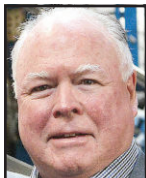


# The preciousness of the ordinary



STEVE FORRESTER



MATT WINTERS

## WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Like a gale that rips off the roofs in a small town, the lingering trauma of Jan. 6 has exposed basic truths about American life. Some of these are intellectual, as they pertain to the U.S. Constitution. The 12th Amendment to our founding document was being implemented inside the U.S. Capitol at the moment violent insurrectionists were breaking down its doors and windows.

Another foundational element of American life was violated that day — an aspect of American life that is more emotional than intellectual, but one with a profound influence on our national prosperity and level of contentment.

Many values constitute America. There is freedom of speech. Also freedom of religion. For many Americans, personal empowerment is defined by the right to bear arms.

Underneath these and other bedrock freedoms lies an emotional truth that is not written down. For lack of a better word, call it consistency. In the most basic terms, we have a justified expectation that when we wake up in the morning the lights will turn on. We expect that we will not find that there's been a coup overnight within City Hall. We expect

that when we drive down our city's streets, we'll not be stopped by a mob. We assume the banks will operate.

We take all of this for granted. But that is not the case in many other countries. And that's one reason why the United States has always beckoned immigrants as well as investment.

Here's how one local immigrant sees it: "The ordinary is truly precious." She adds: "Immigrants know this." They have come to America from places where all manner of

daily disruption is commonplace. This kind of chronic instability is like being in an inescapable bad relationship — inescapable, that is, except by taking the drastic step of relocating to a different nation.

Countries that become mired in cycles of political volatility suffer "brain drain," as those with gumption and resources seek security elsewhere. For the majority who either choose to endure in place or who have no practical choice, life becomes a toothache dogged by worry and underachievement.

Who wants to start a new family or business in a place where officials are corrupt, where public services are undependable, where warring political factions can destroy decades of work in a single riot?

This is what the U.S. risks if we are unable to coalesce around a rational middle ground that cherishes an element of stability and predictability. Far from being boring, the traits that made America great serve as a foundation for creativity and risk taking. Just as children who grow up in supportive

families with high expectations may never fully realize how lucky they had it, citizens of smoothly functioning nations can scarcely recognize how privileged they are.

The dividends of living in such a country may be invisible to most. But they enrich us in countless ways. America's stability means we are able to inexpensively borrow whatever we need to springboard us out of what might otherwise be a pandemic-induced depression. Our reputation for strength shields us, to some extent, from attacks by

our adversaries.

The horror show of Jan. 6 badly bruised our reputation for stability. Prolonged civil unrest has also stripped the luster off several U.S. cities, including Portland.

It's often said that the first step toward getting better is recognizing you have a problem. In today's U.S., there's no shortage of those who decry both real and imagined shortcomings — nor should we ever cease striving to ensure political, legal and economic justice for all. Our problems are comparatively easy to see.

Ben Franklin, our pragmatic founding father, wrote in 1789 that, "Our new Constitution is now established, everything seems to promise it will be durable; but, in this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes."

If transported to today, Franklin would worry about how many of us fail to appreciate what we have. Franklin would recognize citizens who cherish the extraordinary value of normal operations are the key to an enduring republic.

Even Franklin admitted he didn't like every bit of the Constitution, but he recognized the whole package was a recipe for enduring American success. Healing the damage to our nation starts with recommitting ourselves to preserving the preciousness of the ordinary.

*Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group. Matt Winters is the editor of the Chinook Observer.*

## The future of our climate, and our world, is up to us



ANDREW CLARK

### A SLICE OF LIFE

What is the biggest temperature variation you have heard of in one town?

A few days ago, I saw a copy of the "TidBits" paper in Milton-Freewater. It had a very interesting article on the Arctic and mentioned that a town in Russia called Verkhoyansk had the lowest temperature ever recorded in the Arctic — minus 89.9 degrees. And then, in 2020, that same town recorded a temperature of 100.4 degrees.

That is a high/low variance in one place of 190 degrees. The article also noted that the 100-degree temperature set an all-time record for the Arctic, "alarming meteorologists worldwide." Another interesting statistic said if all Arctic ice melted, sea level would rise 23 feet. And if all Antarctic ice melted, global sea level would rise 197 feet, a combined total of 220 feet of sea-level rise.

