

OUR VIEW

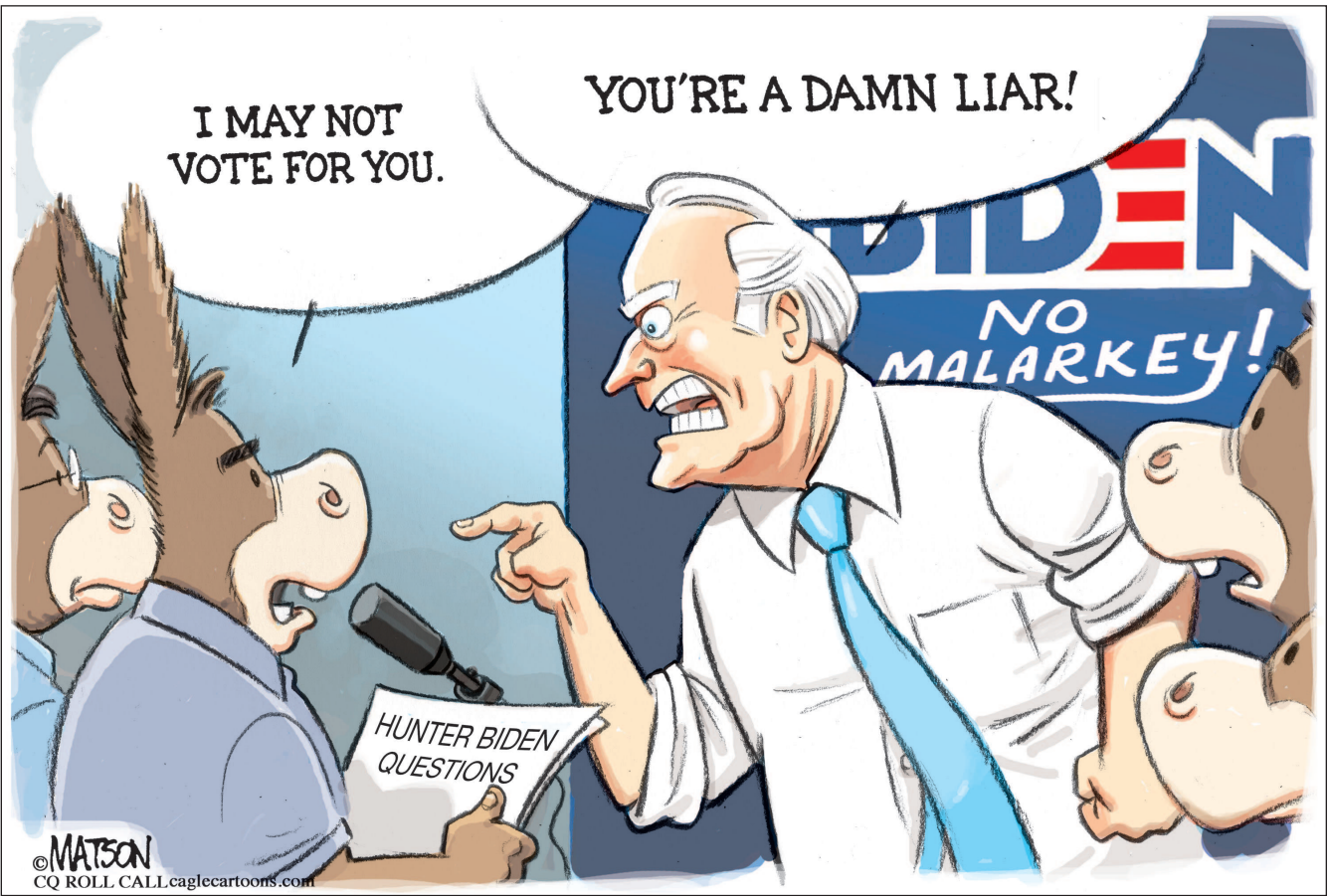
Forest plan and public opinions

The U. S. Forest Service is having another go at writing new long-term management plans for the three national forests in the Blue Mountains and this time, officials hope, things will be different. Whether this new approach yields the success that has eluded the agency for more than a decade, however, is no certain thing.

The Forest Service has been working for about 15 years to write new management plans for the Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Malheur national forests. Those documents serve as guidelines for forest officials as they make separate decisions about specific projects, such as timber sales, livestock grazing and recreation projects. Although management plans are supposed to be replaced every 10 to 15 years, the current plans for the three national forests in the Blue Mountains date to 1990. The Forest Service unveiled new plans in June 2018. But after hearing complaints about the plans from a variety of perspectives — some opponents contend the Forest Service didn’t propose enough logging, while others complained the agency wasn’t doing enough to preserve forests, among other issues — the agency’s regional forester, Glenn Casamassa, announced in March 2019 that the agency would restart the process.

The centerpiece of the Forest Service’s new approach is the Blues Intergovernmental Council. During the past year county commissioners from the region have been meeting with Forest Service officials to discuss ways to ensure that residents of the Blue Mountains will be involved in the planning process, and that their concerns will be considered as Forest Service employees write the management plans. “The attempt here is to create just a more open, inclusive approach where the Forest Service is working closely with our communities in order to make sure that we are developing a plan that is gonna stand the test of time,” said Eric Watrud, supervisor of the Umatilla National Forest.

