

*O*n Principle

Thoughts on American Democracy



Hello. My name is Jane O’Keeffe. I am 46. I live in Adel, Oregon, which is southeastern Oregon. My husband and I live on a cattle ranch that has been a family ranch in his family for, um, four generations.

The economic opportunities in Lake County right now are pretty limited if you’re not interested in natural resources. And they’re limited for a lot of reasons, but one of them is most definitely transportation. Ah, the closest freeway is I-5 and you get on in Medford, darn close to 200 miles away. You live and die by the condition of the highways, and that’s something that you find the local leaders are always haranguing the legislators and the federal folks about. You hear people say, well we don’t want to become like Bend, or its kind of funny when somebody calls Klamath Falls rural, (laugh) that’s, that’s where we go to shop, when we need to, we need to get something that you can’t get in Lakeview. You know there’s always a, a tension between do we want some growth, or do we want to keep things the same, the same. You don’t want the town to lose its flavor, yet you want to be able to buy a pair of pants.

Lake County is 78% public lands. And so what, what happens on those public lands is very, very important to the people there. We graze our cattle on public lands, and we feel that we do an excellent job managing those lands and we follow the rules, yet there’s always a threat that grazing rights may be taken away. And it has more to do with a public perception than it does on generally what’s happening on the range. Its like ranchers at some point quit wearing a white hat to the public and started wearing a black hat, and I don’t know when that changed. I remember years ago when, for instance, the Imperial Hotel in Portland was almost a mecca for ranchers. You go in and there was a picture of the Pendleton Roundup Court and the Oregon Cattlemen’s

Association had their office right there in the hotel. And, if you were from eastern Oregon that's where you stayed when you came to Portland, and it was a, not a revered thing, but it was a respected thing.

I'd always been interested in county politics. To me it's the last level where you make the policy, you make the decision, and then you have to be right there and be accountable for it. You don't get to make the law and then go back to your real life and hope it all works out—you're right there. One of the things that I did when I was a county commissioner was work with a local group on forest management issues, and was able to bring a core group of members from the environmental community, the local timber industry, and the local town together. And, there's, there's amazing agreement, once, you know, once we got past the, "I'm, I'm a member of this group," or "I don't like you because you are a member of that group." At least on the local government level you may run partisan, but there's no partisan way to run the dump. And you just figure out how to do it in the best way that works for the most people. And it seems like when you get to the state level, then you, you have these other influences that start, you know, really dividing people.

Where we live and work off the land, we feel that we're kind of the playground for urban areas. I think that there is a huge generalization in rural areas about how urban people are. "They don't care about us, they don't understand us," and one of the things that I certainly like to keep in mind is if it weren't for urban people, nobody would buy the product I was selling. Urban is, America is as important to rural America as vice versa, I believe.

When my kids are out, especially like moving cattle on the highway or something, people love to stop and take pictures (laugh) and kind of act like you're in this, um, doing this amazing thing that, you know to them, it's just what you do. We would never come to Portland and take a picture of somebody stopping for coffee.

I would explain myself as somebody that's making a living off the land proudly. And feels like we are doing the right thing for the land, and that we're in it for the long haul. We, we have a ranch that our family started and we would like to keep it in our family. And, you know, we

have two sons, we hope they would be interested in maintaining that family tradition. And so therefore we try to make our decisions with the long term in mind, rather than tomorrow, or the next day.