

Trust and the Bend-La Pine School Board

People become friends with people they work with. At least, usually.

For elected officials in Oregon, becoming friends can be a problem. Say you are on the school board and you want to get together socially with other board members. It could look sketchy to the public any time a quorum of school board members gathers. It could look like they are meeting in secret to plot school policy behind closed doors.

Well, members of the Bend-La Pine School board got together at a party recently after the new school board members were sworn in. We know about it thanks to a photo sent to us that was posted on Facebook. Steve Cook, the new school superintendent, was at the gathering, too. He had just started work in July. One thing he emphasized when we met with him: transparency.

Now this was gathering was not necessarily a violation of Oregon law. There's even a specific section of Oregon's Public Meetings Manual that mentions social gatherings and school boards. It's a bit long but we are going to quote it here:

"Purely social gatherings of the members of a governing body are not covered by the law. For example, the Court of Appeals held that social gatherings of a school board, at which members sometimes discussed 'what's going on at the schools,' did not constitute a violation. The purpose of the meeting triggers the requirements of the law. However, a purpose to deliberate on any matter of official policy or administration may arise during a social gathering and lead to a violation. Members constituting a quorum must avoid any discussions of official business during such a gathering. And

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they should be aware that some citizens may perceive social gatherings as merely a subterfuge for avoiding the Public Meetings Law."

Was there any deliberation at this meeting? Any at all? Any discussions of official business?

The school district told us there was not. School Board Chair Melissa Barnes Dholakia also told us there was not. Frankly, we believe her when she says she is very careful in such situations.

Might have a conversation occurred somewhere at this gathering that did dip into policy matters? We don't know.

Deschutes County commissioners can run into a similar problem on a day-to-day basis.

There are only three of them. If just two of them meet in a hallway at the county building and start chatting, it can make matters complicated.

We wouldn't want our elected officials to be forbidden from socializing with each other. We wouldn't want school board members to be forbidden from having a social gathering with new school board members and the new school superintendent. We would want them, though, to adhere to very high standards when they do. That is not optional.

Let the tire shop operate in a new location? Yes or no?

Here is an exercise in decision-making for you and the Bend City Council:

First, some facts.

Bend has cars. Cars need tires to go.

Bend's Central District is located along Third Street between downtown Bend and Pilot Butte. The city's rules for Bend's Central District ban "automobile-dependent" uses.

Les Schwab Tire Centers has an operation in Bend's Central District. It's on NE Franklin Avenue.

That tire center can continue to operate at that location. But it wants to move to another location on Third Street also in Bend's Central District.

Now the problem. If the tire shop moved, it can't operate its business at the new location under the city's rule.

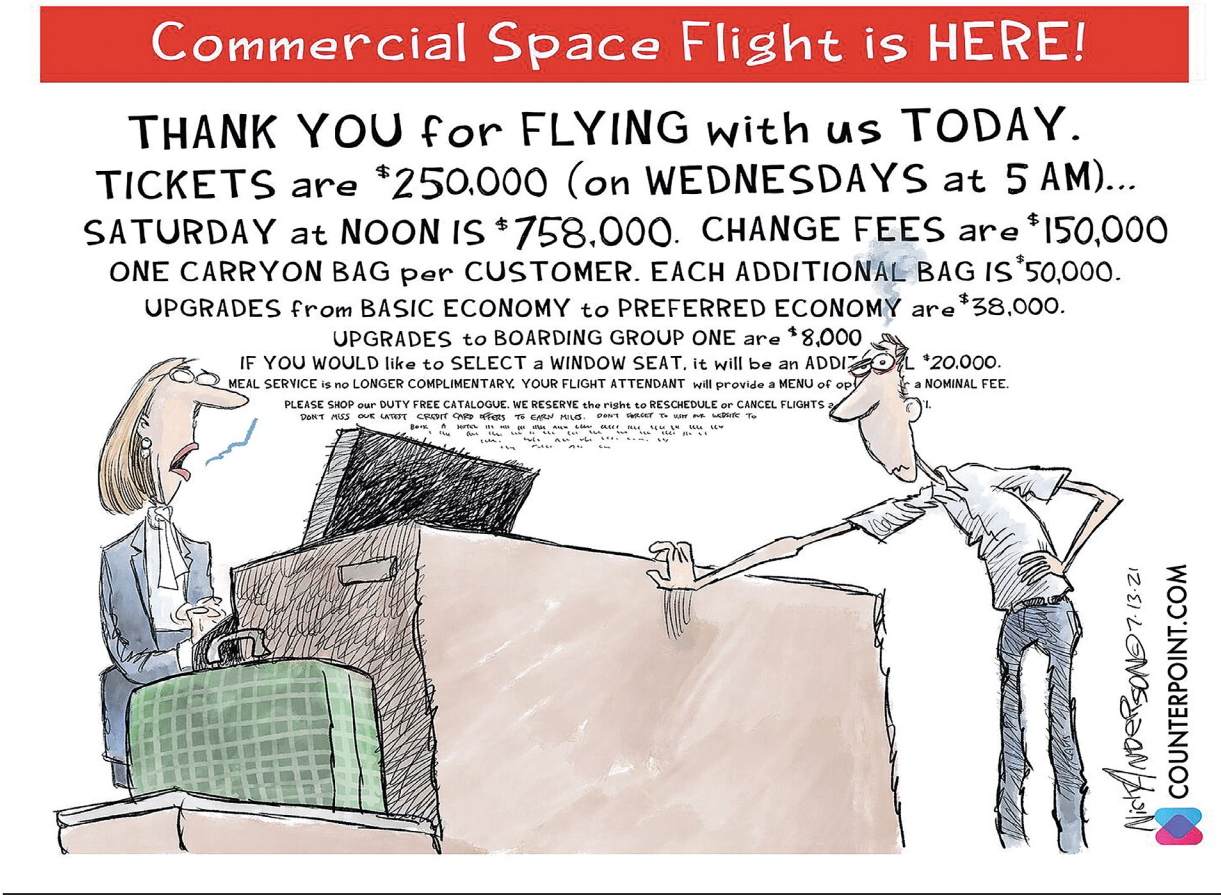
And now you must decide: What should the city do about this?

