

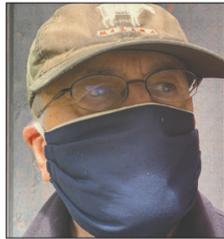
# Opinion

## NO BAD DAYS

### Watch yourself

Big Brother may or may not be watching you, but these days someone probably is.

In your home, your car or especially in public, you are only moments away from becoming a You Tube spectacle and a Facebook phenomenon if there is a cell phone within range.



Don Nelson

Is everybody recording everything? Perhaps not yet, but the only safe course is to assume so. The cell phone is today's ubiquitous instrument of record, easy to use and capable of globally distributing content within seconds. You have almost no control over how that happens, and a difficult path to recourse if you are misrepresented, embarrassed, libeled or just slimed for someone's amusement.

Much of what you can watch on the internet is innocuous or inane. But every day, it seems, some new conflict or problematic behavior has been observed, recorded, and vaulted to instantaneous social media infamy. Most vividly, the video of a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on the neck of George Floyd, who died in front of our eyes, sparked a nationwide eruption of outrage and demands for change that will not quickly or quietly subside.

Although the Floyd video is already historic in its impact, it's only one example of many confrontations initiated by white people against African Americans, or of police and demonstrators facing off, or of coronavirus hoaxers making fools of themselves in public, in front of a tiny but all-seeing lens.

These videos, usually amateurish and often of poor technical quality, are nevertheless news in its rawest, unfiltered form, documented as it happens.

Of course, video can be edited, altered and manipulated, so watcher beware. A million views can occur before someone discovers the deceptions, and by then it may be too late to catch up with the newly raging meme.

Just a few days ago, Fox News was caught doctoring a photo used to illustrate a story about Seattle's "Capital Hill Autonomous Zone." Fox was forced to air a correction and an apology, after the disinformation damage was done.

But most opportunistic videographers are not that sophisticated, and what you see is what they recorded. Which makes it difficult for those involved to deny that what we are watching is what actually happened. Those of us in the news business are just as fascinated as anyone else, while at the same time recognizing that videos typically offer no context, no continuity, no analysis and no follow-up. For good or ill, they stand on their own, open to tribalistic interpretation even if the evidence of what happened seems incontrovertible.

Laying low, staying quiet and not being a racist twit in public are good strategies, yet nobody is safe from their own past. We can no longer count on youthful indiscretions, moments of drunken idiocy or words spoken in jest staying forever buried. Things recorded years ago are surfacing to torpedo people's lives and careers. Accountability is retroactive.

If you ever said or did something you regret, there's always going to be a faint alarm bell going off in your head whenever you see someone eviscerated on the internet. Simply changing your mind (which we are all entitled to do) can come back to haunt you. Witness a several-years-old video now circulating of Trump lapdog Sen. Lindsay Graham lavishly praising Joe Biden.

This is what makes the pop-up video moment so damaging for people who clearly come across as a perpetrator: Once the clip airs, you have lost control of the narrative. It's not your story, and trying to reclaim it is almost impossible. You are behind a runaway train, panting to catch up with explanations, excuses, mitigating circumstances or, worse, denials and counterattacks. The viewing public generally acknowledges only one response as remotely acceptable: abject apology. Even that may not make a dent.

You can undo your standing among other human beings in one indecorous moment, because the intractable reality is that intent doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is perception — which is also entirely out of your control. To the extent that perception coincides precisely with reality, as in the case of George Floyd's death, it's not even up for discussion.

For years we've been telling high school and college students that one ill-conceived Facebook post can determine their life's outcome. As the kids know, grown-ups don't always take their own advice. Among the hundreds of columns and editorials I've written over the past 40 years, I'm sure there are things I would rewrite or reconsider. I'll take that over 40 seconds of everlasting degradation.

## Box 97: Letters to the editor

### No mistake

Dear Editor:

Commissioner Hover has forgotten that he was voted into office — he did not "sign up," as he stated in last week's article, "Outrage over DeTro's Facebook post Sparks recall movement." As commissioners, they have to be careful; "we signed up for this job — nobody put us here," he said. I imagine that the people who voted for Mr. Hover found the statement surprising as well.

Mr. Hover excused Mr. DeTro's actions as a "mistake." However, Mr. DeTro has a long history of posting racist and hateful content. It was not a mistake, it is a pattern, one that Mr. Hover has allowed to continue by not speaking up. By calling it a "mistake," Mr. Hover is not addressing the problem and is giving Mr. DeTro a pass.

