



**GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE REGISTER-GUARD**

## Licensed drivers mean safer roads

Oregon voters made a mistake in 2014 when they overwhelmingly overturned a new state law allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain driver licenses. Opponents of the law had blocked it from taking effect unless voters gave their consent. The opponents claimed the law would validate illegal immigration and thus encourage other unlawful behavior. In reality, it would have made our roads and streets safer for everyone.

A measure in the 2019 Legislature would rectify that situation. House Bill 2015 would allow residents of the state to obtain driver licenses without providing proof of citizenship so long as they met the other DMV requirements. The legislation makes sense on multiple fronts. If people are driving, it is in society's best interests to ensure they know, understand and heed Oregon's rules of the road.

Driving laws and customs vary widely around the world. For example, in the U.S., a left-turn signal indicates the driver intends to move into a left lane or turn to the left. In Mexico, that same signal sometimes is used to tell a driver behind you that it is safe to pass on the left.

Although some people are in the U.S. illegally, that does not mean they will ignore our driving laws. There is a tremendous difference between leaving one's country in search of a better life — often because of poverty and violence — and heeding local traffic laws.

Driving legally allows people to participate in the community — going to school, work, church, medical appointments and other activities. That participation builds civic connections and community safety, instead of forcing people to live in the shadows where they victimize or become victims. The proposed law also would benefit individuals who have lost their birth certificates or other documentation of citizenship.

Oregonians resisted a ballot measure that would have overturned our status as a "sanctuary state." That suggests residents are becoming more realistic about immigration issues, which are federal problems Oregon cannot solve regardless of our regulations on driving. HB 2015's supporters cover nearly half the Legislature, including a few Republicans, but it has not yet had a hearing in the Joint Committee on Transportation.

The bill would not apply to commercial licenses or learner permits, only to personal learner permits, driver licenses and ID cards. A person who lacks documentation of citizenship or legal immigration status could submit a written statement that he or she has not been assigned a Social Security number.

The resulting permit or license would be valid for driving in Oregon but would not comply with the federal Real ID Act and thus could not be used for going through airport security or entering federal buildings.

As was reported in a Register-Guard story last week, 12 states and D.C. already issued similar driver licenses and more are considering taking that route.

If HB 2015 becomes law, the sun will still rise every morning, the world will not implode and our state's streets and roads will be friendlier and safer.

## Without local newspapers, a town is just a place

I've fielded quite a lot of questions recently about the future of the Baker City Herald and The Observer in La Grande but I've found myself, often as not, pondering instead the newspapers' pasts. This is no small thing, no small span.

Our legacies are considerable, the history of our businesses as intertwined with our communities' as are mining and logging and farming and ranching.

The Herald traces its lineage to the Bedrock Democrat, which published its first issue on May 11, 1870. That was less than nine years after a group of prospectors discovered gold in a gulch near the present site of Baker City, which itself was started just six years before the Herald's forebear came off the press.

Which means, if I've done the math correctly (or, rather, if I've entered the proper figures into my calculator), that the Herald will celebrate its 150th anniversary a little more than a year from now.

The Observer is only a bit less venerable, with a journalism record dating to 1896.

And so when people ask me, in the tentative way most people use when broaching a potentially unpleasant topic, what I think is going to happen with the newspapers, I inevitably insert "optimistic" into my response.

And I do so in part because all those years and decades carry for me a considerable weight. The notion that these two businesses which have brought news to our communities for more than a century — indeed, for nearly a century and a half in the Herald's case — would cease to chronicle life in our corner of Oregon seems to me improbable, if not unthinkable.

Tragic, certainly. I understand, of course, that history, no matter how extensive or rich, is no guardian of the future.

When the Herald and The Observer debuted, the livery stable was still a profitable enterprise. But these days you're not going to find a place in downtown Baker City or La Grande or Enterprise suitable for tying up a horse for a couple hours while you visit the mercantile or perhaps slake your thirst with a cold beer.

The world moves on, and businesses once seen as necessary, even immortal, become obsolete.

