

Opinion

NO BAD DAYS

Toilets in Twisp: a No. 1 priority

We all understand what it means to answer “when nature calls,” one of many euphemisms for the most basic of human functions. Other analogous expressions are more colorful or elegant, but nevertheless effective. You can’t miss the point, or underestimate the need. When you gotta go, you gotta go.

Gather enough people in one place, and that adds up to a lotta gottas. Absent nearby relief, stress, anxiety and irritation levels inevitably will rise concurrently with bladder levels. And that’s just the adults. Squirming, low-capacity kids have even less patience than they have control. Other people have health issues that require reasonable proximity to a toilet.

In extremis, most people will accept whatever trepidations they associate with using “public” facilities. It’s the least public thing we want to do. Yet that is often the only option.

Except when it isn’t. If, at this point, you are thinking “downtown Twisp,” get in line. You’re a bit late to the potty pity party.

There are few practical public alternatives in downtown Twisp—even fewer since the street-accessible restrooms in The Merc Playhouse were closed for a variety of reasons. Most restaurants and retail establishments have bathrooms for customers, but they aren’t meant for walk-in traffic. Other facilities such as the Methow Valley Community Center can accommodate events and tenant traffic, but not the general populace.

But it is that pesky general populace that shows up for the Saturday morning Methow Valley Farmers Market, and they may also spend time browsing in downtown shops or eating at nearby restaurants.

Last summer, with the Merc bathrooms closed and no other evident public options available, the search for places to go often turned desperate, and local merchants became the fallback options. Last year and again this year, downtown businesses are pressing the town to do something about the situation.

How difficult can that be, you say?

Now, just hold it a minute. You can’t simply dig a pit latrine and hang a roll of toilet paper from a stick. Even portable toilets must be private, sanitary, secure, reasonably comfortable and adaptable to whatever COVID protocols are necessary. Moreover, they need to be maintained—cleaned, emptied, repaired, regularly inspected. Somebody has to make sure that all happens, and pay for it. Typically, it’s a local or state government function.

In Winthrop, the town provides public restrooms at several locations, including adjacent to Town Hall at the four-way stop, and at the Winthrop Barn next to Mack Lloyd Park. The town pays someone to regularly inspect and clean the bathrooms. As a tourism destination, Winthrop can do no less—and some critics say it’s not enough.

Twisp has its share of visitors, but the town isn’t flush with cash. There’s not much wiggle room in its operating budget. Recently, Twisp Public Works Director Andrew Denham had a portable toilet installed at Commons Park next to the Community Center parking lot to alleviate some of the pressure. He says it will stay as long as it’s needed. Denham did that on his own initiative to provide some kind of response.

More is needed, but that may be as good as it gets for a while. What the town could really use is a commodious central public facility, like the one on La Conner’s main shopping drag, that is regularly attended to. As I recall, at the La Conner bathroom, users are asked to make donations toward its upkeep.

Something similar in Twisp would require a location, money to design and construct it, and a regular budget commitment to maintaining the building. It would take a lot of community effort. (On the other hand, writing even more stories about the need for public bathrooms provides a low-threshold opportunity to weave in groan-inducing and even borderline-tasteless puns, and I’ve used about all of them that are printable in a family-friendly newspaper.)

It’s not as dramatic a project as a new library, fire hall or civic building, but it seems like a worthy project for someone’s near-term agenda. A permanent solution is necessary. Until then, renting porta-potties ad infinitum is just throwing money down a hole.

CORRECTION: In a story titled “Twisp man faces sentencing on four sexual abuse” charges in the April 21 edition of the Methow Valley News, the age of the suspect when the crime was first reported was incorrect. Jedidiah McMillan had turned 18 before he was first accused of rape of a child.