I am glad that we have a sound candidate running against Mr. Hover this fall. Katie Haven offers practical leadership and a commitment to holding Mr. DeTro accountable for his racist commentary and ideology. Please join me and so many others in supporting her campaign.

Kelleigh McMillan  
Twisp

### Demand better

Dear Editor:

I know for many in eastern Washington, Seattle seems far away, their politics irrelevant. I grew up in eastern Oregon, and we certainly felt like that about Portland. The politics felt — and often were — so disconnected it felt like a different state. My dad moved to Walla Walla in 1994. I've lived in Washington full-time since 2007: Walla Walla, Seattle, now the Methow. That divide exists statewide.

It is a dangerous gap nationwide, that has existed for decades. Now is not the time to fall into it. As I write, Seattle is waking from a night of police brutality, to cap a week of brutality. I have friends who, protesting peacefully, were assaulted with gas and flash bangs for exercising their First Amendment rights. This after Mayor Durkan and Chief of Police Best suspended the use of tear gas. Never mind that gas is banned in warfare.

It's easy to think, here in rural Washington, that this doesn't affect us. That it's Seattle, and the bad behavior of their police holds no relevance here. It does. If police brutality goes unchecked; authoritarianism unchallenged; and leadership doesn't stop it, it's only so long before it spreads. Before governments nationwide think they can suppress peaceful protest, arresting, assaulting, and waging war against civilians who voice opinions they dislike.

Regardless of your stance on current protests, that should scare you. As a white man, I've had little reason for fear. I acknowledge that privilege. I don't want to fear the police, or view them as tools of oppression. I want police who protect; who I trust; who I can call for a welfare check on a mentally ill neighbor unconcerned they'll kill her; who won't pull guns on innocent men for using a golf club as a cane, or spend more resources fighting reform than fighting crime. I want this for everyone, regardless of race, background, mental health or immigration status. This isn't the Wild West of the 1800s. Let's act like it and demand better of our law enforcement.

Murray Sampson  
Winthrop

### Let's do better

Dear Editor:

Quite a wind has blown in from across our oceans and across our nation. The global pandemic, and the convulsions, reactions and reflections sparked by the agonizing, public death of George Floyd in Minneapolis have touched all of us in some way.

My concern is how we all respond to these events. Our thinking and behaviors can be shaped by long-standing, and perhaps unrecognized fears and biases, and the current flood of rumors and conspiracy theories that are dividing us as a nation. Or, our thinking and behaviors can be shaped and based upon some of our proven values, such as "love thy neighbor as thyself," and our common respect for the system of government outlined by our Constitution.

In order to beat this virus, that to date has killed over 112,000 of our fellow countrymen, we need to work together. And, we need to respect our diversity, and work together to deal with the root causes of the extreme disparities in our communities and society that lead to great comfort and privilege for some, and a lifetime of fear and struggle for others.

It does not help when heavily armed men come to town, to "protect business owners' property and our right to free speech." The net effect is to intimidate and divide us even further. My father, a combat grunt Marine who fought through the South Pacific and



By Len Baublitz

Korea, would have been disgusted at the sight. Finally, it does not help, be he the President of our United States, or a county commissioner, that their focus is not on the unity and efforts of our people to solve our common challenges, but on their efforts to sow fear and distrust. We all can do better, starting now!

Andy Jones  
Tonasket

### Stay vigilant

Dear Editor:

At the emergence and reality of the COVID-19 virus a couple months ago, I was confused at first about the meaning of wearing a mask. I viewed mask-wearers as being known virus carriers and I adamantly avoided them. Now, through education and paying attention to medical and scientific experts, I realize that wearing a mask is an indicator of a person's caring of others' safety in case they, the wearer, may be asymptomatic — the mask helps protect those around them in public situations. I now always wear a mask for needed trips to the grocery store, post office and hardware store. When I see others wearing masks I am smiling my appreciation behind my mask and thanking them for caring about me and others.

I understand the need for a gradual reopening of the economy but am very worried for the safety our valley as I observe the influx of visitors from other communities. I have seen a huge lack of social distancing and wearing of masks in public and instead have observed crowds of people milling around. I imagine at least some of these people also frequent the valley grocery stores, hardware stores and other businesses. I feel that our community has been doing a pretty good job of proactively taking care to make good decisions and I am dismayed to see a change as we begin to have visitors. I recently heard an out-of-towner remark that she felt "safe and sound" now that she was in our valley as opposed to being in Seattle. This can only be true if we maintain social distancing and responsibly wear masks. We have to keep up the good work!

