across America. Murrow understood that news journalism would never be the same. He also recognized the responsibility that accompanies that kind of power. In 1958, during a Radio-Television News Directors Association and Foundation dinner where he was the keynote speaker, Murrow spoke of the new television medium and the potential effects it could have on journalism and our society as a whole. Known as his now famous "Lights in a Box Speech," Murrow explained how the new medium had the potential to teach, educate and inspire — but that it would require us to ensure it

tial election, and especially over the course of the last four years, we've seen social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and others succumbing to the worst — rather than the best — we have to offer as a society. It's human nature to be drawn to things that disturb or anger us. It's the reason we gawk at the scene of accidents; why there are more NCIS spin-offs than any other genre on TV; and why Greek mythology is full of cautionary tales that end in tragedy. We find a certain comfort in recognizing when the mistakes of others have led to their misfortune — and how we can avoid making those same mistakes. However, equally true — and perhaps more dangerous than the gradual desensitization of our society — has been the

media tribalism. It's no small irony that, while we have become increasingly engaged in sharing our thoughts and experiences with more people than ever before, we have simultaneously come to accept that we are sharing those very things with people we will likely never meet — or in the case of information, sources we may not truly know. Through that acceptance we have been slowly laying the groundwork for the kind of social disconnect that we are seeing through live streaming of disturbing events, agenda-driven misinformation and conspiracies, and having them shared hundreds of thousands of times by others. In a way, social media is promoting a culture of digital-aged peeping Toms, encouraging us to gawk through an endless array of partially open

Will we succumb to the worst of our nature or the best of it? Will our smartphones and other digital devices be utilized to improve the way we communicate and broaden our understanding of each other and the world? Or will they prove to be little more than microchips and lights in an even smaller box? Ultimately, the choice is quite literally in the hands of each of us.

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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.

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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.

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Periodicals postage paid at Cottage Grove, Oregon.
Postmaster: Send address changes to P.O. Box 35, Cottage Grove, OR 97424.

Local Mail Service:

If you don't receive your Cottage Grove Sentinel on the THURSDAY of publication, please let us know.
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