

Opinion

NO BAD DAYS

Leading the news

If you've been around here for a while — and I consider my nearly-10-years-in-the-valley “a while” — you know that the local news goes in cycles. Look back through the bound volumes of the Methow Valley News and you'll see that valley institutions, organizations and personalities take their turns in the spotlight, then retreat into the background as other issues arise.



Don Nelson

It could be the Town of Winthrop, the Methow Valley School District, county government, state and federal agencies, or Okanogan County Fire District 6: At some point, their actions generate more coverage and headlines because of the topics they are dealing with.

Lately, it seems to be the Town of Twisp that's getting more attention. That's not surprising. The town has been dealing with some pressing issues of intense public interest.

Let's start with the town-owned Wagner Memorial Pool. There are few valley-wide attractions that are as popular and widely valued by people who live here. The pool needs to be replaced, and the town currently doesn't have the resources to do that. Local nonprofit Friends of the Pool is spearheading plans to replace the pool, and to find ways to pay for it. The town's involvement has been to keep the pool operating on a year-to-year basis, but that may change once the clatter dies down around the new civic building and regional emergency communications center.

That much-needed facility is finally breaking ground after nearly a decade of planning, public process and financing challenges. Last week, we posted some video footage and photographs of the old Town Hall being mercifully demolished on our Facebook site. That generated some contentious comments and a mish-mash of emotions.

If you've paid any attention to this space, you know that I dislike the online commenting feature for a variety of reasons — mostly, I think it's destructive rather than constructive, and a waste of everyone's time. I've never allowed it on our website, and newspapers across the country have dropped the commenting option because it's typically a racist, misogynistic, homophobic, conspiracy theory cesspool of rage and ignorance. So, do you have an idea how I really feel about it?

That said, we allow but monitor commenting on our Facebook page, where the comments seem to be generally less toxic, vicious and deliberately misleading than in other arenas. But not always.

Despite the temptation, there is nothing more pointless than getting into an argument with someone in the comments thread. Many of the commenters cannot be reasoned with or swayed by things like, let's say, truth and rationality.

Yet, because I can, let me say a few things about the civic building comment stream.

The old Town Hall was not a treasured historic site but rather a crumbling wreck that had been dangerous and barely functional for years. If you were watching, you had to notice that it didn't take much to knock it down. So, get over your misplaced nostalgia for a dilapidated building that desperately needed replacing. And, the new building is being financed almost entirely with state capital budget funds — not local property taxes.

There was also some suggestion that “real” Twisp residents do not approve of the new building, as opposed to the newer interlopers from the west side who, as one person put it, want to turn Twisp into Bellevue.

Puh-leeze. No one who has cruised both Bellevue and Twisp would ever confuse them. What's more, the “real people” of Twisp, whoever they are, voted 70% in support of the mayor and incumbent town council members in the last municipal election. Hardly an angry uprising.

And now, bathrooms.

Really long story, very short: the town needs to provide public restrooms and has few options. The Town Council recently decided to re-open public access to the restrooms in The Merc Playhouse building. That's when a simmering dispute boiled over in public.

Full disclosure: I've acted in and directed productions at The Merc and am a member of the Programming Committee that recommends plays to the board of directors. I also have covered the Twisp Town Council for several years. For a small-town publisher/editor, that's not an uncommon mix of connections.

When I wrote about the council's decision to re-open the Merc bathrooms, as a reporter it was incumbent on me to ask the Merc people what they thought about that. They were not happy, and said so.

There are no “bad guys” here. Honorable, responsible, likeable people who ordinarily get along well are currently sideways with each other on a tough issue with no easy solution. I think they'll work it out, but expect more headlines while that happens. Then it will be someone else's turn.

Box 97: Letters to the editor

Stronger together

Dear Editor:

As we reach this milestone in the pandemic, I would like to thank my fellow Methow Valley Long Term Recovery Board Members and the incredible community partners who have joined us for regular coordination over the past 15 months as we've sought to bring strength, creativity and resilience to our community in the face of COVID-19 through a myriad of new programs, partnerships and collaborative actions.

Their tireless participation has been made possible by “can do” organizations including Room One, The Cove, TwispWorks, Carlton Complex Assistance Network, Aero Methow Rescue Service, Methow Housing Trust, Methow Valley School District, Little Star Montessori School, Winthrop and Twisp chambers of commerce, MethowReady, Okanogan County Electrical Cooperative, Okanogan County Long Term Recovery and the Methow Conservancy. Thank you to each and every donor and volunteer of these organizations, and to the teachers, public safety officials and other front-line workers who have served our community so bravely. You know who you are.

Sincere thanks is also due to our trio of committed mayors from Winthrop, Twisp and Pateros, the Governor's Office, the offices of Sen. Hawkins, Rep. Steele and Rep. Goehner, who personally joined dozens of our coordination calls. A nod as well to Sen. Murray's Spokane office for their assistance navigating it all. We are grateful for the leadership and access you all provide us.

Each challenging event in our valley highlights the work we have yet to do, but I am proud of the ways this community has come together to support one another and fill gaps with meaningful solutions and collaborations since COVID came into our lives. Onward to a stronger and more resilient Methow through working together!

Jason Paulsen, Chair
Methow Valley Long Term Recovery

Time for change

Dear Editor:

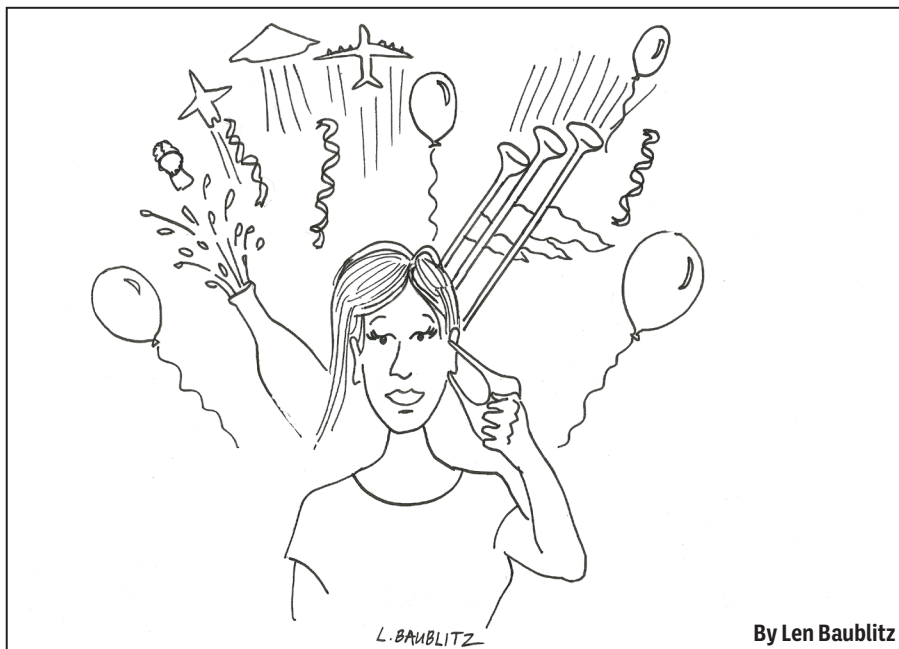
Homestream Park in Winthrop and the Methow Valley Interpretive Center have done beautiful work over the years to educate us newcomers and make sincere efforts to honor the ancestral occupants of this beautiful place. They have worked with sensitivity and integrity toward reconciliation with the descendants of those ancestors for the acts of displacement and genocide committed by our government and military during the 1800s. For the native inhabitants of the Methow Valley, life as they knew it changed dramatically long before the mid-1800s, but as we know, many were still here in 1849. All of this has been well documented by local authors, native and non-native, and it is part of the history of the Methow Valley.