Gov. Insee's recent requirement that all business owners and employees wear masks should help with everyone taking care but there are still businesses not complying. Valley businesses need to show responsibility for our community health and safety, not just being open for profit. I choose to frequent and support businesses where I feel safe. We are all in this together — everyone please do your part!

Kathy Williams  
Winthrop

### Memorial needed

Dear Editor:

I want to thank the people who organized a respectful and peaceful march in honor and memory of Black Lives on Friday (June 12). Carrying signs with the names of black people killed by the police was a powerful and stark reminder of what black citizens in this country fear every day, and of how hard it is for us white privileged folks to really understand that reality.

We need a memorial in Washington, D.C., like the Vietnam Memorial, that names those victims of the legacy of racism at the hands of police. I urge us all to write our Senators and Congresspeople to introduce legislation in Congress to create and fund a Black Lives Memorial. Perhaps that is already in the works. But join me in writing to see that it becomes a reality.

Kathleen Learned  
Twisp

### Conversations about race

Dear Editor:

As a white, privileged woman and the mother of a black child, I am a student of race relations, but not an authority. I will never truly know the black experience. Nor will 99% of the people in our community, even if you have a black friend, or worked with a person of color.

As such, it gives me hope for healing a deep cultural trauma when conversations around racial justice are seeping into our distant white community. While this valley doesn't harbor a substantial black history, race issues have been here since natives were

forcefully removed from their homes. And I've personally watched people of Hispanic descent treated as second-class citizens here.

The conversations I've witnessed around black lives are courageous, and clunky, and even cringeworthy at times. But having them is an important part of shedding light on shadows and creating a culture of equity. Thank you to those of you trying to learn more about racism by reading, or listening or watching some of the great media available on this topic. The following are a few ground rules I've learned from race forums that may support further conversations.

If a discussion around race doesn't involve some discomfort, it's missing something.

Be willing to respectfully listen, learn and share without shame.

You will not have all the information, nor will you identify all of the solutions.

The saying, "I don't see color" is a term of white privilege. It is a racial bypass and will not support collective healing.

The goal is not about who to blame, it is more about how to accept responsibility.

No one person represents, nor should be expected to speak for a race, or continent, sex or gender.

Finally, I probably wrote something wrong here, or assumed something I shouldn't, please forgive and share it with me.

Beth DiDomenico  
Winthrop

### More on accountability

Dear Editor:

Lynette Westendorf's letter, "Accountability needed," in the June 10 issue, is spot-on. DeTro's apology is no apology at all. It is a rambling statement of contempt. Commissioner Hover seems ho-hum about pushing for DeTro's removal, resignation or sanction, by trying to explain the process for removing a commissioner as being complicated and time consuming. Hover seems willing to let the DeTro matter slide by in hopes it will go away. Lynette is right. Andy Hover needs to held accountable.

Chuck Borg  
Wenatchee

### What de-funding means

Dear Editor:

When you hear de-fund the police what do you think of? That's the thing about #tags and slogans, thinking can be cut short. I imagine you think of an instant action that takes money from police departments leaving them gutted and then all hell breaks loose because who will protect us, right?

Regarding de-funding, let's reframe this as de-militarizing the police. The police culture in many places is one of being a warrior rather than a guardian. Police are expected to do things they are not trained to do because they are trained to be warriors not social workers, and mental health workers.

In de-funding the police we should look at the imbalance of police budgets to services, schools, housing, health care, mental health care, jobs and more. We need to look at the power of police unions to give impunity to abusive and murdering policemen, and the pressure they place upon mayors and city councils, getting them rehired when removed from the department. Making rules that keep hidden from the salary paying public, the police officers records of complaint and violence.

There are private companies training police and saying things like, if you're not ready to kill someone you're in the wrong job. Really? Police should be out there protecting and serving while constantly being ready to kill someone? This is a culture of violence against people not a culture of service and protection. Add to this unconscious and conscious bias and we are living the result.

Now why should we even care? This isn't happening here in the Methow. Right it's not, and we are citizens of this country the United States of America, to me that means we should care about what is happening in our country as a whole, as well as what is happening locally.

So I get it when folks say de-fund the police, they know culture is hard to change. Sometimes you just have to start over like they did in Camden, New Jersey, in 2013. Their redo worked. You can Google it.

Raven Odion  
Twisp

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Front page banner photo by Don Nelson

# Opinion

## NO BAD DAYS

### A little back story

What follows is an entirely imagined dispatch from a Washington, D.C., correspondent. Any resemblance to actual events is intentional.



