

Divide present in student survey

The most sobering aspect of a new survey of Oregon high school students is how much their views align with those of their elders.

Each generation wishes for future generations to be better off. Yet Oregon's high school population feels the same divides and discontents as the rest of the country.

There is a divide between those high schoolers who are satisfied with their lot in life and those who are not. There is a yearning for greater respect and for greater involvement in the governmental decisions that affect their lives. There is widespread concern about access to mental health care.

These issues are revealed in the newly released "State of Our Schools: Examining Oregon's High Schools Through Students' Eyes," which might be the first statewide student survey conducted by Oregon students themselves. More than 2,200 high schoolers participated in an online survey or focus groups.

Oregon Student Voice, which is open to students in sixth through 12th grades, conducted the study with the assistance of two respected partners — the Chalkboard Project and DHM Research. Participation was voluntary, so the statistics might not carry the same weight as randomized surveys. But the conclusions remain relevant, especially because they were written by students.

High schoolers are insightful. They know who's a good teacher and who's not. They recognize whether discipline is administered fairly, equitably and consistently. They care whether the school administration — all the way up to the school board — heeds their ideas.

As a society, we know that students who feel valued and engaged are more likely to carry those attitudes into civic life as adults. In contrast, the Oregon Student Voice report states: "Exclusionary cliques,

social tensions and bullying are all present within schools. Students assert that those who do not fit into the typical high school student mold do not receive the respect, stability and support needed to succeed in their school. Students believe that high schools are oriented toward helping those already on a path to success, leaving behind everyone else."

Among the research findings:

- Most students enjoy high school, but 32 percent cite a lack of trust and mutual respect in their schools.

- 40 percent consider access to mental health resources to be the most important issue facing K-12 policymakers. The No. 2 issue, identified by 22 percent, is career and technical education.

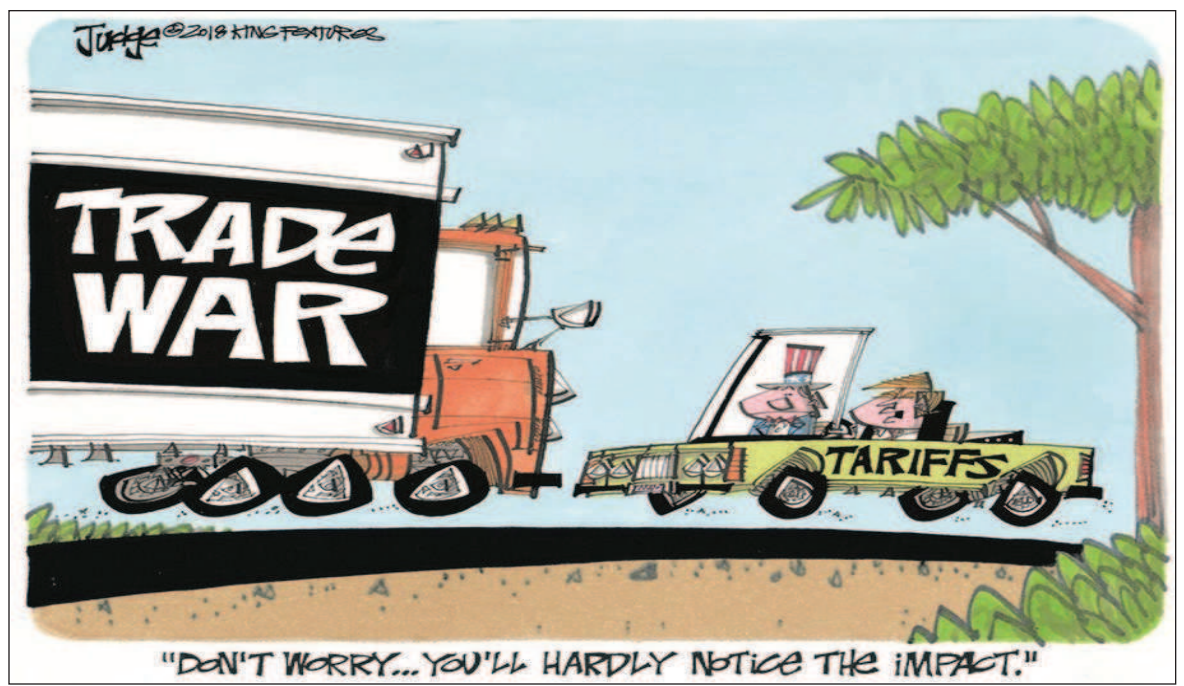
- 77 percent of students feel engaged in class. Among those who do not have post-high school plans — college, trade school or the military — that figure drops to 49 percent.

- 76 percent have a teacher or other school staff member whom they trust as a mentor. Again, that figure drops significantly among students who do not plan to attend college.

- 81 percent say their teachers are good, but only 51 percent think the content of required courses is relevant to their futures.