Box 97: Letters to the editor

The undiscovered Methow

Dear Editor:

No one can know the Methow Valley. There are new experiences every year. Every year there are undiscovered hikes, more bird species to find, or undiscovered back country ski trails. We have produced several world class cross-country ski racers. After 20 years, I thought I had done all of the hiking trails; I had not. Last year I found the wonderful trail on the west side of Lewis Butte. This year I found the dirt road to the Fish and Wildlife camp was open in early spring, with its marvelous views. Just this year I found a new lake in which to swim.

And the animals. A cougar killed a deer in my back yard; not everybody’s cup of tea but wonderful for me. Not seen the wolves yet, but some coyotes and some bears, lots of eagles; I love the redwing blackbirds.

If I am allotted 90 years, 80-some are gone away, but I can safely say, I enjoyed here my day.

Richard O. Zerbe
Winthrop

Need a solution

Dear Editor:

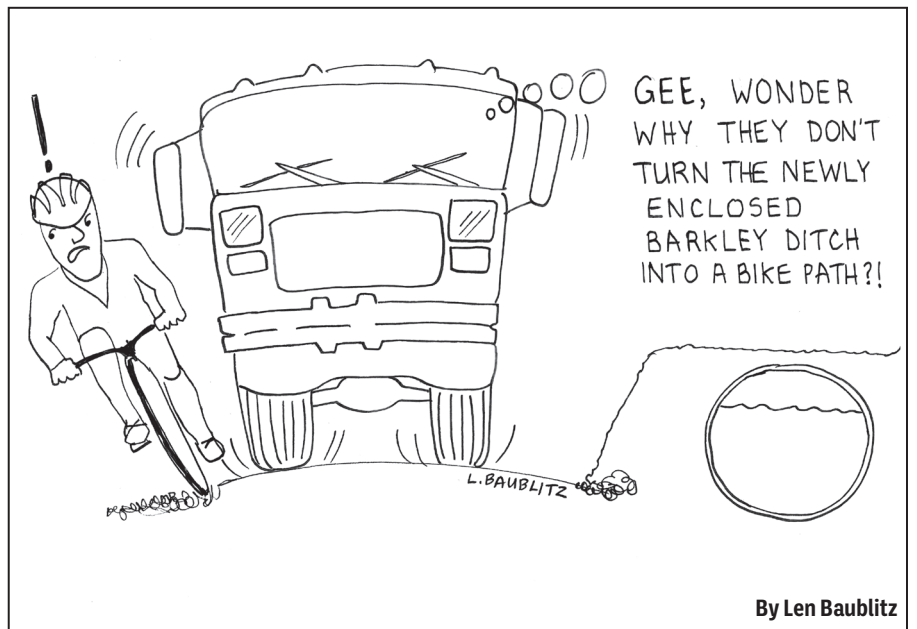
Twisp is my go-to town. I like its character and diversity. However, while the mayor and Town Council have had their attention on the more glamorous projects, such as the new civic center, the Canyon Street crossing project and new sidewalks, they have not been addressing the basic needs of its citizens. I am referring to the article in the April 21 edition of the paper, concerning the public toilet situation. First, Andrew Denham should be given an award, for taking the initiative to bring in a public toilet near the Methow Valley Community Center. I do hope it will be maintained due to the busy Farmer Market each Saturday.

The COVID virus last year caused the shutdown of many public facilities that people depended on. With us getting through a year of how to live with the virus, it is a scientific fact that it would be extremely hard to catch the virus from public toilets.

“The town currently doesn’t have the funding for anything more permanent,” yet as Denise Tompetrini states in her letter to the council that we are promoting tourism, without providing this basic service.

Winthrop has restrooms outside their Town Hall and Methow Trails in Mazama was able to provide a new heated facility with actual flush toilets and running water. And the town of Twisp has one portable toilet?

Which leads me to the question: Will our new civic center in Twisp have public toilet



By Len Baublitz

facilities? Perhaps that is part of the solution.

