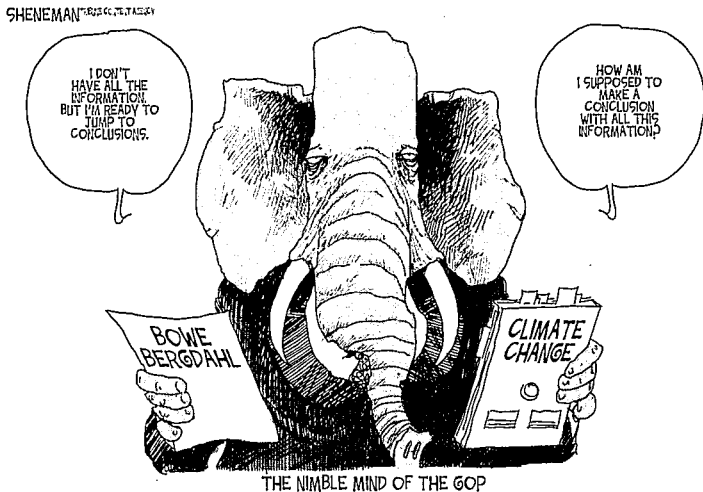


OPINION

Walt Handelsman/Newsday

Drew Sheneman/Tribune Media Services



THE NIMBLE MIND OF THE GOP

LETTERS IN THE EDITORS MAILBAG

UO declined offer of expert help

Eugene has had, in my experience, a disproportionate number of cultural icons masquerading as ordinary citizens: Ken Kesey, Zig Engelmann, Bill Bowerman and Jan Eliot, to name a few. We also have some world-class academicians in our midst living as husbands, fathers, wives and mothers.

Ed Whitelaw is one such individual who was, deservedly, featured in The Register-Guard recently for his work in the field of economics. Jennifer Freyd is another local treasure — a mother of four, a professor and a nationally recognized expert on sexual violence.

Freyd offered to bring her decades of experience and knowledge to bear on a deeply disturbing issue on the University of Oregon campus.

She was willing to take on the project immediately and requested a modest sum of money to facilitate her work.

To put her funding request in perspective, it was infinitesimal compared with the cost of the Jaqua Academic Center, which serves a handful of elite student athletes.

Freyd's survey would have benefited tens of thousand of students at the university and potentially millions more around the country.

Instead, the UO declined her offer, stating it will undertake "some kind of sexual violence climate survey ... within the next year."

It's bewildering and disturbing to me that we wouldn't take every opportunity to do right by our young women and young men at the UO and take advantage of the talents, skills and knowledge of the best and the brightest among us. What are we waiting for?

NARY BAUER
Eugene

GMO supporters should eat the food

Lobbyist alert! Will Coggin's June 3 letter defending genetically modified foods is from an outfit in Washington, D.C., that receives corporate donations from Monsanto. The Center for Consumer Freedom actually supports corporate freedom, and opposes the rights of

consumers to know what's in their food.

Genetically modified organism benefits include increased pesticide and herbicide resistance, in addition to longer shelf life.

Any consumer who prefers to eat food sprayed with even more chemicals should go right ahead. And anyone who wants vegetables that can sit on a store shelf for a few more weeks before they're bought should help themselves.

I don't. I want labels on food so everyone can make choices about what to eat.

Coggin claimed the American Medical Association says GMOs are "completely safe," but he's being paid to be wrong. While the AMA doesn't support GMO labeling, it recommends pre-market safety testing of GMO crops.

Pre-market safety testing of Agent Orange (a Monsanto product) would have prevented the cancer and other problems suffered by millions of Vietnamese people and Vietnam War veterans. Pre-market safety testing of DDT (also a Monsanto product) would have prevented the near-extinction of bald eagles and peregrine falcons.

I have a suggestion: Let Coggin and everyone else who opposes GMO labeling offer themselves as subjects for pre-market safety testing of GMO products. After they've eaten GMOs for 20 years and the AMA determines their disease and mortality rates compared to a control group, let me know the results.