Because of the positive, healing and thoughtful efforts made by so many in recent years, and through the lens of all that has led our country to 2021, I was stunned and disappointed to see a Native American “chief” portrayed by a white man in Winthrop's recent '49er Days event. I don't for a moment think that any unkindness or disrespect was intended by this, but oh my goodness, in 2021 we must strive to do better than this.

I am sensitive to the amount of effort it takes to put on this event, especially in the time of COVID, and hope that the organizers were well pleased by the results. My sincere hope is that before '49er Days 2022, effort be made to extend the authenticity of much of the event to more of it. Surviving members of the Methow Band have routinely and generously shared so much of their culture with us. Organizers from the interpretive center and Homestream also have wisdom to share. The time for use of native imagery or names in sport mascots is over, and the time for white men dressed up as Indians must be also.

We are better than this.

Betsy Cushman
Winthrop



L. BAUBLITZ

By Len Baublitz

Endangered children

Dear Editor:

It just takes seconds for a child to be put in danger by a stranger. Do the mayor and Town Council of Twisp want to be responsible for the unthinkable to occur to our most vulnerable and cherished ones in our community?

I read with dismay the situation about the public restrooms at The Merc in the Methow Valley News. The digging in from the city and insistence that the restrooms be open again; the blind eye to the past history of cleaning and maintenance where they failed on their commitments to our community and The Merc; the audacity of not owning up to their responsibility of the citizens of our valley to protect our children. Our Town Council and mayor are absolutely not focused on the health and welfare of our citizens and are not serving the public interest of the Methow Valley community by refusing to use another solution. That solution is simple: Put out porta-potties for visitors to Twisp and maintenance two times a week, Friday morning and Monday morning, for the 12 weeks of summer season.

The cost of this is nominal compared to the welfare of our communities' children using The Merc Theater for summer camps, that could put them in danger, and at minimum cause the camp staff to have to supervise all trips to the restrooms with an adult to keep our kids safe from the “unthinkable” happening.

It's appalling that the mayor and Town Council care so little about our own resident community that they would put our children at risk. I urge all of us to reach out and write to the mayor and Town Council about this issue. They are absolutely not owning up to the past situation, and not serving the public with their choice in this matter. It's atrocious behavior on their part.

Laura Chedalawada
Winthrop

Thanks to school district

Dear Editor:

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the Methow Valley School District (MVSD) for the extraordinary planning, flexibility, communication and patience demonstrated by its leadership, staff and volunteers throughout this pandemic. Our kids have been extremely fortunate to have an in-person hybrid program offered all year, excellent after school camps and Wednesday outdoor school, a safe and healthy environment, rigorous COVID protocols and now opportunities for vaccination. To quote Ralph Waldo Emerson in part, “. . . to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition. . . - this is to have succeeded.” MVSD, you are a success on all counts and there can never be enough thanks.

Heidi Appel
Twisp

An epic event

Dear Editor:

This Memorial Day will be the 20th anniversary of an amazing event in the North Cascades: Two men kayaked over Cedar Creek Falls!

The hike to the falls at that time of year was a long-standing tradition for me, my wife, and her sister. When we reached the falls, there were two kayakers at the lookout point. Were the two young men hovering there about to kayak down Cedar Creek? No, they said, they were going over the falls themselves.

We watched as they scouted the drop from the top of the falls. They talked, they swung their arms in imaginary strokes as if they

were going over. Then they began.

One of them, Tao Berman (age 22), had spent some of his growing-up years in north central Washington. His father, Birch Berman, operated Backcountry Burro Records in Winthrop. Tao already held the world record for extreme waterfall kayaking — a 98-footer in Canada. Cedar Creek Falls was just another day at the office, according to one of their camera people.

We watched spellbound as Tao moved out into the current and smoothly over the 40-foot first falls. The landing there is tight, with dangerous rocks and logs to avoid. It was over in a second with a beautiful landing.

Then he set up for the 55-foot second falls. It was supposedly the easier one because of a much bigger landing area. Tao hit the water very hard. For 30 seconds he did not appear to surface. The camera operator thought Tao had been pinned underwater and drowned.

Then Tao emerged from behind the waterfall. His water entry was so hard that it had snapped his paddle. He had surfaced behind the waterfall. With a broken paddle, he had trouble paddling out. He was unhurt.

We left them at the falls. At their car, we left a note of thanks for the great show, and three Cinnamon Twisps we had purchased that morning at the bakery.

Tao Berman went on to set records surf kayaking waves almost as big as upper Cedar Falls.
Randy Brook
Twisp

Not feeling the empathy

Dear Editor:

We appreciate your attempt to cover the story of the opening of the public restrooms in Twisp in a balanced way. From comments, it is not clear that most readers read to the end of your article. The Merc board members would like to set the record straight. The town has been an irresponsible partner in this contractual relationship and is opening the restrooms after a superficial clean-up, without consulting The Merc. Safety and sanitation standards in the restrooms (town's responsibility!) have been ignored for years, despite The Merc's frequent communications about cleaning and safety monitoring. Before 2018, numerous urgent requests, including 911 calls, were made to the town regarding drug and lewd behavior in the restrooms while children were in The Merc's facility. In 2018, The Merc and the Town of Twisp agreed to close the restrooms to the public because of these concerns.

The parties also agreed that they should find a way to turn the restrooms over to The Merc. Lawyers from both the town and The Merc began discussing a possible solution. Inexplicably, as these talks are still ongoing, the town has backed away from its former position, placed unreasonable roadblocks in the way of an agreement and is now opening the restrooms without communicating with The Merc at all. Based on past history, we have no reason to believe that anything regarding the town's responsibility or accountability will change in the future. We, as board members of a small, art nonprofit, are becoming increasingly apprehensive about our legal and financial liability implications, not to mention the safety of our staff, actors and patrons.