Pearl Cherrington
Twisp

Consider caregiving

Dear Editor:

Caregivers must have strength and a kind heart. Caregivers certainly are the heart of Jamie’s Place. They provide love, support and care to our residents 24 hours per day. This important work can be challenging, both physically and emotionally and unfortunately burn-out can be high in some settings. We have been fortunate to have a team of dedicated caregivers at Jamie’s Place over many years.

We are in a caregiver crisis in our own community and nationwide. Stressors imposed by COVID-19 have taken a toll during a time when our population is aging faster than we can provide support throughout the Methow Valley.

Jamie’s Place wants to highlight the importance and satisfaction of a career as a caregiver. Sadly, this noble career is underappreciated by our society. We wish to raise awareness and celebrate those who are choosing this career path.

Jamie’s Place is working with local partners to provide caregiver training through Jamie’s Place. Our goal is to train caregivers for employment at Jamie’s Place while also creating a pool of caregivers that would be available to serve our community. This program is a small part of our new focus through SASH, Senior Assessment for Support and Housing.

SASH is researching the needs of the community to assist in connecting resources to our aging population in the Valley. The focus of SASH is to determine what is needed and how our community wishes to be supported as they age.

SASH will conclude the initial phase of work in August and will be looking for feedback from our community as we navigate these challenges together. There is a sizable gap between what we have available now and what we will need in the future. We need to act quickly to determine what resources and assistance our community needs to navigate aging in the Methow. Our caregiver training program is a first step towards expanding eldercare in

the valley.

If you have a caring heart, enjoy working with the elderly, please consider the noble career of caregiving. Our team at Jamie’s Place is here to help make it happen.

Rana Clarke, executive director
Jamie’s Place
Winthrop

There must be a way

Dear Editor:

We have 911, we have 511, we have 711, and 811 and 411.

Surely the tech wizards who make these work, pretty much wherever we may be, surely they can make yet another three-digit number work nationwide (call forwarding perhaps?), without forcing an entire nation to dial 10 digits for a local call that used to be just four.

Bill Karro
Winthrop

Leading the way

Dear Editor:

I had the fortune of being able to compete in both the Methow Trails Ski to the Sun race this past February and the Sunflower Marathon this past Saturday. As we slowly emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, events such as these provide those of us looking for competitive outlet a small reprieve from the partially restricted lives we’re still living.

Given the enormity of safety protocols, statewide restrictions and challenges that hosting events like these present, I want to publicly thank Methow Trails for their amazing efforts. Through their innovation, web-based tracking for the ski race, and commitment to safety, Methow Trails is leading the way for other race organizers to follow. I would be remiss if I did not thank the volunteers who helped with last Saturday’s marathon, the sponsors and the private landowners who provided access for the course. In the words of MVCC, together, we are Methow Strong!

Owen Rice
Winthrop

HELLO?

A billionaire’s blueprint for saving the planet

Bill Gates knows a lot. But he doesn’t know how thankful he should be for my quick reflexes.

One evening in the mid-1990s, driving to a lecture in downtown Seattle, I spotted Bill and Melinda Gates headed for the same venue, arms entwined, deep in conversation. How remarkable and wonderful, I thought, that the world’s richest man and his wife can freely wander the streets of Seattle at night, unattended, without fear of molestation.

Shortly I saw them again, standing uncertainly on a corner where I was about to turn left into a one-way street. I stopped, awaiting their decision on where to go. It did not seem imminent. So I swung into the crosswalk—just as Bill and Melinda Gates stepped directly in front of my car. My brain busied itself with the “Stand-on-brake!” command before it allowed me to reflect on the unthinkable consequences of becoming the person who mowed down the world’s richest man and his wife in a crosswalk.

I missed Bill’s hip by inches. Oblivious, they sauntered on without a glance my way.

I’ve kept a wary eye out for Bill Gates ever since.

Over time, we’ve both mellowed. Bill Gates has evolved from bratty Harvard dropout and ruthless business competitor to the world’s most generous philanthropist, concerning himself especially with health and education of people in poor countries. That, plus his latest contribution to the world’s well-being, “How to Avoid a Climate Change Disaster,” has caused me to conclude that all is forgiven.