Don Nelson

On a recent visit to Washington, D.C., I came across a little-publicized but, thanks to word of mouth, increasingly popular attraction not far from the Capitol building.

It's called the Senatorial Spinal Repository, where the unused backbones of Senate Republicans are collected and displayed. What began as a rather small exhibition has nearly outgrown its original space and may need to expand soon, a helpful tour guide explained.

"There's no shortage of Senate Republican spines for our little museum," the guide enthused. "They are available for the asking, and we've got some splendid specimens."

The repository is most proud of, and displays prominently, Sen. Mitch McConnell's vertebrae. "He gave it up years ago," the tour guide said, "setting a powerful example for other Senate Republicans. They're falling all over themselves to be part of this. Of course, without backbones, they fall down a lot anyway. It helps with the groveling, actually."

I asked if it wasn't a bit unseemly to put the desiccated spines of elected officials on display like ancient dinosaur bones.

"They're not using them and never intend to," the tour guide said. "We think it's instructive. Americans can learn something from what they see here."

But, I objected, I don't see 50 sets of bones—not all Republican senators have surrendered their spines, as the recent impeachment vote demonstrated. And there are Republicans all over the country who have taken stands that clearly indicate they have backbone.

"Terrible disappointment," the guide said. "Makes you wonder where their loyalty lies?"

America, maybe? The Constitution? Democracy? The rule of law? Morality, decency, honesty?

"You must be antifa," the guide sniffed. "You probably started the attack on the Capitol."

I ignored him and moved on. What about guts, I asked? Shouldn't the Senatorial guts be here too?

"We thought about that," the guide said. "But it's rather redundant, don't you think? Without spines, guts are useless. Besides, it would be really messy."

I noticed that the display case labeled "Mitt Romney" was empty. "He asked for it back for the impeachment vote," the guide said. "But it's provisional. We told him we could request that it be returned at any time, depending on events."

As the tour ended, I told the guide it was an impressive collection. "Yup," the guide said. "We'd get their hearts too, if they had any."

Then the guide glanced around with a conspiratorial look. "Here's a new branch of the museum that's growing like gangbusters," he confided as he steered me through an unmarked door. There, in an appropriately dim setting, were the brains of all the most-prominent Fox News commentators, including the entire Fox & Friends crew—floating in oversized fishbowl like they were part of a madman's laboratory. How is this possible? I asked.

The guide chuckled. "It wasn't that hard," he said. "It's evident to everyone in America that they weren't being utilized. Nobody watching Fox even noticed that the talking heads' brains were missing."

"They're all kind of small," I noted as I scanned the collection.

"We thought so too," the guide said. "But they're consistent with the brains of conservative radio talk show hosts, so we didn't see it as an anomaly."

I looked around for Sean Hannity's brain but couldn't find it.

The guide furrowed his brow. "We tried everything," he said. "X-rays. CAT scan. MRI. We just couldn't find anything you could identify even as a brain stem, just some little wrinkled thing about the size of a walnut. We figured if that was all he had, we should leave him with it."

Tucker Carlson?

"We didn't even ask," the guide said. "Have you heard him? There's nothing going on inside that skull. Amoebas have a more cogent thought process."

What about frequent Fox contributor Rudy Giuliani's brain? I inquired. The guide shuddered. "Nobody wants that thing in here," he said. "Not even the other Republicans."

Could the museum's curators envision an auxiliary exhibit for Democratic senators' spines? "We've definitely got our eye on a couple after they got all weak-kneed about insisting on testimony at the impeachment trial," the guide said. "Spinal degeneration can be bi-partisan, you know." Thinking back to the Vietnam War era, I couldn't disagree.

As for the future of the museum, post-Trump?

"The ex-president wants our collection as part of his library, because they gave up their spines for him," the guide harrumphed. "But that's not going to happen. These historic artifacts belong to the American people."

## Box 97: Letters to the editor

### There to help

Dear Editor:

While a number of charitable organizations deserve our support, Methow At Home is specifically directed toward helping the ill and elderly of the Methow Valley. The sincere concern of its staff and volunteers was recently displayed to me.

I am 82, immune compromised, and my request for a COVID shot through the Washington state JOB system (that's Jigsaw of Bureaucracy) had twice gone unanswered.

Upon learning of the Liberty Bell High School inoculations on Feb. 13 (the next day), I signed up by both email and phone message immediately. I received no response by early afternoon, so called Dierdre Cassidy at Methow At Home to ask if there was another contact possibility. Her response was to offer me her own confirmed appointment time if it turned out there were no vacancies left!

