

**Oregon Community Foundation
32nd Annual Meeting Luncheon
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Portland Ballroom at the Oregon Convention Center**

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University of Oregon**

"Oregon Blueprint"

It is good that we can be here together today – and I am honored to have this opportunity to speak to you – to offer an idea or two that may capture your hearts, your minds, your imaginations – and – most important – make a difference.

It would be sad, however, if I were to waste this opportunity – if I were to speak only in platitudes about the greatness of our state or offer such general comments as to leave you feeling full from your lunch - but still hungry for something more substantial from the speaker.

I hope to fill you up.

I have promised you an “Oregon Blueprint.”

But here’s the secret of any blueprint – it is never made by just one person. It is always made with consultation and information gained from electricians and plumbers, concrete pourers and steel workers, landscape designers and wood workers – maybe even a lawyer
...

But my point is – and the heart of my Oregon Blueprint is – we do it together.

PARTISANSHIP

Disease – strangling, circulation-stopping, muscle-binding and breath-taking disease – is killing this state.

The disease has several names – call it partisanship, call it tribalism, call it, as my friend Jack Faust has, “ the anger and selfishness that drives much of the 21st-Century American sentiment.” *The Oregonian's* poll last Sunday says we feel it. More than 50% of us feel Oregon is going in the "wrong direction."

If you leave with only one memory today – one sense of being filled by anything I say – it is this – that bitter partisanship which is the political equivalent of road rage – threatens to leave us as a state and people, a tangled wreck on the side of Oregon’s road toward progress.

Let's see – disease . . . wreck . . . is there another metaphor I can draw on for my analogy? Several seem apt, though insanity comes to mind – with its classic definition of doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting different results.

But whatever metaphor touches you, the fact remains that with every attack ad, with every ratings-driven no-holds-barred talk show program, with every ballot measure that divides us, we grow sicker, more wrecked and more insane.

And we do it to ourselves.

We have failed to deal with such vital issues as:

- Stability and adequacy of our K-12 system
- Health care for the poor and near poor
- Reversing the disinvestment in higher education
- Developing a revenue system less dependent on the peaks and valleys of the economic cycle

OTHER ISSUES

I'll be back to this shortly.

We all know that numerous issues rise to the top of any challenges and opportunities we face as Oregonians.

In fact, as I first thought about my remarks for today, especially in context of the “Oregon Blueprint” theme, three other vital issues rose to the top – the challenge of sustainability, our changing demographics, and the ever-widening income gap and eroding well-being of our Oregon middle class.

Let me touch on them briefly – but in the shadow of this greater danger . . .

SUSTAINABILITY

I plugged the word “sustainability” into the Yahoo search engine and came up with 20,600,000 results. I haven't been through all of them yet, but the range is quite amazing.

From an International consultancy and a think-tank dedicated to promoting the business case for sustainable development . . .

. . . to Dow Jones sustainability indexes . . .

. . . to a speech from the chairman of UPS about that company's sustainability practices . . .
. . . to the International Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture . . .

Well, with 20, 599,996 entries still to go, I won't go on – but you get the idea – the

creation of a sustainable economy is becoming a necessity, here and around the world.

Oregon has a long tradition of sustainability – our beaches, our bottle bill, our legitimate environmental concerns, even in our collegiate curricula.

As our own Third District Congressman Earl Blumenauer has recently noted, “Oregonians know as much about how to build livable communities as anyone else in the world.”

And it is the world that will be looking to us for answers.

Latin America and Asia, in understandable efforts to build strong economies, are sacrificing natural resources at frightening rates – rates that cannot be sustained forever.

China is cutting forests—now including those of Borneo –at speeds that will have serious environmental repercussions for decades to come.

In many parts of Africa, an already fragile ecology is nearing a breaking point.

Yes, cleaning up our own rivers, protecting our salmon, even preserving clean drinking water is a challenge we have to meet. The developing countries of Asia, their university presidents tell me, are going to school on our successes and failures of the Willamette Basin.

Finding ways to create jobs that sustain both the economy and the environment is a challenge we have to meet.

But we can only do so if we abandon – I mean drop like a piece of radioactive cobalt – the ideas and actions that divide us, that separate us into a hundred special interest groups going in a hundred different directions.

DEMOGRAPHICS

It has been said that demographics is destiny. While there may be some truth to this, the real fact is that demographics are constantly changing – and that our destiny is not in the growing cultural differences among us, but in how we respond to them.

The growth of non-white population in Oregon in the next decade is the only reason Oregon’s population, workforce and school age population will grow at all. This growth undoubtedly will create challenges and opportunities as diverse cultures move us beyond the comfortable white zone we have lived in for the past century-and-a-half.

Hear these reports on census data analysis from today's *Washington Post*: "Nearly half of the nation's children under five are racial or ethnic minorities, and the percentage is increasing, mainly because the hispanic population is growing so rapidly."