This all makes us wonder if the town really values a vibrant community theater in the heart of a future “art center?” The town motto may be “Be Empathetic to Everyone,” but those of us associated with The Merc are not feeling like that “empathy” extends to us.

The Merc Board of Directors
Twisp

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502 S. Glover Street • P.O. Box 97, Twisp, WA 98856
(509) 997-7011 • FAX (509) 997-3277

editor@methowvalleynews.com • www.methowvalleynews.com

Don Nelson, PUBLISHER/EDITOR

Natalie Johnson, MANAGING EDITOR

Marcy Stamper, REPORTER

Rick Lewis, SPORTS

Ryan Edwards, DESIGN

Sheila Ward, SALES ASSOCIATE

Tera Evans, OFFICE MANAGER

Paige Wolfe, DISTRIBUTION

CONTRIBUTORS:

Joanna Bastian Erik Brooks

Shelley Smith Jones Len Baublitz

Ashley Lodato Rosalie Hutson

Sarah Schrock Solveig Torvik

Ann McCreary Dave Ward

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Harts Pass



By Erik Brooks

Candidates complete filing for local positions

BY DON NELSON

Candidate filings produced a mixed bag for local positions that are up for election this year.

Filing closed Friday (May 21). Most incumbents will seek re-election, but a few will not. Most candidates face no opposition.

Okanogan County Prosecuting Attorney Melanie Bailey, who was appointed to the position earlier this year after the resignation of Arian Noma, must run for the office to fill out the remaining year in the term. She filed for re-election, and will not be challenged on the ballot.

Okanogan County Fire District No. 6 Commissioner Les

Stokes did not file for re-election. Miles Milliken of Twisp was the only candidate to file for the opening. Longtime Methow Valley School District Board member Gary Marchbank will seek re-election, and will be challenged by Michelle Randolph of Mazama.

None of the three incumbents who are seeking re-election to the Winthrop Town Council will be opposed. In Twisp, Town Council incumbent Hannah Cordes did not file for re-election. Katrina Auburn will be unopposed on the ballot. Town Council incumbent Aaron Studen will seek re-election, and will be challenged by Dara Perez.

All the offices are nonpartisan except for County Pros-

ecutor. Bailey is a Republican. Nonpartisan offices for which more than two candidates filed will appear on the Aug. 3 Primary Election ballot. All partisan Offices will appear on the Primary Election Ballot.

Filings roundup:

Twisp

- Town Council Position No. 1, 4 years. Incumbent Hannah Cordes did not file for re-election. Katrina Auburn was the only candidate to file for the position.

- Town Council Position No. 2, 4 years. Incumbent Aaron Studen filed for re-election. He will be opposed by Dara Perez, who also filed for the position.

Winthrop

- Town Council Position No. 1, 4 years. Incumbent Kirsten Vanderhalf filed for re-election.
- Town Council Position No. 2, 4 years. Incumbent Joseph O'Driscoll filed for re-election.
- Mayor, 4 years. Incumbent Sally Ranzau filed for re-election.

Methow Valley School District

- Director, District 2, 4 years. Incumbent Dana Stromberger filed for re-election.
- Director, District 4 at large, 4 years. Incumbent Gary L. Marchbank filed for re-election. He will be opposed by Michelle Randolph of Mazama, who also filed for the position.

Okanogan County Fire District 6

- Commissioner, Position 1, 6 years. Incumbent Les V. Stokes did not file for re-election. Miles Milliken of Twisp was the only candidate to file for the position.

Okanogan-Douglas Hospital District 1 (Three Rivers Hospital)

- Commissioner Position No. 1 at large, 2 years. Incumbent David Garcia filed for re-election.
- Commissioner Position No. 2 at large, 6 years. Incumbent Leslie McNamara filed for re-election.

Cemetery District 1

- Commissioner, Position 2,

4 years. Incumbent Jennifer Northcott did not file for re-election. Timothy Anderson of Winthrop was the only candidate to file for the position.

- Commissioner, Position, 6 years. Incumbent Teresa Mathis filed for re-election.

Cemetery District 2

- Commissioner, Position 1, 6 years. Incumbent Carol J. Gaston filed for re-election. She will be challenged by Larry D. Smith of Twisp.

Okanogan County

- Prosecuting Attorney, 1 year (unexpired term). Incumbent Melanie Bailey filed for election to the office. No other candidates filed for the position.

WRITERS ON THE RANGE

Wildlife-killing contests only produce losers

BY TED WILLIAMS

Would you like to earn money and prizes by killing coyotes, foxes, cougars, bobcats, wolves, raccoons, squirrels, crows, rattlesnakes, rabbits, prairie dogs, woodchucks or skunks?

If so, you can enter any of the thousands of wildlife-killing contests permitted and sometimes promoted by 44 state game and fish agencies. Such contests are legal in all Western states save California, Washington, Arizona and Colorado.

These events have names like "Song Dog Smackdown," "Good Ol' Boy's Fall Predator Tournament" and "Predator Palooza."

Names of competing teams are no less evocative. Placing high in a Lone Star Predator Calling Classic were "Beer Belly Varmint Hunters" and "Team Anthrax."

Standard equipment includes reclining chairs, electronic predator calls, tripods and other gun rests, spotting scopes, spotlights, night-vision goggles, other thermal-imaging equipment and high-capacity assault rifles equipped with telescopic sights. Prizes include cash — \$50,000 if you win the West Texas Big Bobcat

Contest — and such paraphernalia as camo clothing and AK-47s.

Many contests have children's divisions. Sponsors include gun companies, sporting-goods stores, fire departments, 4-H clubs and chambers of commerce.

Body counts are impressive. One of the 717 teams in last year's Big Bobcat Contest turned in 94 foxes. Carcasses are piled, photographed and invariably discarded.

"Event coordinators are being hassled," lament directors of a killing-contest support group called Coyote Contest. "Help us promote those who still understand and value the services that predator hunters provide!" Commentators on the group's website explain these "services:" "Save a fawn; kill a coyote," "Wanted dead or alive for the crimes of stealing fawns, turkeys, & livestock," "Saving livestock one bullet at a time!"

Not how it works

It doesn't work this way. Predators do kill game and livestock, but no game spe-

cies in the United States is suppressed by predation, and overpopulated species like elk and deer lack the predators needed to maintain their health and that of native ecosystems.

Robert Crabtree, who did the seminal work on coyotes in central Washington and Yellowstone National Park, reports that to

reduce a coyote population, at least 70% of the animals need to be eliminated — something he says "rarely, if ever, happens."