It could do nothing.

It could let the tire shop move and give it an exception because of the unique situation.

This puzzle has been playing out for more than two years. If you live in Bend, it is your government. The Bend city councilors are likely to make a decision on this matter at their council meeting on Wednesday. What should councilors do? You can email them at council@bendoregon.gov.

Editorials reflect the views of The Bulletin's editorial board, Publisher Heidi Wright, Editor Gerry O'Brien and Editorial Page Editor Richard Coe. They are written by Richard Coe.



Stop calling professors ‘professor’

BY TYLER COWEN
Bloomberg

As woke culture has led to a re-examination of American language and life, from pronoun usage to calling slaves “the enslaved,” perhaps it is time to look at professional titles. Why for instance should I be called “Professor Cowen,” but few people would address the person fixing their toilet as “Plumber Jones”?

Aren't we giving some professionals too much status automatically? Aren't we relegating some individuals to lower-status jobs by a consensus they cannot fight? We mock the German honorific “Herr Professor Doktor,” but are American practices so much better?

For a long time I have insisted that my graduate students call me “Tyler.” My goal has been to encourage them to think of themselves as peer researchers who might someday prove me wrong, rather than viewing me as an authority figure who is handing down truth.

I prefer the honorifics world of Twitter, where @tylercowen seems like a more just and egalitarian naming system. I can compete for attention by placing credentials in my Twitter bio, but there is a sense there that too much reliance on titles is a negative signal of quality.

Social media more generally have overturned naming and credentials practices. The good side is the neutering of titles. The bad side is the elevation of popularity in their place. One's number of social-media followers carries a great deal of weight, and on Twitter a select number of individuals are designated with blue checks to verify their identities. One possible benefit of titles is that they may signify a world where popularity does

not matter so much.

When giving academic talks in Australia and New Zealand, I have noticed that many audience members, and students at that, simply called me “Tyler,” rather than “Professor Cowen.” That was hardly the end of the world, and it indicates that another way is possible.

Some of the strongest norms are around the title “Doctor.” Just about everyone calls their physician “Doctor,” though the esteemed profession of lawyer does not receive similar treatment. As a Ph.D.-toting academic, I've even had people say to me — correctly — “You're not a real doctor.”

I fear that by ceding this unique authority status to doctors we are making it easier for them to oversell us medical care, a major problem in the U.S. If your doctor suggests that you need a procedure done, it can be hard to say no, especially if you have been deferring to that person for years through the use of an honorific title. On the upside, perhaps all that deference has encouraged many people to get their vaccinations.

I am not aware of a reliable system for measuring the quality of doctors, but I would like to see such a method evolve, if only to remove doctors from their position as de facto titled nobility in America. Just as we judge athletes by their batting averages or grand slam titles, so might doctors be put into this same realm of quantification. Plenty of athletes have honorary titles such as “King James,” but it is their numerical accomplishments that persuade us.

During the years when Donald Trump was in the White House, I noticed that some people were more likely to refer to him as “Trump” instead of “President Trump,” at least

compared to his predecessor Barack Obama. That is a sign of flexibility in titling practices that perhaps could be extended. I don't for instance think we should address senators as “Senator.” Just choose “Ben” or “Mr. Sasse,” depending on which is appropriate.