Gates’ book brings clarity and common sense to our underfunded, uncoordinated, ad hoc efforts to deal with climate change. His 230-page primer is a folksy account of how he came to understand what it will take to keep Earth habitable. He provides what’s long been missing: an overarching, reality-based roadmap.

“I’m aware that I’m an imperfect messenger on climate change,” the Microsoft co-founder

writes, conceding he’s rich enough to purchase compensation for his large carbon footprint.

Intellectually curious, he’s a self-described “big picture” guy with command of facts on the ground. What I like best about Bill Gates is that—unlike some billionaires who apparently cannot get off this planet fast enough—he’s investing his fortune saving the planet we’ve got and the poorest of those living upon it.

Little time left

We Americans— who are most responsible for overheating the planet yet the most unwilling to repent—consciously chose to make climate change more expensive. We did this by squandering 40 years not taking it seriously enough. We have 29 years left to intervene before humans will be powerless to stem its worst manifestations. By 2050, time’s up.

So Gates’ basic message is rightly stark. Every year, the world adds 51 billion tons of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. By 2050, that must be reduced to zero tons, he emphasizes. He does not shy away from how hard, costly and complicated— or how non-negotiable—this tardy reduction will be.

Population growth will add one New York City’s worth of construction every month for the next 40 years, he warns. (We do now see that pandemics may interfere with population growth projections.)

Gates explains why we must build a unified national power grid (see the recent crippling power outage in Texas), how we might deploy cheap hydrogen energy (see Sen. Brad Hawkins and Douglas County PUD’s hydrogen project) and why battery storage is so vexing.

When Gates’ close friend Warren Buffett—himself once the world’s richest man—asked Gates why we can’t just put electric batteries in airplanes to eliminate their emissions, Gates explained that so many batteries would be needed that the plane couldn’t lift off the ground. “Ah,” said Buffett. It’s an “ah-ha”



Solveig Torvik

Methow Valley News

PUBLISHED WEEKLY SINCE 1903

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Display advertising deadline for this newspaper is on the Thursday previous to publication at 5 p.m. Classified advertising deadline is Monday at noon. The deadline for news items is Monday at noon.

THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS (USPS Publication No. 343480) is published weekly by MVN Publishing, LLC, 502 S. Glover St., Twisp, WA 98856. Subscription rates: \$39 inside Okanogan County, \$50 outside of Okanogan County and \$65 outside of Washington state per year (in advance). Periodical class postage paid at Twisp, Washington, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS, P.O. Box 97, Twisp, WA 98856.

THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS does not refund subscription payments except to the extent that the newspaper might fail to meet its obligation to publish each week of the individual subscription period, in which case the prorated cost of those issues missed would be refunded.

Member of the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association

Front page banner photo by Marcy Stammer.

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.

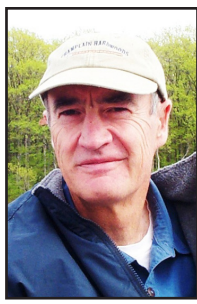
So coyote "control" results

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.

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.

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Opinion

NO BAD DAYS

Giving us some credit

In recent years, as the American newspaper industry has been steadily sundered by a failing business model, politicians and media pundits have periodically suggested some sort of government support to help keep local news outlets alive.



Don Nelson

For the most part, their intentions were good, and desperate times may call for desperate measures. But the idea of government support — intervention, if you will — has been anathema to many journalism professionals, educators and other media pundits. The fear, not entirely unfounded, is that government help means government control of some kind. That is antithetical to a free press.

But so is extinction, which is closer than many people think. Internet incursions, changing demographics and self-inflicted strategic mistakes have sent the industry into a tailspin. Hundreds of newspapers have disappeared, shrunk to skeletal remains, or been absorbed into larger organizations and gutted for their assets. Thousands of journalists lost their jobs, careers and sense of purpose.