He found that where coyotes aren't persecuted, average litter size at birth is five or six, but because of competition for prey an average of one to two pups survive their first year. When coyotes are shot, trapped or poisoned, pup survival increases because competition is reduced.

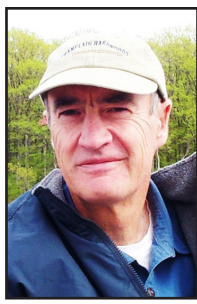
So coyote "control" results

in more, not fewer, coyotes.

What's more, Crabtree has found that indiscriminate killing of predators increases livestock loss. Because coyote "control" (which, again, doesn't approach 70%) reduces the number of adults able to feed young, packs tend to abandon their normal small-mammal diet mammal diet and turn instead to larger prey, like livestock.

Carter Niemeyer, a retired predator-control agent, tells the story of the rancher who phoned him after one aerial operation. "Carter," declared the rancher, "do coyotes revenge kill? We haven't had trouble with coyotes all winter. We saw your helicopter the other morning and heard lots of shooting. Now we've got coyotes killing sheep. What the hell's going on?"

Here's the explanation: Random shooting of predators creates chaos by removing "desirables." Other predators fill the void including "undesirables" that do kill livestock.



Ted Williams

HELLO?

Canceling Liz Cheney

U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney is living proof that even stopped clocks are right twice a day.

Though she's in error about many things, about Donald Trump's danger to democracy Cheney actually is correct 24 hours a day. Give her the thanks she deserves.

Cheney's the only Republican leader — now fired — in Congress with the testicular fortitude to publicly insist that Republicans stop endorsing Trump's blatant falsehood that he won the election. She also wants a public accounting of who did what on Jan. 6.

Republicans don't come much more dedicated to conservatism than this hardened 54-year-old woman from Wyoming. Nor do apples fall much closer to the tree.

She's the daughter of Dick Cheney, who once occupied her seat in the House of Representatives and, like Liz, was chair of the House Republican Conference. Her father was secretary of defense for Bush I. As vice-president carrying the national security portfolio for Bush II, he made regrettable news of his own by missing warnings of the 9/11 attack, championing torture and accidentally shooting a hunting companion.

His daughter shares her father's enthusiasm for waterboarding and the Republican trifecta: low taxes on the rich, weak government and a strong military. She dislikes Obamacare, environmental regulation, gun control, abortion, "socialism" and gay marriage — though when her sister wed a woman, Liz congratulated them privately while publicly condemning such marriages.

She's been a good soldier. She's voted more faithfully for Trump's agenda than the woman picked to replace her, Elise Stefanik, 36, a former moderate Republican from New York who seized a promotion by embracing Trump. This earned Stefanik unflattering epithets, "shapeshifter" and "moral acrobat" among them.

Calling out the lies

None of Liz Cheney's conservative

credentials mattered. Her intolerable offense was that, unlike most of her Republican colleagues, she gagged on the unswallowable, poisonous fiction that Trump had won. And she dared to publicly call Trump on his lies, surely knowing she risked her leadership job and being voted out of office.



Solveig Torvik

Trump won Wyoming by nearly 70% in 2020, the highest percentage anywhere, and Wyoming's GOP called for Cheney's resignation after she voted to impeach Trump for fomenting the seditious attempt to prevent Congressional certification of Joe Biden's election.

Before she was fired, Cheney told her mostly male colleagues: "If you want leaders who will enable and spread his (Trump's) destructive lies, I'm not your person."

So they threw her out. Now "she looks like Churchill and they look like little men with umbrellas," as Peggy Noonan, President Ronald Reagan's speech writer, aptly put it in the Wall Street Journal. "It makes the party look stupid and weak, as if it can't tolerate dissent."

The little men with umbrellas put the Republican Party on the side of a lie to appease Trump and thereby cling to office. "They think the way out is to be quiet and hope the fever passes. Here is the fact of our current political life: the fever never passes. It has to be treated. By not pushing back they create more crazy," Noonan admonished.

Cheney warns that placating Trump only paves his way back to power. "He's unfit," she reminds.

Cheney gets Trump's treasonous role on Jan. 6 exactly right: "There has never been a greater betrayal by a president of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution."

Her warnings to her party are spot on: "We really can't become the party of a cult of personality. It's a really scary phenomenon we haven't seen in this country before. Our oath and our loyalty is to the Constitution, not to an individual — particularly after what happened on Jan. 6."

Public disdain

The public wearies of wildlife-killing contests. Three years ago they were legal in every state save California. Now they're also banned in Washington, Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts and Maryland. New Mexico and Vermont have banned coyote-killing contests.

Competing to kill wildlife outrages the fair-chase hunting community. "We don't like anything that smacks of commercialization with money or prizes," remarks Eric Nuse, a hunter educator who serves on the boards of Orion —The Hunters' Institute and the New England Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. "Anything that doesn't honor the animals grates on us."

Wildlife-killing contests can erode "the public's view of ethical hunting," reports the Wildlife Society, comprised of 11,000 biologists and managers.

No trained wildlife profes-

sional believes that killing contests accomplish anything worthwhile. This from the Pennsylvania Game Commission: "The agency (has) finally accepted the reality that predator control does not work." Yet the Commission still sanctions 27 major wildlife-killing contests that attract thousands of participants.

Why do 44 state game and fish agencies continue to allow these contests? Money. Employees are fed and clothed largely by hunting-license revenue; and wildlife-killing contestants must buy hunting licenses even though they're not "hunters."

More accurately, people who compete to kill wildlife are described by their critics as "assassins."

Ted Williams is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, a non-profit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He is a nationally recognized writer on wildlife issues.

"We cannot become the party of QAnon," she argues. "We cannot become the party of Holocaust denial. We cannot become the party of white supremacy."

Best of luck with all that.

Mansplainers abound

A lot of "mansplaining" occurred as Cheney's fate was being decided. Rep. Ralph Norman of South Carolina complained to Cheney that what bothered him "is your attitude. You've got a defiant attitude."

Hello? A Cheney with "attitude"? Oh, surely not.

Rep. John Rutherford of Florida told her she was not "a team player." Rep. Lloyd Smucker of Pennsylvania informed her that she has "a low E.Q." — emotional quotient. Perhaps because, as one unnamed attendee described it, Cheney "stood implacably" throughout her dismissal ordeal, "as emotional as algebra."

Try for a moment, Dear Reader, to imagine these men saying such things to Cheney were she male.

On his way out the door, the New York Times reported, one congressman remarked: "I just got to spend four hours listening to a bunch of men complaining to a woman that she doesn't take their emotions into account."

"Liz Cheney was canceled today for speaking her mind," admitted Ken Buck of Colorado.