"One in three Americans is now a member of a minority group, a share that is bound to rise, because the nonhispanic white population is older and growing much more slowly."

Again, we can choose to acknowledge and embrace this change with all its challenges and opportunities – or we can divide – and lose.

It is not really a change in who we are – we are Oregonians. It is a change in the variety of what we bring to who we are. I can't claim an ancient pedigree. I'm a first generation American and Oregonian on my father's side, and only second generation on my mom's. What conceit we have to claim rights of ancestry to be here against any migration—especially since the first Americans have buried their ancestors here in this land for 10,000 years before we arrived.

We also face the aging of our population, which brings with it the acknowledged challenges of increased social costs for healthcare, retirement and Winnebagos.

The average age of the voter in Oregon, according to Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury, in a low turnout year is 60 years old, and in a high turn out year – 50.

Do the older...who vote...yet see their stake in the education of the younger who ultimately must sustain them?

According to William Frey, a Brookings Institution demographer, "The older predominately white baby boom generation will need to accommodate younger, multi-ethnic young adults and child populations in civic life, political decisions and sharing of government resources."

This morning's *Washington Post* article continues: "Government officials face a cultural generation gap as they weigh demands from older white citizens for senior citizen centers, transportation and other aid against requests from younger, mainly minority residents for translation assistance, preschools and other services."

We must begin to attract to the political process those who will be most affected by it. Otherwise the generation gap will be compounded by the culture gap.

NICKLED AND DIMED

In her revealing book "Nickeled and Dimed," writer Barbara Ehrenreich documents her travels though the heart of the America's minimum wage earning population.

Across America – and just as truly here in Oregon, we are experiencing a shrinking middle class.

A *New York Times* article, published Monday in the Eugene *Register-Guard*, addressed this issue.

In it, one researcher from Washington University in St. Louis, noted that “There’s strong evidence over the past five years, record numbers of lower income Americans find themselves in a more precarious economic position than at any time in recent memory.”

The article documented what thousands of Oregon families are struggling through right now. It noted that during the 1980s, around 13 percent of Americans in their 40s spent at least one year below the poverty line; in the 1990s, 36 percent of the people in their 40s did – nearly three times as many over the space of a single decade.

Comparable figures for the first decade of the 21st century are obviously not available. But other indicators, such as a climbing poverty rate and rising levels of family debt, suggest the trend grows worse.

For a variety of reasons – some we can argue about until the cows come home – the family-wage jobs that offered a healthy middle class lifestyle during the era when I was growing up, have slowly but surely disappeared.

No longer will a ninth grade education and a willingness to work hard enable you to care for the economic needs of a growing family. Not even a high school diploma will do that for you. The next generation needs college credentials as never before – more, better and faster. But who's willing to help pay?

Without this base of social stability, we face increasing challenges in terms of social fragmentation and, quite frankly, loss of taxable income.

BACK TO PARTISANSHIP

These previous three issues are real challenges to Oregonians – Oregonians today.

But the extreme partisanship that has crippled our efforts to govern this state for the past decade at least – actually 15 years – casts a giant shadow over every other need.

As I noted earlier, it is the political equivalent of road rage – a high blood pressure, winning at all cost, no prisoners taken approach to politics that is better suited for the politburo than the statehouse.

It does not have to be this way – and we have the fine example set by Oregon’s two U.S. senators, Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith, once bitter election rivals, now allies who join in town halls and who reach repeatedly across party aisles. They have partnered effectively to represent the needs of Oregonians.

One, labeled a fairly conservative Republican, and the other, often cited as a fairly liberal Democrat, have found a way to come together for the benefit of Oregonians.

And lest the Senate get all the credit, our representatives Blumenauer and Greg Walden took a hike around Mt. Hood and in the process found a way to agree on what was

necessary to maintain more of that wonderful wilderness.

Theirs is a larger and better approach we all can learn from. It works to capture the vital center.

I know many of you have heard me speak before on what I have called “The New Tribalism.”

As I first wrote seemingly long ago in 1992, the New Tribalism is the growth of a politics based upon narrow concerns, rooted in the exploitation of divisions of class, cash, gender, region, religion, ethnicity, morality and ideology — a give-no-quarter and take-no-prisoners activism that demands satisfaction and accepts no compromise.

It is a raw permissiveness that escalates rhetorical excess sometimes even to physical violence.

And it creates an environment where our political system of limited government is asked to take on social and religious disputes that the system cannot possibly resolve.

We must be the ones to step up. How can we do this.

THE BLUEPRINT

I trust that awareness of the problem is a first step.

I hope, that in this group today of people I know care about Oregon and Oregonians, a seed will be planted that might germinate – that might actually be the beginning of change.