While there are those who don't lament the industry's decimation, the consequences have been severe. Studies show that where local news outlets close and are not meaningfully replaced, civic engagement declines. People know less about what is happening in their communities, or what their local governments are up to. Connections fade. Fake news seeps into the vacuum left by mainstream journalism's decline.

The problem with most government assistance proposals of the past was that they focused on directly buttressing the news organizations' operations, with the implication of conditions for that support. What was needed was a program that included something for everyone: publishers, readers and advertisers.

Rep. Dan Newhouse, our Fourth District congressman, and Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick of Arizona have come up with a bipartisan plan which just might do that.

Newhouse and Kirkpatrick recently reintroduced the Local Journalism Sustainability Act, designed to shore up community journalism where it's most needed. No cash is involved. The legislation's effectiveness would rely on the appeal of tax credits.

"For many rural communities like ours in Central Washington, local news is the only way to receive important information and updates. Unfortunately, many of our locally-owned newspapers have been struggling to make ends meet," Newhouse said in a press release. "By providing tax credits for readers and small businesses and by empowering our local journalists, we can begin to help our small newspapers remain resilient and continue to provide in-depth perspectives that inform their readership regarding local current events."

"Local journalism is a bedrock pillar of communities across the United States," Kirkpatrick added. "Unfortunately, journalistic endeavors throughout the country are facing major economic struggles that put the future of many publications in serious jeopardy. These struggles existed before COVID, but the pandemic only made them more severe. We need to make sure these publications can sustain themselves through this crisis and beyond."

Three tax credits are included in the proposal. One would help local newspapers to hire and adequately pay journalists. A second tax credit would provide incentives to subscribers. The third would incentivize small businesses to advertise in local newspapers (and broadcast outlets, so it might also benefit KTRT). The bill is aimed at smaller journalistic enterprises: The staff support credits would be available only to organizations with fewer than 750 employees, which would not include the major newspaper chains. As one description of the bill explains, "The primary content of such publication is original content derived from primary sources and relating to news and current events. Such publication primarily serves the needs of a regional or local community."

The bill's credits would not be permanent, but would expire in five years, and would only work if the community gets behind it. Readers and advertisers would have a vital role in preserving local journalism. The government would not have a say in operations.

"It's not a handout, it's a hand up, to help them [local news outlets] find a sustainable path forward," Newhouse told the Seattle Times recently.

According to the press release, the proposed legislation has the support of journalism and newspaper industry leaders around the country.

I wouldn't claim to be a "leader," but count me in. The Methow Valley News is the only paper in the county that is not part of a newspaper group. In the past year, as our advertising revenues nosedived, we would have been hard-pressed to survive without two Paycheck Protection Program loans, which are in fact government handouts. PPP worked for us. We did not lay anyone off and managed to keep producing a worthy weekly product. But I would rather count on the community's participation and support for a plan that could benefit readers and advertisers through tax credits. We would all be in it together, with shared goals.

Box 97: Letters to the editor

Not that simple

Dear Editor:

I feel compelled to dispute Don Johnson's unsupported claims of environmental harm that will be caused by U.S. Forest Service restoration projects. Particularly, that thinning of trees will cause earlier snow melt and reduced stream flows. It is overstocked forests that have these effects.

Tree canopies capture a lot of snow. Anyone who has skied or snowshoed knows that much more snow accumulates in openings than under trees. Some of the snow intercepted in the canopy evaporates. The rest is exposed to sun and wind, often resulting in partial melting before falling to the ground. The meltwater is delivered to the stream system far earlier than if it were accumulated in a deeper, colder snowpack.

In addition to reducing snow accumulation, overstocked forests harm aquatic ecosystems through increased water use. Not that I want our forests to burn up—quite the opposite!—but I have seen quite a few seasonal streams begin to flow year-round following forest fires. However, both snow accumulation and stream flow response to thinning will depend on the density of trees left behind. The thinning proposed by the Forest Service may not measurably increase the amount of water reaching stream channels, but it will certainly not decrease it.