But it’s not as though the Forest Service’s previous attempts to write new plans were not “open” and “inclusive,” to borrow a pair of adjectives from Watrud. Indeed, as federal law requires, the process gave residents several chances to express their opinions about draft versions of the plans either by attending public meetings or by submitting written comments. And hundreds of people availed themselves of those opportunities. The concept behind the Blues Intergovernmental Council is sound. Using elected county commissioners as a sort of liaison between the public and the Forest Service could give residents a stronger sense that their comments are not only considered, but incorporated into the final product. But at some point Forest Service officials need to acknowledge the management plans will inevitably prove unpopular, in some respects, to just about everyone. Such is the nature of managing land on behalf of the public.



The focus now has to be on news

Since taking the role of editor at The Observer, my list of changes to improve what we do continues to grow. Some of that is mundane — placing “also” before the verb in a sentence and getting away from the alphabet soup of acronyms and initialisms. Some are more substantial, such as pressing for deeper coverage of the local scene. Most of my focus as been on how we deliver news and what we report. I spent the better part of a decade covering crime, courts and crashes, so I’m partial to breaking news and hard news. For the time being, most of my focus will remain on our news content. Some readers have expresses dissatisfaction — that’s putting it lightly — with the opinion and editorial content of the paper. If only that were as easy to fix as making sure we run a liberal column one day and a conservative the next. I’m only beginning to surf through which columnists are available to us. More than striking some balance between political sides, I’m interested in who writes well. If that turns out to be a conservative, a liberal or someone without a political bent, so be it.



FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK
PHIL WRIGHT

I suspect the op-ed pages have experienced a bit of continental drift the past year or so, another side effect of the former owner of The Observer. I find that confusing, and I know some readers do as well. The “My Voice” section we need to reserve for local columnists and not someone who is nationally syndicated. We’ve messed up on that and are working to do better. “Our Voice” is the editorial voice of The Observer. Without a local editor, there have not been many local editorials. I’m changing that. Some of our letters to the editor have come from out-of-state folks who make something of a point to publish their views far and wide. I want our letters to be as local as possible, so if a guy from New York City writes us and has no local connection, I don’t see much reason to publish that. This Friday is the first installment of “Across the Fence” under my watch. I

changed the name from “On the Fence” because most folks are not on the fence about much. I also met with local Republican and Democrat leaders that provide these columns and stressed the need to keep the focus local. While there could be exceptions to that, I find there is plenty to discuss here in our backyard. We need to build consistency throughout The Observer and that’s one reason we’re in the early stages of working on our own style book using AP style as the base. I like consistency. Readers like consistency. The concept needs to be central to every local newspaper’s brand. That effort, however, may be inconsistent for a while longer. I think our readers want to know what is happening. I think they rely on The Observer to deliver the news, so those wheels are getting the most grease. When the news wheel is spinning well enough, I can shift more attention to editorial content. If readers are checking out the local paper to make sure the editorial pages line up with their political views, then I’m probably the wrong guy for this job.

Phil Wright is editor of The Observer.

Your views

Koltuv: How about it, Mr. Adelsberger?

To the Editor:
I wish to commend Phil Wright and The Observer for both the new depth of reporting that you have shown in covering the issue of homelessness and the recent misguided appeal of the Warming Station’s permit, and for the editorial stance you took in calling on Al Adelsberger and the other three business owners not to appeal the La Grande City Council’s decision that their appeal had no merit. While your actions here have been, in my opinion, positive, I think your editorial stopped one step short. I think your editorial board and all citizens should call on Adelsberger to publicly commit now that he will not appeal the council’s decision so work can begin now to get the site ready to serve our homeless friends rather than having to wait for the 21-day appeal period to expire. Adelsberger and his partners have already delayed the opening of the warming station by weeks. Allowing three

more weeks to elapse as the weather gets colder and colder is unconscionable especially when common sense, common decency and two governmental review boards have found their objections to be without merit. So, how about it, Mr. Adelsbeger? Will you publicly drop your appeal now and allow the work to provide food and shelter to people in our community who are living in the streets to begin immediately?

Max Koltuv
La Grande

Goddard: State champion title earned with hard work

To the Editor:
First and foremost, let me say I am proud to be a member of this great community. I am honored and thrilled to have been a part of the success of our football team. My gratitude goes to the young men who gave us this great experience that we will remember and enjoy for the rest of our lives.

They have provided us with a new identity: state champions. That phrase describes the love and sacrifice the team endured to get us to this point. The early morning and late evening practices were sometimes brutal, but they persevered with hard work and dedication. Their parents, Mr. Goodman and Mr. Mendoza not only supported us but provided guidance throughout this journey. A big thank you to all of our fans who braved the cold to travel out of town. Coach McIlmoil and his staff did an outstanding job in preparation for this year. Rich’s commitment to this team started years ago. We coached these boys from the seventh grade to their senior year and realized, during this time, that they were something special. Rich was dedicated to this team and the potential they had to become state champions. With help and support, all things are possible. This team is living proof.

Orv Goddard
La Grande

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