This is Methow At Home.

Art Zink  
Methow

### Republicans, tell the truth

Dear Editor:

I believe that unity begins with truth-telling. No matter what differences of opinion we may have, Republicans and Democrats alike, the truth is the truth. Kansas City fans acknowledge the truth that Tampa Bay won the Super Bowl. To our Republican representatives and senators as well as all Republican elected officials, tell your constituents the truth that Joe Biden won the election. That you would speak the truth is an essential step toward unifying our nation.

President Biden won 81,283,098 votes to Trump's 74,222,958 votes. Biden/Harris won by over 7 million popular votes. Biden/Harris won 306 electoral votes to 232 votes cast for Trump (the same count by which Trump beat Clinton in 2016—another significant truth in our country's political history).

President Biden and Vice President Harris were elected strictly in accordance with the Constitution. It is a truth. The majority of our country's secretaries of state are Republican, as are a majority of the state legislatures. Each one of these officials and legislatures recognized this truth in certifying their respective electoral votes whether for Trump or for Biden. Until all Republican leaders confirm this fundamental truth for their supporters, there will be no hope for unifying this country we love.

Frauke Rynd  
Twisp

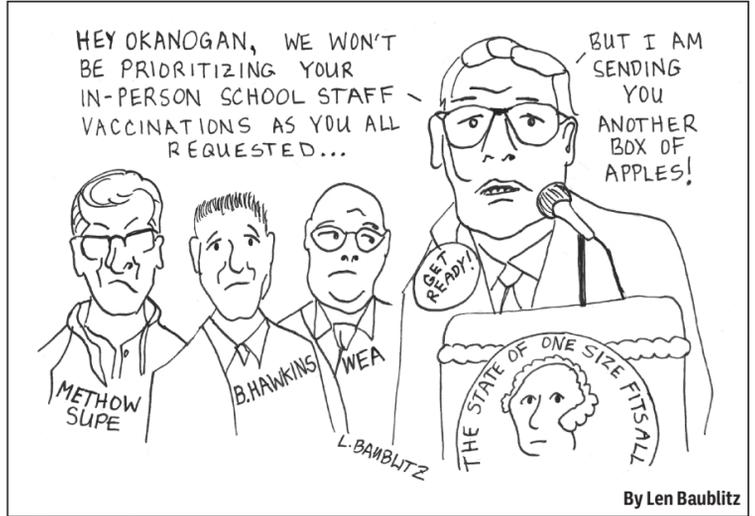
### Draw the line

Dear Editor:

What is a conservative? According to Webster's online dictionary, the first definition is: disposed to preserve existing conditions, institutions, etc. or to restore traditional ones, and to limit change.

There is nothing wrong with being a conservative. If you want to be one, be one. But I want to point out one thing.

The definition reads "preserving institutions." Do you think the mob who attacked the Congress on Jan. 6 was trying to preserve the institution



By Len Baublitz

of our Congress and Constitution? Our institution and tradition of voting and accepting the outcome, win or lose, with grace? I think not.

Do you think the elected officials who voted to acquit Donald Trump were trying to preserve the institution of government? Again, I think not. What they are trying to preserve is their political skin. They are gambling that Trump still has enough political clout to support them if they support him. (Apparently they haven't had their eyes open for the last four years to see that Trump eventually throws everyone under the bus, no matter how "loyal" people were to him. Think Mike Pence.) These politicians chose to not draw a line in the sand between conservatism and violent extremism.

It's past time for the Republican party to draw that line. It's time for them to return to their original roots of conservatism and to break away from extremism which is the polar opposite.

Our elected officials are only as bad as we let them be. If you're a Republican and you agree with this, please let your elected officials know you have drawn that line in the sand and if they want your vote again, you expect them to do likewise.

Patti Nordby  
Winthrop

### Kudos to Newhouse

Dear Editor:

I would like to commend Rep. Dan Newhouse for his vote to impeach now ex-President, Donald Trump. The last four years have been divisive, to say the least, and Mr. Trump repeatedly showed his willingness to do anything for his own gain, despite the effects on the country.

The Republican Party really needs to look deep inside. It is OK to be a conservative, but not OK to tear down democracy to further your cause. Mr. Trump incited an attempted overthrow of the government. History will bear this out. We need to face this, and all of his other betrayals. He lied from his first day in office. He cheated his taxes, his wives, his military service, his businesses, his government, his people. He is a bad person that needs to face consequences for his actions. It is unfortunate he wasn't convicted in the second impeachment.