In the case of the livery stable, and the horse-powered world it represents, the internal combustion engine was responsible for its demise.

Some would argue that the internet and its many digital tentacles will do — indeed, are already doing — to newspapers and other "traditional" media what the gas-fueled automobile and tractor did to the owners of



**FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK**  
JAYSON JACOBY, BAKER CITY HERALD EDITOR

livery stables and the makers of buggy whips (and of course buggies).

But when I compare the two I don't see anything like a parallel case.

That the internal combustion engine was an improvement over the horse in every way (except, I suppose, possibly the aesthetic, depending on whether your nose prefers the odor of dung over the sharp scent of distilled petroleum) is beyond dispute.

Yet I have seen nothing to convince me that the supposed digital replacements for newspapers — Facebook pages and their ilk — even in the most generous definition constitute an ersatz substitute.

I don't question their popularity, to be sure. That ubiquitous blue lowercase "f" occupies my computer and smartphone screens too.

But I shudder at the prospect of having to rely solely on any online source, with their anonymity-fueled exaggerations and infantile character assassinations, to tell me what my city council or school board is up to.

The only digital exceptions to this, in my view, are the websites that newspapers themselves, including the Herald and The Observer, produce — electronic replicas of the quality journalism we print on paper three days each week.

The ultimate proof of the continuing relevance and popularity of our newspapers, I believe, is that both remain profitable despite the immense technological changes that the internet era has brought.

I understand why readers are curious about the future of the Herald and The Observer. It is a natural reaction after reading last week that our parent company, Western Communications, just a couple months after making a Chapter 11 bankruptcy filing, now is trying to sell its newspapers.

The key word here, though, is "sell." You sell only things that have value, of course — and the Herald and The Observer are valuable.

I mean this in two ways. There is the monetary value, and it reflects the willingness of businesses to pay us to advertise their products and services in our pages. They do this because you, and our thousands of other subscribers, are willing to pay us to learn what's happening in their communities.

This has been the case, for the Herald, almost as far back as the Civil War. And it has continued to be so, for both newspapers, through wars and droughts and depressions, a role

we have played with the reliability of August's torrid heat and the October yellowing of the tamaracks, a consistency which has few, if any, peers.

But our newspapers are also valuable in ways that can't be quantified in dollars and cents or even in years, but which are, I believe, equally and perhaps even more important than the numbers on a spreadsheet or a calendar.

The Herald and The Observer represent the heart, rendered in ink and paper, of the communities whose people and businesses and institutions we have followed and described and narrated for so long in ways that generate laughter and tears, agreement and hearty, respectful dissent.

There is no better way to appreciate this awesome span than to walk the room-spanning rows of volumes that bind every issue of our publications over many decades (the collections, alas, are not complete, as archiving during the 19th century was not as thorough).

There are hundreds of these books and each is quite a stout thing, requiring considerable effort to pry it from between its neighbors and lug its barbell-like weight to a table.

(And a wide table it should be, as each volume stands about as tall as a kindergartner.)

The sheer volume of information that the newspapers have compiled confounds my ability to comprehend. I feel a trifle fuzzy in the head when I ponder it, as I do when I try to understand the number of stars and galaxies in the universe.

The numbers in this case don't require so many digits, of course. But it is still an immense chronicle. Imagine how many thousands of people appear in this long and continuing story, how many of their triumphs and tragedies, how many games won and lost, how many faces smiling on the front page, how many lives bookended with a birth announcement and an obituary in the very same newspaper, the former typed by a reporter who like as not had already gone to the grave by the time the latter was printed.

The Herald and The Observer were there for it all. And through it all, we have depended, as a person depends on oxygen, on our communities.

I'd like to believe their residents feel the same about the newspapers. I previously referred to the papers as "ours" and I mean that in the best and the purest sense of the word. I chose that all-inclusive pronoun because I believe the newspapers, in the most elemental way, belong to us all, as do the other persistent institutions, the schools and churches and libraries, without which a town is just a place.

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