LESLIE RUBINSTEIN
Cottage Grove

Gun control advocates misfire

Zeff Thompson trotted out the nearly meaningless fact that the United States "has the dubious distinction of having the most gun deaths per capita of 27 developed countries" (letters, June 10). That's analogous to comparing the number of swimming pool deaths per capita in Southern California to those in the Gobi Desert.

What would give a comparison of gun death statistics greater credibility is if overall violent crime statistics were included — something usually omitted and ignored by gun control advocates.

FBI statistics for 2011 indicate U.S. murders using all types of rifles accounted for 323 of 12,664 deaths, so eliminating assault rifles or reducing their clip capacity wouldn't likely have a statistically significant effect on improving public safety. Supporters of those measures have the wrong target.

If anyone can devise a system for expanded background checks that prevents criminals and the mentally ill from acquiring firearms, that *doesn't* include creating enduring, centrally located records of those checks — a de facto registry of guns and gun owners — and that includes vigorous government prosecution of those who falsify information on their background check applications, I'll vote for it.

And, until such time as I don't have to reboot my computer to get it to function properly, "smart guns" are not an option for self-defense.

PETER E. LOEWY
Eugene

U.S. is headed down Rome's path

President Obama is channeling tens of thousands of illegal immigrants all over the United States, stuffing them onto planes and into buses headed to dozens of cities.

Corruption and lawlessness in Obama's administration are rampant, as he writes his own laws and ignores those he doesn't like.

Scandals erupt almost daily, and veterans are dying while awaiting medical care. Nobody's willing or able to stop the growing madness.

As Rome began its descent, its armies, engineers and traders were forced to abandon much of the occupied world as there was no longer enough money to keep the empire intact.

The collapse accelerated as anarchy spread around the world. Immigrants from all over the former empire flooded into Rome for protection as its treasury collapsed and the army disintegrated. Rome was unable and unwilling to halt its own demise, and 500 years of Dark Ages followed.

What's going to become of our America, and the world that depends on our former wealth, generosity and moral leadership?

DAVID POKVITIS
Springfield

School shootings list exaggerates

It was disappointing to see The Register-Guard parrot a figure from Michael Bloomberg's anti-gun group Everytown without the most basic fact-checking.

Journalist Charles C. Johnson looked at the 74 shootings listed and found they included incidents that were drug-related, gang-related, suicides, debt collections, accidents, domestic disputes, gang initiations, shootings that occurred after hours and not on school grounds, shootings ruled self-defense by the police, and at least one in which he could find no evidence it even occurred.

While one might dismiss all that and say the cases "technically" fit, gang-related violence, debt collection, domestic disputes, self-defense and suicides are not what most people have in mind when it comes to "school shootings."

In other words, the list was compiled to give the public an exaggerated impression of how many school shootings have recently taken place.

It's true that any number is too high, but with gun ownership at an all-time high, firearm homicides are 49 percent lower than 20 years ago, as reported by CNN.

California is top-rated by the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence and has all the things that were proposed after the Sandy Hook tragedy and yet it recently had a mass knifing and a shooting in a gun-free zone.

The solution to stopping criminals with guns is not to take guns away from their potential victims.

BOB J. TAYLOR
Eugene

LETTERS LOG

Letters received in past week: 77
Letters published: 45

Hurricane Aretha?
A little respect, please

Here's a riddle: Why would a Hurricane Alexandra be deadlier than an identical Hurricane Alexander?

Because females don't get respect. Not even 100-mph typhoons, if they're dubbed with female names.

Researchers find that female-named hurricanes kill about twice as many people as similar male-named hurricanes because some people underestimate them. Americans expect male hurricanes to be violent and deadly, but they mistake female hurricanes as dainty or wimpy and don't take adequate precautions.

The study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, underscored how unconscious biases shape our behavior — even when we're unaware of them.

Researchers examined the most damaging hurricanes between 1950 and 2012, excluding a couple of outliers such as Katrina in 2005. They found that female-named storms killed an average of 45 people, while similar hurricanes with male names killed about half as many.