I hope that, now, not next year or after the next election, is the time this can begin to happen.

If this is a blueprint, where do we start? We start with a foundation.

I’d like to talk now about that foundation – a triad that is composed of each of us as individuals, each of us as citizens, and each of us as members of what I can best call the philanthropic community.

THE INDIVIDUAL

One person at a time is how we make a difference. Enough “one persons” and we have a movement.

I’m not talking about anything supernatural – I’m talking about something that each of us – ordinary people of every walk – can do.

And while creating a movement that matters is my goal, there are seemingly small things – but things that truly get to the heart of the matter – that each of us can do.

For example: Let's lower our voices – literally – let's lessen the volume and increase the quality of our discourse.

Let's decide not to use e-mail flaming, talk radio or TV spin shows for our civic dialogue. (I deleted an angry draft of an e-mail response on my computer this morning...so it can be done!) These quasi-public means of communication avoid the nuances and dimension of true public dialogue, replacing it with a "lowest common denominator" set of competing primal screams.

It is that high decibel volume which sets us up for dangerous and divisive tribalism – a tribalism that thrives because there are those who profit from it.

Political writer Joe Klein wrote on how the pollsters, the political spin artists, the highly paid consultants exploit us. The title of his book, which says a lot is "Politics Lost: How American Democracy Was Trivialized by People Who Think You Are Stupid."

It's time to move beyond these noise merchants – time to talk and listen with each other. Most of the purveyors of this toxic oversimplification live by the ratings. Help them expire by reducing their ratings. Move your dial; change the channel. Advertisers will notice.

For a democracy to work over the long run, we must not only find our voice and speak it, but search out other voices and listen. And we need to find new common forums, the modern equivalent of the old village square that themselves are unwilling to be captured by partisan sides.

As many of our fathers and mothers used to say to us, "Listen. You might learn something."

A part of it may be as simple as – stop interrupting the speaker – whether you are talking with a friend or hosting a radio talk show.

And here's another old piece of advice we got from our parents– count to 10!

By those two means alone, half the problems encountered in Oregon in recent years could have been avoided.

THE CITIZEN

Is there a difference between the individual and the citizen? Only, I would say, in degree of focus, in that the individual as citizen looks at herself beyond self-interest and beyond today--or should. Citizenship implies duty. It requires looking for and deciding about the common good.

The citizen asks, not what serves me, my party, or my special interest group – but what serves the broader community.

The citizen finds the way to mute the partisan voices and winner-take-all issues.

The citizen in this state, I believe will also consider reigning in--re-designing--the initiative process which has been hijacked, for the most part, by those who do not have a stake in the resolution of conflict, but a stake in getting their way beyond the deliberative process.

They want it all – and they want too much, and have since the passage of Measures 5 and 11 – the first forced the reduction of spending on the vital education of our children, and the other forced promiscuous spending on prisons without supplying new sources for funding.

If you draw up an initiative, you and four or five of your friends and fellow believers can ask for it all, no compromise, no give-and-take, no counter-arguments. Just put it all out there for an up-or-down vote, “give me mine and future priorities be damned... and doomed.”

There is money in promoting these single-issue causes, sometimes big money, for those in this society who have no stake in consensus. Indeed the perpetuation of conflict and divisiveness is both their meal ticket, and their egotistical pathway to power.

Another article in Monday’s newspapers noted that at least two initiatives vying for a place on our fall ballot – two that strike at the very structure of our capacity to govern – are driven and financed by out-of-state interests. They want Oregon as their political playground. They won’t have to live with the consequences, they’ll just go to the bank and move on to the next ideological battleground.

One of them, a government spending limitation similar to one that Colorado voters recently called a temporary halt to, is financed to the tune of \$75,000 from an Illinois-based group (Americans for Limited Government). Deny that petition your signature--if it qualifies for the ballot mobilize with the opposition. It is a cynical trick that would destroy an already emaciated state infrastructure.

The second, backed by \$50,000 from a national organization called U.S. Term Limits, proposes to again take away the voters' right to elect or throw out our legislators based on the quality as opposed to the time of their service. An earlier version was declared unconstitutional. It's back again and threatens to rob our legislature of its expertise and institutional memory. Vote "no" unless you really believe domination of a crippled legislature by the executive branch and professional lobby is a great idea.

I have some more practical – blueprint, if you will – suggestions.

- Make at least one of the houses of our state legislature be elected on a non-partisan basis--ask that of the Oregon Senate. It takes only a stroke of the legislative pen. State Senator Frank Morse noted yesterday that much partisanship is generated by the structure of the institution – so let's just redesign the institution!
- Consider some version of an open primary. Allow the disaffected independents to have a voice in primary elections and mute the intransigence of ideological zealots at the same time. Recapture the center, from which both progress and stability usually flow.
- Withhold your signature from state spending limitations petitions, and for that matter any petition you don't fully understand on the spot. Deny our ballot to out-of-state special interests, whose only real concern is to use Oregon as a political game-piece . . .
- Create a legislative exchange program—a deliberate live-in exchange that for days, even a week or more sends legislators from Eastmoreland to Elgin, Salem to Sutherlin, Bandon to Baker City – something that enables those who represent us experience the reality of representing all of us.