Look at a world map and note all the

major cities at the periphery of continents — all those huge cities that grew from little seaports and now hold, cumulatively, hundreds of millions of people. As those cities drown, coastal people all over the world will move inland in an immense migration and, although it will be very slow, it will be inexorable.

All of our Oregon coastal cities are at sea level zero and gone. Portland is at 50 feet elevation and underwater. As the seawater spreads out, the Willamette Valley would become a very large saltwater lake. Eastern Oregon would perhaps be less affected by water than by the people fleeing Western Oregon and elsewhere.

This won't happen in our lifetimes or for many, many lifetimes to come, but the significant issue for us right now is that we — right now, us — are part of the trajectory that is making it happen. We are guilty parties. We are creating the anthropogenic climate change that is responsible for the 190-degree temperature variance in the Arctic, and that means a lot of what was previously stable snow and ice becomes flowing water and the process of ocean rise is happening as we speak. The warmer air melts the snow from

above and the warmer water melts the ice from below. And it is happening right now.

At this rate, our future progeny will have good reason to curse our irresponsibility for not addressing this problem when it was reconcilable, because by their time, alternatives are likely to be limited or nonexistent.

As of Jan. 20, we are back in the Paris Climate Agreement — a good, solid first step in terms of national policy — but what do we do as individual citizens? There are several potentials.

We need to drop the unfounded statements denying climate change and start relying on solid science. We need to encourage our legislators at both state and federal levels to support legislation that reduces use of greenhouse gas-producing fuels. We need to examine our own individual activities that create CO2 and methane. We need to think in terms of trading small engine implements for electric replacements. To drive cars gently. With all the technical advancements and efficiencies regarding production and usage of energy, many changes can be made if we make ourselves aware of available alternatives and take individual responsibility. And all together that can add up to a lot of

positive action.

How can we learn more?

Based right here in Pendleton, there is an organization called the Eastern Oregon Climate Change Coalition — EOC3. This is a group of concerned citizens who strive to learn, together, how to deal with our changing climate and ensure a sustainable future for themselves, their families and everyone else, including you.

EOC3 members make themselves more aware of the causes of climate change, the issues surrounding its effects, and mitigations that all of us can consider in response to a changing climate. Anyone — especially you — can be a member, involved in awareness and solutions.

For more information, please contact [EastOregonClimateChange@gmail.com](mailto:EastOregonClimateChange@gmail.com) or check out their Facebook page at EasternOregonClimateChangeCoalition. Please be involved. Please think of our grandchildren in the distant future — futures that we now hold in our hands.

*Dr. Andrew Clark is a livestock veterinarian with both domestic and international work experience who lives in Pendleton.*

## Insolvency is at BMCC's doorstep



KIM PUZEY

### OTHER VIEWS

In 1962, when Wallace McCrae was selected as the first president of Blue Mountain Community College, John F. Kennedy was president of the United States. Fertility rates were high and baby boomers were graduating from high school. Trade schools and community colleges were part of a bright future for a growing population.

Federal, state and local funding sources were available to build facilities, design course curriculum and fully staff hundreds of such institutions across the nation. Almost anything imaginable was possible.

McCrae presided over a dozen years of exciting growth.

Ron Daniels was the next president and served for 23 years. Near the end of his tenure, he invited me to fill a vacancy on the Budget Committee, which led to an appointment to the Board of Trustees where I have had the privilege of serving for nearly 25 years. During that time I have worked with the following presidents and interim presidents, each of whom brought their own management style and unique skills set as the chief executive officer: Nicki Harrington, Travis Kirkland, Paul McCarell, John Turner, Cam Preus, Connie Green, Dennis Bailey-Fougner and John Fields.

Shortly after the myriad nationwide technical schools and community colleges were established, federal funds were directed elsewhere, assuming each institution would be self sustaining through prudent financial management. Ron Daniels was a fiscal conservative and left a substantial financial reserve when he retired. The college was growing, bond measures were passed and enrollment increased.

In 1994, Oregonians voted in favor of Measures 11 and 17, which required mandatory sentencing for certain crimes and work for the incarcerated. The impact of these measures resulted in approximately \$1 billion in the construction of correctional institutions and the diversion of state funding to the maintenance and operations

of those facilities. The measures increased the mandatory portion and decreased the discretionary portion of the state budget, which is the portion from which community colleges are funded. K-12 and higher education are in the mandatory portion of the budget.