Of course, this nasty business isn't really about Liz Cheney's career, though some habitual cynics understandably suspect that Cheney political ambitions are in play here. It's actually about whether Republicans can win elections if all citizens are allowed to vote and whether Americans will accept election outcomes as valid.

Some Republicans who claimed the presidency was stolen from Trump now pretend they never said any such thing. Is it dawning on them that destroying voter confidence in the last election destroys confidence in any future election that Republicans themselves might win — after they finish gerrymandering and erecting discriminatory barriers to voting?

Solveig Torvik lives near Winthrop.

REAL ESTATE

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Opinion

Editorial

Facebook facedown

What to do about Facebook?

The more we read about how the omnipresent and seemingly omnipotent social media site operates, the more questions are raised about whether individuals and organizations should continue being associated with it.

Talk about breaking up being hard to do. As a community information provider that wants and needs to reach the largest audience we can, the Methow Valley News is among those wrestling with that question. Millions (billions?) of people, companies and other institutions rely (as the News does) on Facebook to readily and efficiently connect with friends, family, colleagues and followers to push out and exchange valuable information. For others, it's just a mass marketing engine that loads and reloads annoying posts. Much of your personal feed probably is clutter you didn't ask for and scroll past.

There seem to be three Facebook nations: the personal and professional users mentioned above, whatever their generally benign motives (yes, people gotta sell stuff), and the evildoers. By that I mean the liars, fakes, Jan. 6 insurrectionists and their traitorous enablers (every day, more credible, verifiable information emerges that clearly indicates a Trump-endorsed coup attempt was being plotted to topple the U.S. government), anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers, 2020 election deniers, Trump cult zombie trolls and other right wing extremists (let's call them what they are — domestic terrorists). Lots of overlap in those groups, by the way. That doesn't even include the blatant scammers or the skulduggery of foreign governments like Russia, which gleefully prey on the gullibility of many Facebook followers.

It's evident that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg doesn't have a problem with any of that, as long as the billions keep flowing in. His own employees are coming forth as whistleblowers because of mounting alarm about his public pronouncements versus his ongoing practices. Hate speech? Political subversion? Deliberately misleading information? Propaganda of any variety? A toxic threat to democracy as we know it? Shameful rip-offs? Not happening, according to Zuckerberg — even as it does, and he pockets the proceeds. Profit rules.

Technical glitches also remain a problem — hacked accounts are all too common.

And yet — how to disentangle and start over, if that is your intent? The options are not readily presenting themselves — except for young people, who have already disdained and disassociated from Facebook. Many younger users have migrated to Instagram, which is owned by Facebook. Instagram, another favorite option for cultural influencers, is now under scrutiny for its potentially harmful effects on teens — which was uncovered by Facebook's own internal research.

Facebook has been, for many years, a vital part of the Methow Valley News' social media efforts. It took off during the 2014 wildfires, as a reliable source of up-to-date information, and has grown steadily since. We now have about 12,000 followers, more than four times our print circulation. It's an important audience and we pay attention to it. We post throughout the day, seven days a week, with whatever current information we think will be valuable.

We have had one ironclad rule since the beginning: We do not post anything that we have not vetted. It's either our own work, or reposts from organizations or other sources that are identified and credible. Many of our posts will take you directly to our award-winning website, where our original work for the newspaper resides.

As a practical matter, then, Facebook still works for us and transitioning to something else would be challenging for all concerned. But as a philosophical conundrum, concerns about Facebook's operations and influence must be taken seriously. We're not sure how that will be resolved, but we do know that a lot of users are asking the question, and some have decided to abandon their accounts.

Meanwhile, count on the News to stay the course and continue putting Facebook to its highest and best use. It's still the most effective way for us to distribute information of value to a community that has come to expect it.

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: (509) 997-3277

email: editor@methowvalleynews.com

or drop by 502 S. Glover St., Twisp

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editor@methowvalleynews.com • www.methowvalleynews.com

Don Nelson, PUBLISHER/EDITOR

Natalie Johnson, MANAGING EDITOR

Marcy Stamper, REPORTER

Rick Lewis, SPORTS

Ryan Edwards, DESIGN

Sheila Ward, SALES ASSOCIATE

Tera Evans, OFFICE MANAGER

Paige Wolfe, DISTRIBUTION

CONTRIBUTORS:

Joanna Bastian Erik Brooks

Shelley Smith Jones Len Baublitz

Ashley Lodato Rosalie Hutson

Sarah Schrock Solveig Torvik

Ann McCreary Dave Ward

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Box 97: Letters to the editor

Support Miles

Dear Editor:

It's election time in Winthrop, and we have a different situation this election cycle than we normally do.

Seth Miles is working to get elected to be the next mayor of Winthrop through a write-in campaign. Seth's a local businessman who has had enough of the current mayor and her policies and he wants to see them change. He believes that there are things in the community that should have been done by now. Too many projects are still in the "design and survey" stages. That list includes water system assessments and sewer surveys, a Susie Stephens Trail crossing at Highway 20, the road up to Horizon Flats, the RiverWalk, the Englar Street fire station's future use as well as the old library's future use, and the list goes on.

Seth doesn't see a Winthrop government that is cohesive and strong. He sees a strong council who is not being united to work out the issues that are going on here in Winthrop.

Seth owns a business in town and has had to struggle through the pandemic for over a year and a half and through the fires this past summer. He's seen the other businesses that have had to cut hours or close due to these issues. Imagine his surprise when the mayor of Winthrop declared that the tourist season was over and not to come to Winthrop until the snow came. One of the mayor of Winthrop's top priorities is to protect the town and to put it into a positive light, not to discourage people from coming here.