Mr. Newhouse was correct. Those who did not vote to convict, including Mr. McConnell should be ashamed. C'mon, the Trump show was crazy. Let's get back to normal, please? We have work to do.

Thank you, Rep. Newhouse. I might even vote for you next time.

Ken Bevis  
Twisp

Patti Ahlfs  
Winthrop

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Front page banner photo by Ashley Lodato: at Sun Mountain

## Harts Pass



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By Erik Brooks

# Opinion

## NO BAD DAYS

### Many happy returns

Man, I have been going about this tax thing all wrong. Reading the extensive, compelling and revelatory coverage of President Trump's tax returns in the New York Times last weekend, I realized that I've been a real Pollyanna about paying the taxes I owe and trying to stay out of trouble with the IRS.



Don Nelson

Turns out one of Trump's key strategies is to *always* be in trouble with the IRS. He's dragged out a potentially devastating audit for a decade, and as long as it's pending, he's not on the hook for a substantial and possibly ruinous repayment. I don't think the IRS would give most of us 10 minutes

to settle a dispute over a refund. We don't owe enough money to make trouble.

Trump's tax bill was reported as \$750 the year he ran for president, and \$750 his first year in office. One imagines the president looking under White House couch cushions for enough loose change to keep the feds at bay. For 10 of the previous 15 years, his tax bill was zero. He paid more taxes overseas, in places where he has wrangled business deals.

The New York Times' coverage laid bare a lot of Trump's business and tax machinations that, while not necessarily illegal, belie the image he has projected for decades: that of an enormously successful business titan.

Much of the outrage has been about how little he paid in taxes. For me (longtime business reporter and editor), the fascination is how much his business ventures lost.

Trump is all about losing money. Lots of money. Being a world-class loser (one of his favorite slurs) has sustained him like a billionaire superstar instead of the pauper he may well be. Losing is how Trump stays afloat, plunging into one huge, speculative, doomed deal after another. But The Stable Genius has racked up failure after grandiose failure despite his snake oil salesmanship.

How does he do it? When you start with some money (his father's, inherited and according to some accounts finagled away from the rest of the family), and can convince others to lend you even more money, you can afford to lose a lot. You just have to be really brazen about it. Trump has relentlessly failed his way to the top. There's probably a business adage in there somewhere.

As the New York Times story put it, he "racks up extensive losses that he aggressively employs to evade taxes." Trump writes off everything, large and small. He supports his extravagant lifestyle by claiming most business expenses as deductible.

"And he has previously bragged that his ability to get by without paying taxes 'makes me smart,' as he said in 2016," the Times story notes. "But the returns, by his own account, undercut his claims of financial acumen, showing that he is simply pouring more money into many businesses than he is taking out."

It's a perversely appealing strategy, but I just don't see how that would work for me. As I sometimes lamely joke to friends, the Methow Valley News is not a nonprofit—at least, not on purpose.

Trump once was quoted as saying something to effect that if you owe a bank \$1 million, you're in trouble—but if you a bank \$1 billion, they're in trouble. Especially if the debtor is The Donald himself, who notoriously stiffly pretty much everyone he owes money. He owes so much to lenders (\$421 million, by the Times account) that his hollow empire could crumple like a wet paper cup if they press him for repayment. The massive indebtedness, and likely obedience, to those lenders has led some people to speculate whether the people Trump owes money to are really running the country.

On a smaller scale, there's the \$70,000 a year deduction for hair styling while he starred in "The Apprentice." That's not going to work for me either. I can't remember the last time I saw \$70,000 in a year, and my hair has retreated so dramatically that even Trump's hair sculptor could not whip it into something frothy.

Trump mostly sails along on bluster and bluff. I'm not sure whether that says more about Trump or our tax code, which the president has made work to his advantage—even as he demonstrates a spectacular lack of business acumen.

"Ultimately, Mr. Trump has been more successful playing a business mogul than being one in real life," the Times concludes." That being the case, you have to give Trump credit for fully exploiting the role of a lifetime while casting us minor characters as suckers.

*EXERCISE YOUR FREEDOM. Letters must be fewer than 350 words and may be edited for libel, grammar and taste.*

Send to: Methow Valley News, P.O. Box 97, Twisp, WA 98856, fax to (509) 997-3277, email editor@methowvalleynews.com or drop by 502 S. Glover St., Twisp

## Methow Valley News

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## Box 97: Letters to the editor

### Finding your sunlight

Dear Editor:

Strange times are upon us like uncharted land, raw and natural. Like wandering out into the mountains on paths that are non-existent, seeing a corner ahead and not knowing what lies around the bend. No footprints to follow, only game tracks that switch back and forth in untraceable patterns, giving us subtle clues on somewhere we may be going. Much like the times that are upon us this year. There are no answers to be had on what our future will look like, not just with the pandemic but with politics, environment, economics, wildlife, access to justice, education, global health, humans rights, and so much more. Only whispers are hinting us to how our lives are changing. Some for the good and some for the bad. The universe is throwing us curveballs and we, as humanity, must adapt.