A piece of the Oregon Blueprint is buying into the truth that we are in this together.

In Eastern Oregon water is life.

West of the Cascades we feel we are drowning in it.

Salmon are a foundation to the commercial fisherman, but a raw spot to the Klamath Falls rancher.

To Oregonians outside of Portland, PGE used to stand for Portland Gets Everything. Today everything is a struggle.

The ex-mill worker in Gardiner watches his old workplace dynamited, and knows he is poorer for the loss.

The forest ecologist, noting old growth trees still standing, sees a richer world.

But we are in this together.

In the great Columbia River – we see a prime example of how we must come together as the wheat and other produce of Eastern Oregon's rich farms and fields is shipped down that river, into the Port of Portland and from there to feed a hungry world. It creates an economic base that gathers its strength from the extremes, that attracts thousands here for jobs and other opportunities.

It is not about who gets what, but about our interdependence and how we all get something of meaning.

MEMBERS OF PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY

There is no better example of that final participant in our interdependence than each of us here – members of an organization that is both a collection of individuals and of organizations that care, but also a collective voice that can make a difference.

My father was a founder of the Oregon Community Foundation.

Back when roads were not what they are today, he thought nothing of driving 6 to 8 hours each way from Medford to participate – to make that difference.

The great advantage we have is that as charitable foundations we are beholden to no one but the voice of conscience and the challenge of unmet needs.

Elected officials have to win the next election – have to finance it and please at least a perception of what the voters want. Some never break out of that chase for a real glimpse of the public interest. The game of getting campaign funds swallows up the opportunity to work for the long haul.

Let's be clear, I'm not against democracy.

What I am saying, though, is that within this and other philanthropic organizations, we don't have to build a "bridge to nowhere" – we get to build bridges to where we want to go.

Look at what Bill Gates has done and is doing for literacy and in his worldwide fight against what he calls the "forgotten epidemic of malaria."

Look at what Rotary International has done toward the eradication of polio worldwide.

Here in Oregon:

- Consider The Chalkboard Project, a group of foundations looking hard at how to ask tough questions and develop real strategies for nurturing K-12 education.
- Foundations are beginning to take on the scourge of methamphetamine addiction.
- Foundation scholarships to colleges and universities are helping young men and women find their place in the sun – or the cleansing rain – of their futures in Oregon.

CONCLUSION

The irony, in so many ways, of the West and its settlement, is that the settlement itself holds the capacity to destroy what we love – that Oregon, with its mountains and valleys, its spray-drenched ocean views and vast desert panoramas, its frolicking Cascade streams and rolling, rolling Columbia, that is both a paradise – and a paradise to lose.

And I fear we can lose it.

The great Oregon poet William Stafford, in a poem called “Ask Me,” raises questions of personal choices in his life. And in the end he says:

“What the river says, that is what I say.”

I don’t know about each of you, but when I see a river – I see the Columbia rolling on, as Woodie Guthrie’s great song says . . .

So I say, as we look to the Oregon that we protect, that we hold in trust for our children and beyond, any blueprint must pass what I will call - the river test. I am not a mystic, but ask . . .

So what does the river say?

- The river says that it sustains itself – otherwise it would not remain a river. This is why we must build sustainability.
- The river says that change is natural – and often for the good, even when you don’t recognize it at first. This is why we must embrace the changes brought to our destiny by our changing demographics.
- The river says that once the smaller brooks and streams have joined together, they become one, heading the same direction. This is why we must work together to create jobs that provide livable incomes for Oregon families.
- But most important, the river says that it will remain one river – all the way to the ocean – and that if you want to get to the ocean, there is some necessity in following the river.

This does not do away with our highly-valued sense of individuality.

It does not mean we walk lock-stepped together in everything.

It does not mean we do not hold or air our differences.

I’m not a preacher – but if I were there would be a place at the end of my remarks when I would make the altar call . . .

I’m not going to – because the ushers aren’t ready.

But I am going to ask you to think . . .

We can remain in the embittered state that we have allowed to build within us in the past years – or we can move beyond it.

As I said at the beginning, this is the secret of the Oregon Blueprint.

It has all of our signatures on it. It has all of our contributions. It has all of our hopes and dreams.

It entails compromise and patience...lowered voices and magnified vision.

Bertrand Russell said, “One must care about a world one will never see.”

I say – we must care enough to make it happen.

We must care enough to act now.

We are the Oregon Blueprint.