

OUR VIEW

We’re going fishing for the big ones

If you have been reading Oregon news the last couple of years, you probably noticed a trend: The most interesting news stories are coming out of rural Oregon, often Eastern Oregon.

Oregon Public Broadcasting in early November published an expansive look at Grant County, where the sheriff’s political views and official acts have split the community in the wake of the Malheur occupation.

Baker County sheriff’s deputies in July arrested Colby James Hedman, 23, on multiple counts of vehicle theft. The ensuing investigation connected Hedman to the murder of Kyle Jordan Martz, 35, an adviser at Whitman College, Walla Walla. According to court records, Hedman dismembered his victim and stole his car.

I began covering a court case back in Umatilla County in 2018 that involved fraud and elder abuse and led the district attorney’s office to file motions prohibiting one circuit judge from presiding over any criminal cases. Those circumstances continue to produce waves there, including a Bar complaint against the district attorney’s office.

Right here in Union County, Grande Ronde Hospital and a former cardiac surgeon were defendants in a federal whistleblower lawsuit. We have a three-way race for sheriff, the first time in perhaps 30 years, and one candidate, Bill Miller, used to work for the incumbent, Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen, who is seeking a fifth term. With the filing deadline not until March 10, the field could grow even more interesting.

Today’s Observer offers an overarching look at the most pressing issue in La Grande: the delay in opening the Union County Warming Station. And The Observer itself has been a big story, from the bankruptcy of its former owner, Western Communications, to the sale of The Observer and related newspapers to the East Oregonian Media Group.

Let’s be frank — Western Communications did The Observer, its employees and this community no favors. The Observer crew has been through a lot. They have moxie. That counts for something.

Then I jump in, my first go as an editor, a native of Pendleton who was an English major in college and is something of a film snob. But I’m keen to work with this small but hardy news team, and I’m committed to capturing the stories that matter to the community.

We’re already begun pushing out more hard news coverage the last couple of weeks, a trend I aim to continue. We also obtained public records to find out what was happening at the Flying J restaurant. Public records are a reporter’s bread and butter, so expect more stories using them.

We’re also going to explore bringing on local contributing columnists and letting our reporters produce regular columns as well.

Other changes are going to be more subtle, and not all of this will happen at once. No doubt I’m going to stumble. Not every decision I make will be good. But I’m a big fan of science. If your experiment only proves what you know, you didn’t learn much.

For those readers who have endured the tumultuous waters the paper has navigated this past year or so, you have our thanks. For those who are new, welcome aboard. The sailing remains bumpy. Maybe that’s the only kind of sailing anymore for newspapers.

That’s OK. We’ll get to where we can stand in the fast water so we can fish for the big stories. I don’t think you can catch the big ones if you’re out of the mainstream.

— Phil Wright is the editor of The Observer.



MY VOICE

Animals have an ally in the Trump administration

On Sept. 10, the Environmental Protection Agency issued a memorandum calling for the agency to make the reduction of animal testing a priority.

Tens of millions of animals are used yearly to test drugs, cosmetics and other household items. Dozens of species are used in experiments with the majority of them having been purpose-bred. Most animals are killed at the end of the experiments, if they live to the end of the study. In 2019, we no longer need to test toothpaste, shampoo and eye shadow on animals. The Food and Drug Administration does not require the use of animals in cosmetic testing.

When trying to combat human diseases it is common to genetically manipulate mice, but human and mouse genes obviously behave differently, and 90% of drugs that test safe and effective in animals later fail in human clinical trials. And it’s not just mice that are being used in experiments in the United States and in other countries. Tens of thousands of dogs and cats are still being used in experiments in the United States today. Dozens of dog breeds are used but beagles are the breed of choice for most researchers as they tend not to bite when they are being hurt. Using human cells and computer models is clearly more compassionate and these methods are also proving to be more effective.

The EPA’s memorandum calls for the agency to reduce funding of mammal studies by 30% by 2025 and eliminate all mammal study funding by 2035. The memorandum also “directs the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention and the Office of Research and Development to prioritize ongoing efforts, and to direct existing resources, toward additional activities that will demonstrate measurable impacts in

the reduction of animal testing while ensuring protection of human health and the environment.” The EPA further announced \$4.25 million in funding for the development and use of alternative test methods to reduce, refine and/or replace vertebrate animal testing. And it’s about time. Animal testing is needlessly cruel and obsolete.

The Trump administration should receive full credit for leading this ongoing campaign against animal cruelty. Trump and his administration are pushing common sense changes that benefit animals, and the president is getting virtually no praise for it. To the president and his supporters, it’s a common refrain.

The president’s daughter-in-law Lara Trump is a longtime, outspoken and hardworking advocate for animals. This spring, Lara Trump along with former Republican Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi and Florida Republican Reps. Brian Mast and Matt Gaetz backed a federal crackdown on inhumane puppy mill practices, including commercial puppy breeding operations.

In December 2018 President President Trump signed the “Dog and Cat Meat Prohibition Act” into law in a groundbreaking victory for animals in the United States and the world. Before this was signed into law, it was still actually legal in 44 states to eat dogs and cats. The law prohibits the shipping, sale and transportation of animals for the “purpose of slaughter for human consumption.”

On Nov. 25, Trump signed the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act, which criminalizes certain acts of animal cruelty into federal law. Trump and fellow Republicans have also backed other animal welfare initiatives including a move to reverse euthanasia

About the author

Ryan Moore is a writer, songwriter and social media strategist. Ryan has adopted a cat and rabbits that were victims of animal testing from Beagle Freedom Project and a dog from a puppy mill that was shut down. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

plans for horses on federal lands and “pets for vets,” which is a program to help our veterans who are suffering from PTSD and other ailments by teaming them up with shelter animals. The program is a big win-win to save and help veterans and shelter animals.

Helping animals is a nonpartisan issue with bipartisan support. Neither Republicans nor Democrats want animals to suffer needlessly, and we need to work together where we agree instead of just blaming the opposing party and wanting them to fail. A lot more needs to be done to reduce and end animal suffering in the United States, but it is abundantly clear that animals now have a strong and sincere advocate in the White House.

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