Peace must be found. I am confident we all can find this sense of peacefulness in different ways. It may be for a minute or may be for a lifetime. Even if the dark somber grey cloud lingers over our heads, we need to find the sun's rays of light and hope. We all need to take a moment to breathe in ... breathe ... slow our pace, wane our minds and find what truly lights up our lives and makes us internally smile. Take one moment and think ... who, what or where could you put yourself to release stress, anxiety, worry or tension? It does not have to be grandiose just a minuscule thing. Then go and do it.

Mine is simply Mazama, where you can hear the river flow unbothered around the rocks, the Ponderosa pines swishing willingly in the wind and the tall sunburnt grass swaying without tension in the cascade breeze.

Go find your ray sunlight, help the world relieve tension. We all will benefit.

Caryn Darmer  
Mazama

### Re-elect Branch

Dear Editor:

In the upcoming local elections, let's not risk losing Chris Branch as county commissioner for District 1. Having taken notes at commissioners' meetings since 2014, I can confirm the complexity of a commissioner's job. It includes: land use; economic planning; writing and repealing laws; coordinating over 20 departments governing such activities as public works, the court system, emergency management; responsibility for an approximately \$70 million budget—and more.



By Len Baublitz

Once a heavy duty mechanic and logger, Branch later became a planner by profession and education, working for 27 years with towns and cities in Okanogan County in community development. His past affiliations have been as president of Community Action Council and the Economic Development Board. At the multi-county level, he serves Washington State Association of Counties on its board and legislative steering committee, focusing on health care, the elderly and work force development.

Branch's extensive experience with the diverse land and people of our large county, together with four years of learning the intricacies of this job, makes him a leader we can trust during challenging times ahead. Be aware that his challenger for the office does not have close to this type of experience or perspective.

In addition, Branch identified the failings of the county's microphone and PA system as citizen complaints mounted. After County Watch note taker Katie Haven (now a candidate for commissioner in District 2) introduced YouTube videos into county proceedings and identified resources for the county to do their own, Branch convinced the commission to invest. This big step in open government allows the public to view meetings at any time and reduces staff workload.

Branch owes allegiance to no political party, only the United States and Washington State Constitutions and the commissioners' oath of office. He clarified this publicly on June 1 during an open commissioners' meeting that followed a distressing Facebook post by Commissioner Jim DeTro. Taking leadership by opening a productive discussion among commissioners, he addressed each commissioner's responsibility to represent all the people of Okanogan County rather than solely a personal perspective or that of a political party.

Vote experience and integrity. Vote Branch.  
Isabelle Spohn  
Twisp

### We need water plans

Dear Editor:

This summer I have heard about more and more people in the valley whose wells have run dry. My 87-year-old neighbor is among them. See also My Turn—Know your Methow Water rights (Sept. 23) for more examples. At the same time, new houses are being built at a fierce pace. Many established contractors are backed up for a year or more with new house orders.

Many of the new houses are going up on existing lots. But at the same time, the county is allowing new subdivisions dependent on a limited supply of water designated for single houses, with only token regard to state laws and regulations prohibiting this.

The county still doesn't have any real plan in place to deal with the water shortage we already have and which is likely to worsen in the future. When it does, will we tear down the new houses that should never have been built because there was no legal source of water? Of course not. But those owners may have to find other sources than their illegal wells.

I have looked at the positions taken by Katie Haven (a rancher herself) and Andy Hover. Katie lists planning for future water needs as her number one issue. This is crucial to the future of all of us. Andy features support from the Farm Bureau as his top attribute on his Facebook page. Ironic, since any farmers with interruptible junior water rights have been cut off in most recent years. Andy's lack of good planning will only make it worse.

If you are concerned with the future of the valley and think we need real planning for water needs, increasing fire risks, and other important issues, vote for Katie.

Randy Brook  
Twisp

## HELLO?

### Baked

We have passed the point of no return in altering the climate, achieving an unprecedented milestone in human history on Earth.