The claim that thinning will increase water temperatures by reducing shade is difficult to discuss briefly. Many factors affect shade, including channel width, tree height, slope and aspect. It is not clear to me that the proposed actions will reduce stream shading. Also, the relationship between shade and water temperature is variable: it is in small streams — and not wide rivers — that shade strongly affects temperature.

But is shade the only consideration? One effect of fire suppression is that many small streams that historically had deciduous riparian vegetation are now dominated by conifers; the hardwoods have been shaded out. This is significant for the aquatic food web — deciduous leaves are a better source of nutrients than conifer needles. It is entirely possible that letting a little more light in could benefit some aquatic ecosystems.

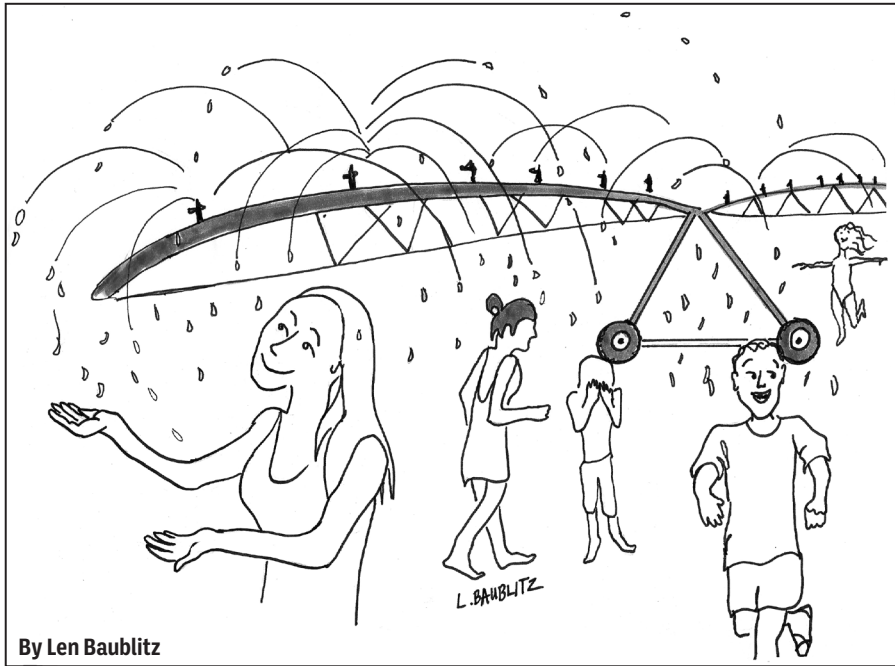
We need to think with greater complexity about these incredibly complex systems.

Gina McCoy
Winthrop

Curious?

Dear Editor:

While reading last week's (June 23) sports page I noticed something curious. I learned that the Liberty Bell girls' basketball team has just finished a quite successful season, winning 10



By Len Baublitz

out of 11 games. The Liberty Bell boys' basketball team also had a successful season, winning six out of 11 games.

In the same article under the heading "By the numbers," I read that the four top scorers on the girls' team all scored 100 points or more for the season with the top four scorers totaling 529 points! The boys' team's top four scorers (which includes just one player scoring more than 100 points) scored a total of 355 points for the season (second-place scoring was a tie; even if the top five scorers on the boys' team are included their total is still less than the top four scorers for the girls' team).

Now, I did not major in journalism nor am I a sports aficionado. But, it seems to me that since the girls' basketball team clearly outperformed the boys' team this year and by quite a margin the girls' team should have had first mention. They did not.

The last time I paid any attention to high school sports reporting was in the 1970s when I was in high school myself. Back then, boys' sports always got top billing no matter how dismal the performance. That was because, well, that was because they were boys.