- Students favor teachers who welcome feedback and adapt their teaching accordingly. The report states: "Students want to learn in interactive, collaborative and hands-on environments. Students are critical of rote memorization and inflexible approaches that favor higher-achieving students while leaving others behind."

The research contains many positives about students' views of their education. But their concerns should generate a statewide call to action. Otherwise, the divides that roil our state and nation will continue to manifest themselves.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Security priorities raise questions

To the Editor:

I hope things have improved, but fairly recently I needed to talk to someone about a matter in Grant Union High School, and I just walked in, unchallenged.

I also have had business with the John Day police headquarters and jail. In both places, I had to buzz to get in a heavy, securely closed and locked door, then buzzed in another securely closed and locked door — all just to see a man in a bullet-proof vest trained in the martial arts with a badge and a gun the size of a dinner plate on his hip, and a mace and a baton (read "club") and handcuffs.

Maybe in light of all the recent school horror stories, we should put the kids in jail and the cops in school.

Richie Colbeth
John Day

'Cooperative democracy in action'

To the Editor:

I recently listened to a program host ridiculing controlled elections in the old Soviet Union by saying they had to throw a party and serve food at the polling stations to get anyone to vote. As an observer of OTEC's election process over the years, I must say that the charade is similar, except that OTEC also bribes members to vote with a \$500 prize drawing. The bribes are understandable, given the usual slate of incumbents and the obstacles OTEC has erected to keep candidates from running.

OTEC's four-month election period begins quietly with the appointment of a secretive, elite "nominating committee," whose task is to determine if you are "qualified" to run. They could actively reach out to members to find potential candidates, but little if any effort is expended for that. Sometimes a director retires early so that an insider can be appointed, giving them incumbency status and a leg up in the next election. The result is that often the only choices on the ballot are incumbents, but in one case where another well-qualified candidate was in the race, important experience was left out of his Ruralite profile.

The bylaws allow additional nominations not less than 60 days prior to the annual meeting if a member can get over the next hurdle, which is to collect 50 member signatures by petition before the end of the time period. Several years back, there was a candidate who was told that nominations were closed even though the nomination period was not over. He then had to go out and find 50 members to sign a nominating petition to get on the ballot.

This year, if you were unhappy with the incumbent candidates finally announced by OTEC in the March Ruralite, you might have wanted to try and get 50 signatures to get on the ballot. Too bad, you would have been out of luck, because the signed petitions had to be submitted by Feb. 20, several days before the candidates were even announced in Ruralite, and write-ins and nominations from the floor are not allowed. Cooperative democracy in action!

Christopher Christie
Baker City

A public safety solution

To the Editor:

Recent headlines warned residents about a report stating "costs for police services have grown significantly faster than revenue over the past 20 years." The report also states population decline and economic stagnation have reduced available revenue for public safety services in John Day. They concluded that police and emergency communications costs increased 3.5 times faster than the city's property tax base and the

situation was unsustainable going into the future.

So now public safety is in question. Add that to the lack of funding for schools, mental health and other revenue our county needs. Citizens should demand the commissioners explore all options and put forward a plan to deal with all the budget shortfalls, especially when it comes to public safety. So, what if the county could tap into a source of revenue of millions of dollars distributed 40 percent to schools, 25 percent to mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, 15 percent to law enforcement, 10 percent to cities and 10 percent to counties, and the only requirement is allowing operations of a business that's 100 percent legal under Oregon law? Most people would think it sounds too good to be true.

Well, it's a fact. By allowing legal recreational marijuana, Grant County could share in the millions being collected in tax from sales of recreational marijuana. The commissioners are well aware of these facts. They told me and others at prior meetings they would find money elsewhere, and it was an ethical issue. So what's more ethical? Watch the county continue to deteriorate financially and put public safety at risk? Or opt into a program that addresses everything Grant County lacks the revenue to pay for? It's obvious they have no Plan B.

Politicians are elected to do what's best for the community, and sometimes that means making decisions on economics, education and public safety that go against your base but are necessary for a community to grow and prosper. Fortunately, May 15, citizens can do what's ethical for Grant County. Vote yes on initiative 12-71, lift the ban and bring jobs and revenue back to Grant County.

Cindy Kidd
Mt. Vernon

Women, be careful

To the Editor:

I was "approached" last week in Chester's parking lot. As I was leaving, a car pulled up behind me, and a tall man, in his 50s or 60s, knocked on my window and said, "I'm in a bind, and can you lend me \$10? I'll take your address and send you the money back."

Well, now I am a giving person and love to help people, but something about this situation was not right. He looked "off" or distressed, and I'll admit I was not at ease. No one was close by, so I just said, "Sorry, no."

This letter is a shout-out to all women in Grant County to be careful, and next time this happens, take down license plate numbers and tell the store owner. (I did neither.)