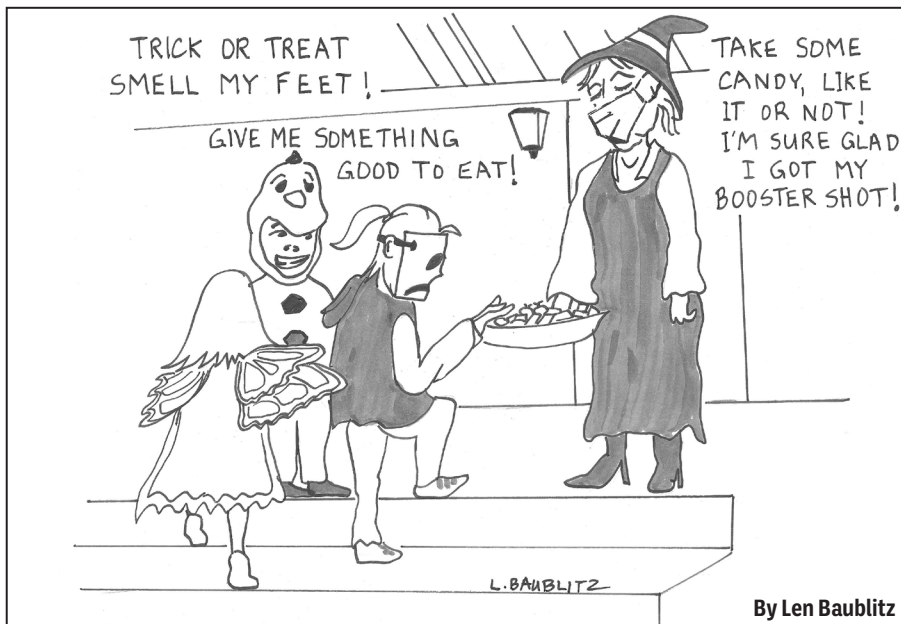
Seth is committed to getting things done by reaching out to the council and the community to prioritize the projects and issues that need to be addressed. Once those issues have been defined, he will work toward getting those things done working with the town's staff and departments. It will be tough to get the votes as a write-in candidate with a late start in the game, but I will be writing his name in and I hope that you will see that a change is needed and that you will also support him.

Rick Northcott
Winthrop

Library funding

Dear Editor:

Thank you for sharing the exciting news about NCW Libraries plans to invest in upgrades to its 30 branch library facilities in Okanogan, Chelan, Douglas, Ferry and Grant counties. As you shared in your article, NCW Libraries will partner with the owners of its branch locations to engage in community-led design that will inform the improvement of existing facilities, most of which greatly need facility upgrades to serve their communities. Your article stated that the new Winthrop



By Len Baublitz

branch library, now under construction, will not be part of this project. That is not true. In fact, our new library will share in the distribution of NCW Libraries project funds the same as all the other branch locations in the system. What differs is the schedule for Winthrop's participation in the funding because Friends of the Winthrop Public Library (FOWL) — working in partnership with the Town of Winthrop and NCW Libraries — has already engaged and completed the community-led conversations that identified the needs, hopes and dreams that defined the design of its new library. The NCW Libraries improvement funding will therefore be contributed quickly to help complete the interior build-out of the new facility.

It is an exciting time for libraries in North Central Washington! NCW Libraries' significant investment in its network of branches will create inviting, safe spaces that are accessible to everyone. This will enhance our library patrons' experiences and also bring communities together at a time when we all need to see more of each other.

Jill Sheley
Executive Director, Friends of the
Winthrop Public Library

The highway is no place for a garden

Dear Editor:

People should be thought of first. Twisp residents and visitors and passersby all use the highway in front of Hank's Market. Why was the concrete garden made in the middle of the highway? Who will keep it up?

In summer with campers and motor homes and log trucks. In winter with the snow and ice. Is Twisp looking for a lawsuit to happen?

The highway should be for traffic and not a garden that takes up road space.

AeroMethow Rescue Service needs money for powered stretcher-loading systems. The cost of that highway concrete project needed to go to the people of Twisp and taxpayers, not for cement in the middle of the highway to cause accidents.

This is my opinion. What do the people of Twisp think?

Phyllis Sansaver
Twisp

How about a tax break?

Dear Editor:

I am a property owner directly affected by the subdivision ordinance the county just extended. My 30-acre property near Twisp is virtually unsellable as long as I cannot get water. I blame the county for not informing people like me of the problem when I bought the property.

I have read the DOE opinion and studied much of the history of the Methow Rule. Like it or not, it seems clear that DOE's interpretation of the Methow Rule was legally correct and necessary to protect our watershed. Thus, the subdivision ordinance was also required.

At the same time, there is something the county can do right now for people like me while it looks for a long-term solution. It doesn't require ignoring the law or making believe there is more water available than we all know is the case. (I know people who have already had their wells run dry, and farmers whose irrigation was shut off due to low river levels.) Nor does it require that we deny that climate change will make the situation even worse.

I appealed my tax assessment after the subdivision ordinance went into effect. I asked for a substantial reduction in the supposed fair market value. I got a reduction but it was way too little. The reasoning was that the property could be used for a "dry land cabin." Really? Any real estate broker would laugh if I wanted to market the property anywhere near the assessed value.

What the county can do right now is give all us affected landowners a very substantial and realistic reduction in our tax assessments until the water availability issue is resolved. This seems only fair under these circumstances.

Randy Brook
Twisp

See **LETTERS**, A5

MY TURN

Winthrop library will be a special place for kids

BY REE WEST

I take a peek around the bookcase to see if my help is needed; no, the child is still snuggled into a beanbag, completely absorbed in a book. His mother appears content as she browses the collection and adds to a growing stack of books. At an opportune moment I mention how happy her son's impressive focus makes me, and the mom shares with me that a series her son discovered for himself at the library has got him absolutely riveted.

It's not just the scene that warms my heart: The boy's love of reading hints at future success at school and in life. An impressive body of research links childhood achievements in reading and math to success in adulthood. Findings suggest that reading advances in childhood have an enduring positive effect on socioeconomic advances across the life span. Kids who take a love of reading with them into adulthood are more likely to succeed.

The fact that this child discovered a series he's enthusiastic about at the library gives me another reason to celebrate: Research

also highlights a trend that's sometimes referred to as the "decline by 9," in which there's a significant decrease in the number of children who read for enjoyment, between the ages of 8 and 9. And how do you beat the "decline by 9"? Give kids plenty of opportunities to choose books for themselves, and give them interaction with other readers, both peers and adults.

Our new Winthrop Library will be such a special place for the kids in our community to develop a lifelong love of reading. The children's area will be a warm and welcoming environment for creative play and learning. A mother once made my day (she actually made my month, or my year or possibly my entire life) by describing her daughter at home between storytime sessions, pretending to be "Miss Ree," reading to the dolls and stuffed animals that she had assembled.

Wonderful vision

When I look at the architectural drawings of the Children's Nest, it is so very easy for me to envision that child, curled up in a reading nook with a toy and a book. I can

see myself in the new library surrounded by preschoolers, all of us doing an action rhyme to get the wiggles out (and work on listening skills, reading readiness and social-emotional awareness) before the next story. In fact, I can envision all of us together at the new library, creating, learning, and growing. Can you see yourself there, too?

The Friends of Winthrop Public Library are seeking your help to complete the final stretch in the construction of the new library. We're close to the finish line, but the Children's Nest is still in need of funding. No matter what the size, your contribution at Give Methow this month will make a big difference in our community. Please help the Friends reach their goal of 1,000 donors in support of our new library. From now through the end of October, you can visit www.givemethow.org to make a gift to nonprofit organizations that enrich our community in so many ways. And, I can't wait to see you at the new library: Visit winthroplibraryfriends.org to find out how to tour the construction site this month. Thank you so much for your support.