I would like to think that sports reporting has evolved since then. Did the girls not get top billing in last week's article because, well, because they are girls?

Patti Pritchard
Winthrop

Ousting the loan sharks

Dear Editor:

Loan sharking (charging unlimited interest rates) was illegal — until the Trump administration made it legal last year. They allowed lenders to override state usury laws and charge up to 200% interest. They did it by creating a "fake lender rule." This allowed the loan sharks to disguise their loans as coming from a national bank. These banks are not subject to state interest limits.

The victims of the fake lender rule are desperate, low-income families and small businesses with difficulties getting credit. The worst lenders are the ones offering "payday

loans," so-called because they appeal to people who live from paycheck to paycheck.

Thankfully, Congress just overruled this despicable rule. It was a close vote. Apparently, Republican senators love loan sharks. Forty-seven of them voted to keep the rule in place. House Republicans love loan sharks even more. All but one (including our own Dan Newhouse!) voted to keep loan sharks in business.

I can understand Republicans giving the richest people and businesses gigantic tax cuts. Those are their biggest campaign contributors. But loan sharks? That is just plain mean. That includes you, Dan. Shame on you.

Randy Brook
Twisp

Pride and love

Dear Editor:

To the community — the showing of love, openness and genuine support was incredible Sunday during our 4th Annual Methow Valley Pride Festival in Twisp. Always a volunteer effort, this event hasn't happened since 2014. This year, our small but mighty planning team came together only two weeks ago. We are humbled and inspired by the support and "Yes we can" that came from everyone we approached.

There are many community members who came together to make this possible. We want to give thanks to just a few: Lindsey Bryson at TwispWorks, who created such an incredible space for us, Methow Arts for hosting a flag-making event, Old Schoolhouse Brewery, Fork, and Mountain Meals who opened just to keep the festival fed and in cold beverages, Twisp Daily Business who worked fast to get our flyers printed, DJ Nolan, Travis, and the Family Band who kept us moving, despite the heat, and Zach Cardenas for the always-amazing photobooth skills. For all of you who came out to walk and roll together, and who spoke from your hearts at the event, we are deeply grateful. See you next year!

Methow Pride 2021 Planning Team
Twisp

HELLO?

We're stress-testing our tourism infrastructure

In Winthrop, the pandemic has been good for business.

Yet some town merchants say they and the town were woefully unprepared to handle the size and behavior of the crowds.

Winthrop's joined the big leagues, becoming yet another tourist town struggling to keep tourism from shredding the cultural fabric and degrading the livability of the host community. The large influx triggered by the pandemic is a stress test of our human and physical infrastructure's capacity to support our tourism economy.

Have we been shown the Methow's future as a tourist mecca? Or is this merely a COVID-driven one-off? Either way, we're learning something about our fitness for the tourist trade.

Many Winthrop merchants are breaking sales records. By the end of May, the town's 3% share of the hotel/motel tax alone had brought in \$78,179. That's \$21,641 more than the same time last year.

In 2016, the tax produced \$39,542 by the end of May and just under \$178,000 annually. A decade ago, it was \$19,349 by the end of May and nearly \$110,000, at year's end. In 2021, this tax, paid by visitors, is expected to bring in at least \$180,000. The retail sales tax, paid by everyone, is expected to bring in \$355,000 by year's end, \$85,654 more than a decade ago. By the end of May, it had produced 52.3% of the expected annual town income from this tax.

These tax receipts tell a success story. It started in 1972, when Winthrop opened its arms to visitors arriving via the newly opened North Cascades Highway. Today Winthrop is home to North America's largest groomed Nordic trail system and the valley is a year-round, multi-sport recreation mecca.

No one foresaw today's surfeit of traffic nor the shortages of labor and affordable housing.

Residents nixed routing Highway 20 on the west side of the Methow River, where skaters

now glide on an outdoor, refrigerated ice rink. Today the unpoliced traffic backup at the four-way stop in downtown Winthrop can stretch to the Thriftway grocery store on one end of town and the rhythm-and-blues concert grounds on the other. Tempers flare.