The authors of the study, Kiju Jung and others at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Arizona State University, also conducted experiments asking people to predict the intensity and riskiness of a hurricane. When asked about a male hurricane, such as Alexander, people predicted a more violent storm than when asked about a female hurricane, such as Alexandra.

Likewise, research subjects were more willing to evacuate to avoid Hurricane



Nicholas Kristof

Victor than when it was Hurricane Victoria. The more masculine the name, the more respect the hurricane drew. The researchers estimated that changing the name of a hurricane from Charley to Eloise could nearly triple the death toll.

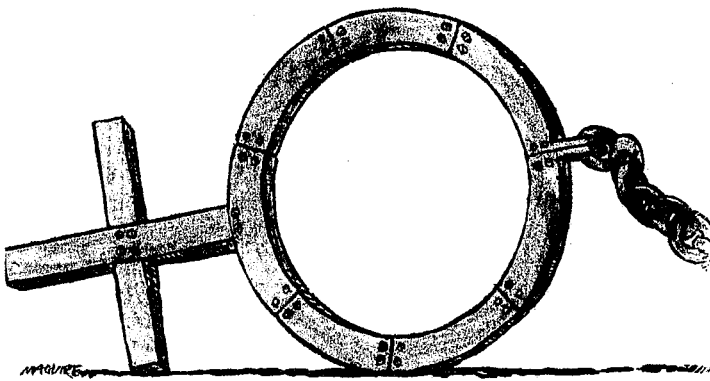
Women were as likely as men to disrespect female hurricanes.

We often assume that racism or sexism is primarily about in-your-face bigots or misogynists, but research in the last couple of decades — capped by this hurricane study — shows that the larger problem is unconscious bias even among well-meaning, enlightened people who embrace principles of equality.

This affects the candidates we vote for, the employees we hire, the people we do business with. I suspect unconscious bias has been far more of a factor for President Obama than overt racism and will also be a challenge for Hillary Clinton if she runs for president again.

"It's a mistake to assume that gender bias is only or mainly about misogynists," said Susan Fiske, a psychology professor at Princeton University and the editor of the hurricane study. "Much gender bias is more automatic, ambiguous and ambivalent than people typically assume."

"Gender bias is not mostly about 'I hate them, I hate them,'" she added. "A lot of it is about 'I cherish them because they are nice, even if incompetent and needing protection.'" Yale researchers contacted science professors at major research universities and asked them to evaluate an application from a (mythical)



BARRIE MAGUIRE/NewsArt.com

recent graduate for a laboratory position. The professors received a one-page summary of the candidate, who in some versions was John and in others Jennifer.

On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 the highest, the professors rated John an average of 4, and Jennifer a 3.3. On average, the professors suggested a salary for Jennifer of \$26,508, and \$30,328 for John. Professors were more willing to mentor John than Jennifer.

The professors' assessments were unrelated to their own age or gender.

Other studies have reached similar conclusions, often by sending out identical résumés for job applicants — some with a female name and some with a male name. The male versions do better.

For example, evaluators assess the CV of "Brian Miller" as stronger than that of an identical "Karen Miller." Stanford Business School students who read about "Heidi" rate her more power-hungry and self-promoting than those who read about an otherwise identical "Howard."

While virtually all voters say today that they would vote for a qualified woman for president (only 30 percent said so in 1930), experiments by Cecilia Hyunjong Mo of Vanderbilt Univer-

sity suggest that in practice people favor male candidates because they associate men with leadership.

Mo found that people, when asked to make pairs of images, have no trouble doing so with male names and words such as "president" or "governor." But some struggle to do so quickly with female names, and those people are more likely to vote for male candidates.

"There appears to be a gulf between our conscious ideals of equality and our unconscious tendency to discriminate at the ballot box," Mo writes.

I suspect that unconscious biases shape everything from salary discrimination to the lackadaisical way many universities handle rape cases. They also help explain why only 4.8 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs and 18.5 percent of members of Congress are women.

This deep bias is as elusive as it is pernicious, but a start is to confront and discuss it. Perhaps hurricanes, by catching us out, can help us face our own chauvinism.

Nicholas Kristof is a columnist for The New York Times.