Measures 5, 47 and 50 placed limits on property taxes, which had been the primary resource for funding community colleges. This left community colleges in a position to lobby the Legislature for a larger portion of discretionary funds or, alternately, increasing tuition and fees.

By the time these measures were in place and had begun to create unanticipated tension between resources and requirements, costs across the board had increased and fertility rates had fallen from a high of 3.58 in 1960 to approximately 2.0 in the mid-1990s, meaning there would be fewer prospective students in the years to come.

Between 1998 and 2011, believing that "if we build it they will come," the public continued to vote for more bond measures to expand and improve existing facilities and establish satellite campuses in Hermiston, Milton-Freewater, Boardman and Baker City.

Each new facility came with operations and maintenance costs that were intended to be absorbed by increased enrollments. Instructional and administrative costs continued to increase as the aforementioned fiscal reserve was gradually diminished. For more than a decade the general trend has been increased costs and decreased enrollment.

Faculty, administrators, presidents and trustees have planned and hoped and worked toward reversing these intractable trends, to little avail. President after president after president has continued to face what seems to have become inevitable.

From my perspective of almost 25 years of associating with the governance of this institution, I believe insolvency is at the doorstep of Blue Mountain Community College unless we reinvent a floundering system.

*Kim Puzey lives in Hermiston and is the general manager of the Port of Umatilla. He is a member of the Blue Mountain Community College Board of Education.*

## Act will protect more Oregon rivers and streams



RON WYDEN

### OTHER VIEWS

Oregon is special for many reasons. But two attributes are near and dear to my heart: our state's unmatched natural treasures and our firm commitment to democracy that I call the "Oregon Way."

With those attributes in mind, I was proud this month, along with Sen. Jeff Merkley, to introduce the River Democracy Act.

The legislation proposes to protect our natural treasures by adding nearly 4,700 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon to the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system — the largest Wild and Scenic Rivers effort in U.S. history.

And the bill takes its name from the fact that the proposed rivers and stream additions came directly from more than 15,000 nominations submitted by Oregonians statewide.

That open public process encouraged Oregonians to nominate rivers that are outstanding for their recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, or because they provide clean drinking water. This bill represents, for example, nominations for the Umatilla River and Middle Fork John Day by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

In addition to reflecting Oregonians' desire to protect our spectacular rivers for generations to come, the bill would continue to rev up our state's outdoor recreation economy — which, according to the Outdoor Recreation Industry, supports 224,000 jobs statewide and generates \$15.6 billion in consumer spending. The legislation was crafted with the input of small businesses across Oregon who know these protections support hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation, and will help them as they fight to recover from the pandemic as more and more Oregonians find refuge and safety in the outdoors.

And we did this the "Oregon Way." We solicited nominations from the people who interact with these rivers every single day. And we listened to concerns these folks were having in real time by taking a 21st century conservation approach that considers the climate emergency, and the sobering risks that wildfire poses to Oregon families and small businesses.

In the devastating aftermath of the historic infernos that ripped through Oregon communities in fall 2020, I made sure the River Democracy Act takes multiple, necessary steps to protect homes, businesses, and our state's special places from wildfires.

Those steps include the requirement that federal land management agencies assess the risks of wildfire in Wild and Scenic River corridors, as well as near homes and businesses, and develop a risk reduction plan that must be implemented immediately.

The bill also allows federal land management agencies to enter into cooperative wildfire-fighting agreements with states and local governments and establishes a federal grant program for states and local governments to help repair drinking water quality, watersheds, and infrastructure.

I intend this bill to protect federal public land, and believe strongly that private property rights must be upheld. This includes farming and ranching, which are vital to many local economies around the state. The legislation takes great care to state in plain English that "Nothing in this Act or an amendment made by this Act affects private property rights."

And finally, the bill includes language that explicitly makes it clear that valid or vested water rights will not be affected; and the state of Oregon can still administer water rights in accordance with state laws and regulations.

So it's in the true spirit of the "Oregon Way" that the proposed River Democracy Act now opens a new round of conversation among us as Oregonians.

*Ron Wyden is Oregon's senior senator.*