We've succeeded—as long predicted—in sending enough greenhouse emissions aloft that ever more-extreme wildfires, floods, hurricanes, droughts and rising seas are “now irretrievably baked in,” a group of climate scientists told the New York Times in what has to be the most underplayed news story in millennia.

The scientists acknowledged defeat. “Decades of growing crisis are already locked into the global ecosystem and cannot be reversed,” they confirmed. What we're seeing today by way of bad weather behavior will at least double in intensity over time, they warned. “Gone is the climate of yesteryear, and there's no going back”—even if serious efforts to curb fossil fuels began tomorrow, they added.

Yet this isn't “game over,” they cautioned. We still can decide how much hotter, and disheveled, a planet we wish to inhabit. The focus, though, will no longer be on preventing climate change but on slowing its pace.

In a summer that saw Seattle among West Coast cities with the world's worst air pollution from forest fires; the highest temperature ever recorded on Earth—130 degrees Fahrenheit in Death Valley, California; massive Antarctic ice shelves teetering dangerously on their moorings, and a record 32,727 fire-fighting personnel battling U.S. blazes—the scientists offered hints for coping.

For example: Don't think of California's 2020 August as the hottest in this century. “Think of it as one of the coolest months of August in the next century.”

### The economic impact

There was other landmark climate news this month.

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) isn't the first place we usually look for news we can use. However, the CFTC just concluded the first in-depth government study ever undertaken to ascertain the effect of climate change on Wall Street and our economy.

“A world wracked by frequent and devastating shocks from climate change cannot sustain the fundamental conditions supporting our financial system,” the commission starkly concluded. Duh.

The commission's tardy effort comes 37 years after scientists first informed Congress that climate change was well under way and 170 years after researchers first grasped that greenhouse gases trap heat on Earth.

Even if you only eat, not raise or sell food; own a house or mortgage, pay insurance premiums, borrow money, receive a pension, live off a retirement fund or invest in the stock

market, the CFTC's warning should ring alarm bells. The astounding costs of the unruly weather we have brought upon ourselves cannot be sustained by our financial system.

Our president calls climate change a “hoax.” He's eviscerated some 100 environmental regulations, including those that curb greenhouse gas emissions. He wants to free us from the nettlesome demands of the Paris Agreement, which wanly strives to save us from catastrophe even at this manifestly late hour.

Yet it was a Republican-dominated CFTC that warned of the dire impacts on the nation's financial system of this supposed “hoax.” The Climate Change Denier-in-Chief appointed all five members of this commission, including two Democrats. All five unanimously approved the report.

It was written with input from analysts from investment firms such as Morgan Stanley, oil companies such as BPO and Conoco Phillips, the behemoth agricultural trader Cargill and representatives from environmental groups and the academe.

The financial losses caused by climate change will hit various regions and different markets at varying times, the report says. Home insurers may withdraw from California and elsewhere in the wake of wildfires, and home values may plummet along coastlines and in floodplains. Banks in the Midwest may limit farm loans due to extended droughts that reduce crop yields. And so on.



Solveig Torvik

### Assessing risk

“Climate change is one of the top three risks to our fund,” says Divya Mankikar, an author of the report and investment manager for the two-million member California Public Employees Retirement System, the country's biggest public pension fund.

Yet the Trump administration's Labor Department has proposed a rule that forbids retirement investment managers such as Mankikar from considering environmental consequences when giving investment advice to clients.

“If there's any class of investors that should be thinking about the long run, its retirement funds and pension funds,” says report author Nathaniel Keohane, an economist with the Environmental Defense Fund.

Home prices already are falling and mortgage defaults rising in regions decimated by wildfires and floods, the report states.

“If in your town, your house is devalued, that makes it harder for your local government to raise money,” noted report author Jesse Keenan, a professor of real estate at Tulane University. Repeated, this scenario can lead to a contagion of instability across financial markets, he added.

The financial system breaks down when risks remain invisible and thus are not accurately reflected in stock prices, as happened in the 2008 financial crash triggered by overvalued mortgage-backed securities, analysts warn. Today companies face climate change liabilities that aren't disclosed to their investors.

Unhelpfully, the U.S. Geological Survey recently put limits on scientific investigations that might reveal impacts of climate change beyond 2040.

Meanwhile the European banking system is preparing to tackle climate change with such tools as climate change stress tests on banks. European Central Bank president Christine Lagarde says she's aware this is unprecedented. “I'm also aware of the danger of doing nothing.”

As, at last, is the Commodity Futures Trading Commission. So now what, people? Hello?

Solveig Torvik first reported on climate change 40 years ago. She lives near Winthrop.