Ree West is the Winthrop librarian.

Harts Pass

By Erik Brooks



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HELLO?

Heading for infamy

“The existential threat to humanity is climate change.” — President Joe Biden, Oct. 21, 2021

We’re asking the wrong question about Joe Manchin III, the Democratic senator from West Virginia.

Getting the nation’s electricity grid off Earth-warming fossil fuel feedstock was the critical centerpiece of President Joe Biden’s ambitious effort to cope with climate change in his Build Back Better bill.

And rightly so. A rapid switchover to electricity generated by clean fuel is imperative to avoid the worst chaos and cruelty of climate change hell.

But Manchin — former governor of the second-biggest coal producing state in the nation — has succeeded in forcing his own president to drop this essential planet-saving measure from the bill.

“What does Joe Manchin want?” cry Manchin’s anguished fellow Democrats.

People, this is not the right question to ask about Joe Manchin. The question to ask is, why is someone who founded, and profits from, a coal brokerage serving as chairman of the Senate’s Energy and Natural Resources Committee?

Well-funded by fossil fuel interests, Manchin is blocking the most meaningful climate legislation ever attempted in this country. The lone Democratic office holder still standing in Trump-loving West Virginia, Manchin holds veto power over Biden’s legislative agenda.

Biden’s bill earmarked \$150 billion to quickly be spent assist-

ing utilities that switch from fossil fuels to producing electricity from wind, solar and nuclear energy.

Utilities that did not switch would have been penalized. The goal was to get 80% of the nation’s electricity from cleaner sources by 2030, double what it is now.



Solveig Torvik

Protecting coal

Is Manchin’s refusal to bestir himself to address the climate

crisis simply explained by the half a million bucks he gets annually from his brokerage? Is he incapable of seeing the big picture? Did he miss the memo? Or is it that he just doesn’t care?

Manchin’s been offering standard-issue platitudes for his intransigence: he’s protecting his state’s economy, consumers, jobs and taxpayers. But his excuses ring hollow. He’s really protecting coal producers.

Just 3% of West Virginia’s work force (13,000 people) labors in the coal industry; 2,000 of them in coal plants. To keep running, West Virginia’s coal plants need \$448 million worth of upgrades, mandated by the federal government. That would keep them producing coal until 2040 instead of shutting down in 2028.

Coal generates 89% of West Virginia’s electricity. Over the last 13 years, the price of electricity in West Virginia has risen 122%, from an average of \$62 per month to \$138, according to a CNN report.

“It does feel very wrong when your electric bill is more than your mortgage,” West Virginia resident Felisha Chase mused to CNN. Come January, her bill increases five-fold and she falls in arrears. Chase lives in an old house in one of the poorest, sickest states in the union.

Yet, hogtied to coal, there’s worse to come for West Virginians such as Chase, who relies on tape to seal up her drafty home. Next year she’ll pay 3.3% more for electricity. Manchin blames this rate increase on upgrades ordered by the feds for those polluting coal plants.

While the cost of coal-fired electricity keeps soaring, solar

and wind-generated electricity keeps dropping — solar by 80% in the last decade, wind by 70%.

As for Manchin’s claims that, absent tax hikes, we’ll bankrupt ourselves if we borrow to pay for Biden’s programs, Nobel laureate economist Paul Krugman puts that fallacy to rest.

Borrowing to pay for \$1.75 trillion worth of Biden’s programs would add \$30 billion to annual interest rates, Krugman writes — “0.15% of gross domestic product, which is trivial.”

Flood threat

Ironically, West Virginia is more exposed to catastrophic flooding from increasingly heavy, fossil fuel-driven rainfall than any other state, according to First Street Foundation: 61% of the state’s power stations are at flooding risk, more than twice the average in the rest of the nation. At 46%, West Virginia also leads in the number of roads and police stations under flood threat. And it’s tied for first place with Louisiana in having the most schools and commercial properties at risk of flooding.

Flooded West Virginia homeowners frequently also have to endure contamination from sewage system failure.

Manchin’s state ranks seventh nationally in child poverty. Yet he fears what he dismissively calls “an entitlement society.”

That is, societies that invest in pre-kindergarten programs, child tax credit payments, affordable child care for working parents, affordable housing, parental leave, free community college education.

Enfranchising West Virginia’s disenfranchised to help lift them out of poverty isn’t in Manchin’s lexicon. But it is in Biden’s Build Back Better bill.

Originally that bill, which combines climate and social safety net measures, was to cost \$3.5 trillion over 10 years. Manchin insisted it be trimmed to \$1.5 trillion. Now Biden’s aiming for one that will cost a mere \$1.9 billion.

With Democratic dunderheads like Manchin, who needs Republicans?

Solveig Torvik lives near Winthrop.

MY TURN

County leadership has failed us on COVID precautions

BY OKANOGAN COUNTY WATCH

As volunteers who regularly take notes at meetings of the Okanogan County commissioners for Okanogan County Watch, we support Gay Northrup’s thought-provoking recent letter regarding the county commissioners’ failure to step up to the plate by addressing the physical, emotional and economic pain the COVID-19 virus is causing residents of this county.

The casual approach of the Board of Commissioners to the virus, and the resulting lack of consistent and coherent policies at the county level, have cost our county government and its employees dearly. One month after the Sept. 21 recording cited by Northrup, the situation has unfortunately not changed significantly.

However, during the past week’s morning session of Oct. 19, Commissioner Chris Branch made a determined and lengthy attempt to reach agreement with Commissioners Andy Hover and Jim DeTro that coherent COVID policies need to be developed for at least county employees and facilities.

Among Branch’s concerns were unclear county masking requirements, inequity among departments, and confusion over procedures for COVID-exposed employees. He raised the possibility of liability of county commissioners in the case of employee infection, due to lack of implementation of the statewide indoor public employee masking mandate.

Unfortunately, last Tuesday’s recording shows that Branch’s hopes for agreement were met with argument, resistance and change of subject by Commissioners Hover and DeTro. The closest the board could come to consensus was that if an employee comes to work feeling sick in some way, he or she should go

home.

Should our leaders continue to helplessly allow the virus to run its course and passively accept the results, or should they take responsibility for doing more on a daily basis to lessen the amount of infection, death, and long-term disabling conditions from COVID-19? Is it really too much to ask that commissioners and county employees follow the mandates of our state government regarding employee safety and the guidelines for exemptions?

Regarding safety, Branch used the example of an unnamed county department in which only two employees have been vaccinated. They also wear masks, unlike the other employees there. He asked, “Where is the protection for those two employees?”

