

COMMENTARY

The Providence Journal

PUBLISHERS OF
The Providence Journal since 1829
The Providence Sunday Journal since 1885
The Evening Bulletin from 1863-1995

The Providence Journal, the oldest continuously published daily newspaper in the United States, is the winner of four Pulitzer Prizes.
 DISTINGUISHED NEWSPAPER
 New England Newspaper & Press Association

Diversity, equity, inclusion — and what it is to be human

Your Turn

Stephen Brigid
 Guest columnist

It seems remarkable and perplexing to me that the issues and principles of diversity, equity and inclusion need to be an issue or a problem. I am inclined to offer an offense of these very principles which I believe to be fundamental to us all. After all, are we not talking about humanity, the most basic element in which we all share? To breathe is to be human, and that is its most basic qualification.

There are written documents, both religious and secular, which all state basically the same thing — love thy neighbor — and a particular phrase that leans politically to state that all men are created equal and bear the right to the pursuit of happiness.

That last part is where it gets messy because there are some who define "men" in an exclusive and narrow fashion. The term must be considered as universal; in fact, it means human beings of all colors and sizes within the overall category of humanity. The word is simple, and its spirit and literal intent includes ALL people, ALL creeds, ALL cultures, ALL multigenders, hence ALL human beings. This is my assertion, and I believe it to be a widely shared thesis that requires acknowledgment and real practice.

A system based upon respect for one another is the most basic requirement, regardless of different choices or persuasions.

Diversity is strength — a richness and enhancement for everyone and to any place of any size. When we appreciate the cultural differences that may distinguish one ethnic community from another, they become assets rather than obstacles. All may be livable under the same roof, the umbrella of humanity. Why would any difference become a threat when it is really a blessing? No one should ask of anyone to disregard their culture, rather the charge is to share and contribute such nuances. Diverse thought and expressions make for a more interesting place, which should be welcomed and embraced.

Equity means being alike where no one has superiority or inferiority because of any distinctions, whether they are physical or of a belief system. Co-existence is an inherited right drawn from a natural order of human principles. We all share core tenants of emotions, beginning with empathy and compassion. These are among our greatest possessions and qualities. Cooperative living is normal as it is achievable by looking upon each other as the same. Sameness in this regard is a gift of understanding and attitude.

Inclusion means unity in being part of an arrangement and an agreement of acceptance. Our greatest strength is in recognizing the humanity in each of us and acting to reinforce this very basic common trait. It is inside all of us, and we should be so bold to bring it out openly and honestly. This is liberation, as we free ourselves of the burden and confinement of an inflated ideal of self-importance. We are not more or less important than our neighbor. We are not the same with an aligned mission of being truly human.

Woke is another term often misunderstood and misapplied. Wokeness is to awaken, to become aware of our humanity and to appreciate the humanness that is DEI. To be woke is to be positively prideful, and to be assertive and supportive of the values that define our humanity. We all possess the attributes of sensitivity; let us make these things our compass to lead.

The sole opposition to woke is the ego, which tells us of separable things. We have the opportunity to consciously challenge the destructive and defensive force of ego, and to move toward a more calming and peaceful place that reaches into rich diversity, full equity and real inclusiveness.

We may then see all people as being equal and encompassing all differences and variations as being essentially our charm, the great charm and attribute of being human.

Stephen Brigid is a retired professor of art and aesthetics living in Bristol.



A homeless man holds a sign on Point Street at Eddy in Providence. DAVID DELPOIO/THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Panhandlers endanger motorists

My company has operated a business in Providence since 1997.

Panhandlers regularly "work" at the intersection of Memorial Boulevard and Francis Street. Described by Google as "a key downtown location, notable for its proximity to... interstate ramps for I-95," this intersection is where I-95 and Route 10 exit into the city.

It is illegal to access this area on foot; there is no crosswalk. Nevertheless, government officials permit panhandlers to occupy this location.

First Amendment rights only apply on public property which is lawfully accessible by the general public. The location is not lawfully accessible, and for good reason: DOT Director Peter Alvitri described this intersection as "the second most dangerous in the state."

The panhandlers I have observed often are wobbly on their feet and walk up the highway off-ramps towards the traffic, thereby exposing innocent motorists to both civil and criminal liability.

The whole operation also makes for a terrible look. Visitors enter the city only to be greeted by panhandlers harassing them at their car windows. Officials also have permitted suitcases, cones, cardboard boxes, etc., on the median separating the off-ramps and on-ramps.

The area must be kept clear and presentable. The current situation violates law-abiding motorists' civil rights and gives preferential treatment to panhandlers solely based upon their status as such.