The place to be

During the pandemic, some urbanites forced to work at home apparently decided the Methow was the place to do it. They're in the mix that's fueled eye-popping real estate price increases triggered by people fleeing urban life, pricing out ever more local buyers.

Some merchants delayed opening or cut back business hours because they couldn't find workers. Apparently, not enough workers live in the Methow to support the demands of our retail/tourist economy. They can't find housing and likely couldn't afford it if they did.

As a business plan, this mismatch seems unsustainable.

At its worst, an unanticipated deluge of maskless, uncommonly "rude," tourists swarmed over Winthrop's boardwalks, raising hackles, merchants say, while trails filled with visitors who often reacted suspiciously to friendly greetings.

Nothing magic about this Methow. Winthrop Chamber of Commerce president Abeline Hagee, who runs Trail's End Bookstore, is upbeat about Winthrop as a business venue. But until recently, she says, "Every morning I would wake up preparing myself for someone to be horrible." Most of the trouble merchants have had with visitors is about masks, she says.

Greg Wright, co-owner of the Iron Horse hat store, says he thinks Winthrop experienced "revenge tourism" by people angry about pandemic restrictions.

But he's told the town council and mayor that he faults them for not being more pro-active in attending to the problems inherent in hosting tourists. Better provisions must be made for disposal of

garbage and dog waste and for traffic control, and the town needs clearer messaging to make things easier and more welcoming for visitors, he argues.

Handling the stress

Winthrop Mayor Sally Ranzau lived in Estes Park, Colorado, for 40 years and has a background in retail. "One of the reasons I'm mayor is because I don't want Winthrop to become Estes Park," she says. That town grew, unconstrained, to become unrecognizable. "They had no planning in place."

She's trying to learn how many more people can live in Winthrop given the constraints on the town's water supply; Winthrop's grown from 380 to 500 residents in the last decade. The sewer system needs upgrading and an abandoned well must be rehabilitated for backup should the town's single, aging well fail, she says.

The town well is on the west side of the river. The only means of delivering water to downtown and residents east of the Methow and Chewuch rivers is a leaking pipe — in "urgent" need of replacement — hanging under the bridge near the Winthrop Physical Therapy and Fitness building, says the mayor.

A hurdle to addressing problems caused by tourism is that hotel/motel tax income is restricted to spending on marketing, Ranzau explains. Praiseworthy efforts are afoot to get legislative approval allowing that money to be used to solve tourism-created health and sanitation problems — i.e., garbage disposal and restrooms.

The town is hiring a third police officer, she adds, which should help with traffic control. But Ranzau rejects as unwelcoming the suggestions that the town post signs urging visitors to "be kind."

Tourist towns everywhere are writing their own versions of this story. Often it's one of culture clash and mismanaged tourism economies.

Maybe stress on small tourist towns is just what happens when Americans are confined to their own country.

Or is it a wake-up call? Hello?
Solveig Torvik lives near Winthrop.

Methow Valley News

PUBLISHED WEEKLY SINCE 1903

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Display advertising deadline for this newspaper is on the Thursday previous to publication at 5 p.m. Classified advertising deadline is Monday at noon. The deadline for news items is Monday at noon.

THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS (USPS Publication No. 343480) is published weekly by MVN Publishing, LLC, 502 S. Glover St., Twisp, WA 98856. Subscription rates: \$39 inside Okanogan County, \$50 outside of Okanogan County and \$65 outside of Washington state per year (in advance). Periodical class postage paid at Twisp, Washington, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS, P.O. Box 97, Twisp, WA 98856.

THE METHOW VALLEY NEWS does not refund subscription payments except to the extent that the newspaper might fail to meet its obligation to publish each week of the individual subscription period, in which case the prorated cost of those issues missed would be refunded.

Member of the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association

Front page banner photo by Steve Mitchell.