Much stress

The stress placed upon county employees and the impact upon our county government has been disturbing, as follows:

The County Auditor’s office staff was at one point reduced by 40% due to COVID, and the public (frustrated by long lines) had begun to harass the staff. Auditor Cari Hall had to make the decision to close her office until the situation was under control.

Planning Department Director Pete Palmer explained months ago that unmasked individuals were entering her office in spite of the fact that there was an immunocompromised individual there. She did not receive much guidance from the commissioners. Finally, during this last COVID surge, she made the decision to lock the doors of the Planning Department, requiring appointments for those who wished to confer. She can be seen sanitizing the front

table and microphones by herself before speaking in the hearing room, although Branch had reminded other staff last week that possible HIPAA sanitation violations were important.

While the Financial Committee, the Assessor’s Office, the Department of Emergency Management and others consistently wear masks during commissioners’ staff meetings, other departments such as Public Works virtually never wear masks. Some, such as the Sheriff’s Office, occasionally wear masks.

Finally, the Coroner’s Office raised alarms on Oct. 11 that due to hospital overload of COVID patients and thus more deaths at home, more storage space was urgent and that two corpses were being stored in a garage at that time.

Last Tuesday, Hover (who has not worn a mask for months even when simply listening to the audience) announced “I am done on the whole masking thing.” Having been on vacation during most of our state and county’s recent COVID-19 surge, he thought the masking mandate had been declared “two years ago or something like that.” We hope he will better inform himself as to the recent situation.

The county’s livestreaming and archived videos now make it easy to view commissioners’ meetings from home. For help in finding dates or times, see summaries by Okanogan County Watch. We hope citizens will stay informed and form your own opinions by watching our county’s operating principles.

Submitted by Stephanie Clark, Okanogan; Isabelle Spohn, Twisp; Emily Sisson, Winthrop; Ruth Hall, Mallot; and Katie Haven, Methow.

LETTERS

From Page A4

Excellent column

Dear Editor:

Wow! What a poignant and evocative column last week, Ashley Lodato. Nice work. It was a tearful reminder of what all of us parents eventually go through. Inspired writing indeed.

Linda and Wayne Mendro
Twisp

Great production

Dear Editor:

I went to The Merc Playhouse fearing that its production of “CoronAnthology” would be depressing and bring back bad memories. I was surprised at how entertaining it was. Sure, there were heavy parts but they were offset by comedic breaks — “Emails to Ma,” the “Ski Slope Lift Tales” and the “Mystery Motel” puppets.

It reminded me even though we were isolated we all went though this together and I came away uplifted.

Thank you to The Merc and Phil Quevillon for presenting this. To all the performers on stage and behind the scenes, thank you for all your time

and effort. Bravo!

Sue Sabin
Twisp

Shriners say thanks

Dear Editor:

Okanogan County has supported the Shriners, who raise money to help local kids who need specialized care so they can become the best they can be. Even the COVID impacts did not keep us from continuing this mission to help kids get needed surgeries or go to the many out-of-area appointments.

The Okanogan County Shrine Club supports the Spokane Shrine Hospital in providing orthopedic services for kids from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. Nationwide there are 21 specialized Shrine hospitals plus one in Canada and Mexico. We also support the El Katif Shrine (Spokane) Travel Fund so these kids and their families can afford to go to distant facilities, like the burn center in California.

People bought our raffles at different events, including the Okanogan County Fair, where we drew the winners. As we have in the past, we raffled off three livestock and a kid’s-sized four-wheeler. Buy-

ing fair livestock assures first quality meat and supports the kids who raised them. But it is the special donations from people like Hank and Judy Konrad, Twisp, who bought and donated the beef and hog; Bob Lloyd, Twisp, who bought and donated the lamb; and the slaughtering by Wyatt Radke, Oroville; the cut and wrapping by Juarez’s Valley Meat Packing, Ellisforde, that really makes the difference. These people generously donated time and money to improve the life of a child.

This close connection we have with the kids who need medical help and those who donate time and money, and those who buy our raffles — this connection is the reason why we do this year after year. Friendships, caring for others, seeing the smiles, and getting hugs — drives the true meaning of community home.

Thank you all!

Blaine Sullivan, President
Okanogan County Shrine Club

A proposal

Dear Editor:

There are some things going on in our country which defy logic and common sense. To vaccinate or not to vaccinate has been debated for months without consensus is just one

example. So the unvaccinated, especially those refusing to wear a mask as well, can put my health at risk for the sake of their “personal freedom.” Are these individuals more valuable than me? These citizens are telling us the election was stolen and Jan. 6 was not a violent insurrection threatening our democracy.

Then there is an effort in certain states to ban abortion after six weeks. “Personal freedom” does not apply to women, apparently. I have never met a woman who did not describe the choice other than one of desperation.

I wish to make a proposal: If life begins at conception and abortion is banned after six weeks, then the father of the child will be required to start paying child support at the sixth week of pregnancy. This will provide good prenatal care, assist with shelter and nutrition for the mother and the child.

Sandra Momilani Clarke
Carlton

Please be safe

Dear Editor:

Generally the valley feels very safe on the roads. We’re all very respectful of each other and cognizant of road safety. However, it seems a reminder may be in order that the school zone

is 20 mph, solid yellow means do not pass, and even if it is dashed yellow, passing should be done only when safe. Please don’t pass by driving into oncoming traffic. One saves mere seconds at most, but risks a lifetime of pain and suffering for everyone on the road at that moment.

Please also remember that the corner on Twin Lakes Road is very narrow, and the shoulder is often full of debris. Be ready for a member of the cross country team out training or a family biking to school to be taking the lane to avoid crashing. Be extra cautious with those passes there too. There’s very little room for error on that 500 or so yards and lots of families driving and biking to and from school.

Thanks all of us for being so safe over all! I appreciate the full lane when a car passes me while cycling and the respect of the speed limit that means I’m not constantly tailgated on the highway or passed by folks going 80. Let’s keep it up and keep each other safe.

Oh, and maybe the state and county could help out with some speed bumps in town or a turn lane in front of the school to help remind the vacationers.

Murray Sampson
Winthrop

Contact your U.S. representatives

Sen. Patty Murray (D)
Washington, D.C., office: 173 Russell Senate
Office Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-2621
D.C. toll-free: (866) 481-9186
Fax: (202) 224-0238
website and email access: murray.senate.gov

Sen. Maria Cantwell (D)
Washington, D.C., office: 511 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.,
Washington, D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-3441
Fax: (202) 228-0514
State office toll free: 1-888-648-7328
website and email access: cantwell.senate.gov

Rep. Dan Newhouse (R)
Washington, D.C., office: 1641 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 225-5816
Fax: (202) 225-3251
website and email access: newhouse.house.gov