Stephen J. DiGianfilippo, East Greenwich

Strikes against drug boats demand oversight

I am struggling to understand the logic behind calling the second drone strike on a suspected drug-running boat a potential war crime, while treating the first strike as somehow acceptable. If the basic act — using military drones to destroy a small civilian vessel at sea without congressional authorization — is legally questionable and ethically disturbing, then dividing moral responsibility between "first shot permissible" and "second shot criminal" makes no sense at all.

Executing suspected drug traffickers by blowing up their boat bypasses every principle of due process. The United States has a vast and capable military and Coast Guard; if the goal were truly law enforcement, these individuals could be intercepted, detained, and tried in court. Even giving them time to abandon ship would align more closely with humane and lawful practice.

Drone executions of suspects should alarm every American. Congress, not any single executive, must authorize the use of military force, and any policy resulting in deaths deserves rigorous investigation, oversight and accountability.

Marc J. Seifer, South Kingstown

RI right to defy effort seeking voter info

It is totally unsettling that the state Republican Party supports breaking the law, as noted in The Journal story "Justice Dept. sues RI to get personal info on voter rolls" (News, Dec. 4). As is typical with anything done in the Trump-Republican Party, rather than provide a lawful purpose for collecting this information, there is an attack on the state and the secretary of state for lawfully protecting the information.

Using President Trump's tactics, anyone who does not acquiesce to the party's demands is accused of some nefarious motive. In fact, the nefarious motives are those of the Republican Party. Its primary purpose is to gain information on the state's voters for use in identifying Rhode Islanders who do not fit in the Republicans' image of who Americans should be.

One needs to be deeply concerned when a political party attacks congressional members for reminding our military that only legal orders must be followed.

Secretary of State Gregg Amore is well aware of the law safeguarding voter information. He is to be commended for insisting the law protecting Rhode Islanders' personal information be followed. It is shameful the Republican Party is slandering him for abiding by the law. Under Trump, the Republican Party has lost its moral compass.

Joseph H. Crowley, Cranston

Join the conversation

We want to hear from you. Your Turn commentaries should be no more than 600 words, including a short bio of the writer. Letters to the editor should be no more than 250 words; we prefer 150 or fewer.

For both: Include your full name, full address and phone number. Write the text in the body of an email, or copy it in; don't attach a file of any kind. Then send it to letters@providencejournal.com, our address for both letters and longer pieces.

Lawmakers must push climate bills

In his excellent article on the state's climate strategy ("RI pushes to meet Act on Climate regulations," News, Dec. 2), Alex Kuffner notes a three-year period of "relative stagnation" in the state's efforts to reduce harmful carbon emissions.

It's no coincidence that those three years correlate with the stagnation of meaningful climate action in the state legislature. Year after year, excellent climate bills are filed, and year after year they die silent deaths without a vote. It's time for the legislature to allow a vote on these proposals.

The impact of these bills would extend well beyond the environmental crisis. Many have the potential to decrease electric rates, reduce lung-related health problems and reduce air pollution that disproportionately affect low-income neighborhoods. Others will improve public transportation and raise money to address a variety of important state issues.

Please write your legislators and tell them that you want to see meaningful climate action this year.

Bill Iselle, Providence

Joy of the holidays

Over time, Christmas holiday celebrations have changed, as institutions do. The bright lights and outdoor lightings we see today were muted during World War II. Regulations called for black curtains on all windows and car headlights were painted half-moon black. Rules were enforced by air-raid wardens who patrolled the streets every night. Also, most products and services were rationed or restricted from public use.

After the war ended we celebrated with parades and family reunions, and Christmas began to take on a new meaning with lighting displays and the availability of once-rationed products, especially gasoline.

Since that time until the present we have much to be grateful for. Many homes are now fully decorated; seasonal performances, commercial window displays, parades and lighting of a municipal Christmas tree are just a few of the enjoyable scenes every year.

If you have the resources, remember those less fortunate and assist by whatever means possible.

Also remember those who are no longer in our lives, and try to attend a religious service to experience the real true meaning of the holiday.

Bob Sweeney, Warwick

Bridge failure ultimately fault of the state

This is for sure another "only in Rhode Island" moment.

The state is suing several bridge-inspection companies because they claim that the firms failed to adequately inspect, or report on defects, in the now defunct westbound Washington Bridge.

It was reported Dec. 9 ("Sued firms inspect bridges," News) that seven of those same companies are currently being paid millions by the state to (... wait for it) inspect bridges.

A comparable scenario: You hire a builder to build a house. The job is horrible, and it falls apart after a short time. You sue him to recoup the money you paid.

You have a second lot that you want to build on. You hire the same contractor you are suing. When that house falls apart, it is your fault for hiring a company that has demonstrated their inability to do the job properly!

So it follows that if (and when) any of the bridges currently being inspected fail, it is ultimately the fault of the state. Also, it is obvious that DOT Director Peter Alvitri Jr. does not belong in his highly paid position.

Rich Deblis, Riverside