Titles in the military seem fine and indeed necessary. The whole point of a chain of command is to establish authority relationships, but that practical reality should give us pause about the use of professional titles elsewhere. You also might think that titled nobilities have their uses. I am fine with there being a Prince of Liechtenstein, and it does seem that we have to call him “Prince” for the system to work. But again, the practicality of those titles suggests they do not deserve a broader use in the U.S.

Sometimes a title can be used to suggest a subordinate position, such as the use of Nurse. It can be an honorific, but it also places the person below the Doctor. The advantage, however, is one of greater anonymity and remove. A woman in particular might prefer “Nurse Washington” over the use of her real full name, given the potential risk of harassment.

Title issues and gender issues intersect in tricky ways. A title such as doctor or professor can give a woman newfound respect, but perhaps the practice hurts respect for women as a whole, since they are titled at lower rates than men.

Titles are complex, and we cannot abolish them outright, but perhaps professional titles are due for a re-think?

■ Tyler Cowen is a Bloomberg columnist. He is a professor of economics at George Mason University and writes for the blog *Marginal Revolution*.

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Mother Nature is ticked off — but can you blame her?

BY MICHELE L. NORRIS
Special to The Washington Post

Mother Nature has had it with her brood. If you can't see that, you haven't been paying attention.

Earth provides nutrition and sustenance. She coddles us and protects us. And what have we done in return? We treat her the way we too often treat our mothers. We ignore her advice. We place our needs above hers. We imagine she can magically make any problem go away — perhaps because we take for granted the toil of our real mothers who dusted us off when we faltered and stretched a pound of meatloaf to feed a family of six.

And now, as we can plainly see, we have underestimated her wrath.

Fires. Floods. Mudslides. Rivers and reservoirs drying up. Record heat. Rising shorelines. Glacial melting. The Earth is in peril, and many are finally

realizing they can no longer think of Earth as the open armed goddess dispensing blessings and bounty to us — especially if we take no steps to curb the activities and habits that have sent carbon dioxide emissions soaring.

The defining struggle of our time, and our future, will be the tension between Mother Nature and human nature. So, more of us need to think differently about who and what we are dealing with here.

That seems to have finally begun. In a season of catastrophic, deadly and too-common extreme weather events, there are signs that even people who were hesitant to embrace the science behind climate change are waking up to the threat. The Pew Research Center found that more than 60% of Americans view global warming as a major threat — the highest share going back to 2009 — and 65% want the government to do more to

reduce the effects of climate change. Six in 10 Trump voters support regulating, or even possibly taxing the pollution that causes climate change.

Let's start with our ideas about who's really in charge of our fate. The idea of adopting a maternal symbol to represent the Earth may have been an early effort to moderate individual behavior. Don't we all want to avoid disappointing our mamas? The symbol of Mother Nature in the Western world has roots in Greek and Incan mythology. It's a shame that, over time, she lost some of her edge.

In Andean culture, the goddess known as Pachamama was doting and demanding. She protected her subjects, but according to lore, also insisted that they care for the home she provided. In essence, she demanded respect. Western Europeans and then Americans adopted a more passive figure, rendered as a benevolent sprite

with contented woodland creatures frolicking around her dainty feet.

If artists were asked to imagine Mother Nature in this season of unbridled water and heat, they would be more likely to sketch a character with a palm to her forehead or her hands on her hips. I see a woman scorned — a mother who doesn't care that she's yelling loud enough for the whole neighborhood to hear because her selfish and self-centered changes left the freezer open, ignored recycling rules and dared to play with matches in the middle of a drought. But however old fashioned our notions, and accounting for the sensitivity around gender norms, the irony is that women in general and mothers in particular are uniquely positioned to lead the on-the-ground battle to deal with the growing climate crisis.

No one is letting men of the hook, but if you check the lists that tick

through the 10 to 12 things that we as individuals can do immediately to reduce our carbon footprint and conserve resources, most are actions most often influenced or controlled by women: Eat less meat, buy more efficient appliances, limit food waste, drive electric or hybrid cars, lower thermostats (in winter), try composting and use long-lasting lightbulbs.

So along with taking the steps we've resisted, let's retire our singular caricature of Mother Nature and let her toss away her crown of wildflowers and eucalyptus. Those images seem pulled from a fairy tale in the first place.

In that battle between Mother Nature and human nature, the decisions made by women, girls and yes, actual mothers may ultimately save our imperiled planet. That's something I'm certain she would applaud.

■ Michele L. Norris is a columnist and founding director of The Race Card Project.