If we are unaware, we can be compromised. I also should have told him to seek out the police department for help. We see they are also losing numbers in our county, so we must step up and be responsible. I'm sorry I wasn't.

Mya Ennis
Mt. Vernon

Innocent lives matter more

To the Editor:

A former Grant County doctor, Dr. Janssen, in a letter to the Eagle, reacted to the Sandy Hook slaughter of 20 children and six teachers, saying "something is broken" in our country. Immediately, people argued — guns don't kill, people do; it was a conspiracy by the government; it is about an attack on our Second Amendment rights. Having grown up a very serious hunter here in Grant County, I have deeper rooted convictions about my right to own guns — either for hunting or for protecting my wife or myself. But the body count continues to pile up. Time after time, I have discussed one of these mass shooting tragedies with NRA members. They briefly acknowledge the loss of lives,

but immediately inject their fear of losing their guns. I don't pretend to be wise enough to know what the answer is to stop all shootings. I believe, however, there is something that can be done about mass shootings.

The NRA would like us to believe differently — that if we give an inch, we will lose all our guns. Nationally, they have been brutal, showing no compassion for shooting victims. In Florida, they openly threaten to silence political leaders standing up for regulation of certain weapons. They dismiss students who demand that the adults in their world do something to stop shootings. Locally, on the Eagle Facebook page, disgusting low-life commentators (worried about losing their guns) called 10 of our students vulgar names. They demanded their punishment because the students walked outdoors to honor the 17 lives lost in Florida and to demand safety in schools.

What can be done to stop mass shootings? Part of the solution is found in the opinion of a conservative Reagan appointee, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, who stated, "Like most rights, the right secured by the Second Amendment is not unlimited..." It is "...not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose."

What I see as broken is people valuing their right to own rapid-fire, high-capacity weapons over the lives of innocent victims.

Terry Steele
Ritter

You think it's over a gun, but it's not

To the Editor:

You think it's over a gun, but it's not. It's the people who decide to pull the trigger. You said that the kids who wanted to remember the dead peacefully couldn't. All they wanted to do was stand for those lost and those who are scared. Then you threatened that they couldn't do what made them happy. You said, "It's a waste of school time," but what about the kids who are thinking their lives are on the line? People who stood are getting called names because of people like you who think it's all about the gun. When was it decided that going to school could end a person's fate? Because for all those kids, now it's too late. It's not the gun. It's not the gun that decided to kill. It's not the gun that decided to scare people. It's the people pulling the trigger. It's the people we're scared of. It's not the gun.

A student
Grant Union

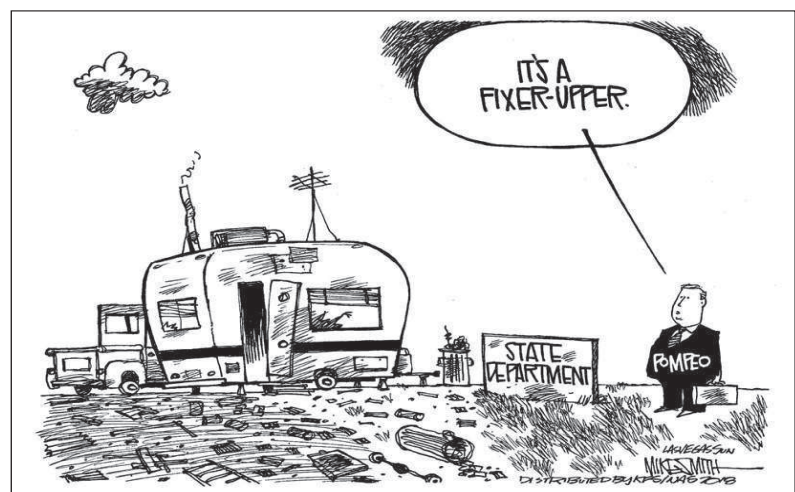
Editor's note: The Eagle withheld the name of this student at their request because of fear of reprisal. The name was provided to the Eagle, and we will still not accept anonymous letters. We will only withhold a name in rare circumstances.

'Looking forward to visiting again'

To the Editor:

I had the opportunity to spend an afternoon in you all's nice town. Thank you, ladies at Hair It Is, for the laughs. Lunch at the Outpost was very good, as always. The espresso was nice. After a quick visit with Mrs. Knowles and mentioning getting stuck in the mud above their cabin up Calamity Creek a few days before, another good chuckle. As I was leaving town, I thought I'd wash the truck of the muck and was dismayed to discover that there are no usable car washes going south through Canyon City. Maybe with some of your town's grant monies, it would be useful to upgrade the one that was kind of operational but not open? Just an idea. There's nothing wrong with mud on the tires. I'm looking forward to visiting again.

Mitzi Defenbaugh
Drewsey



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