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Good day to our valued subscriber Sharon Tarter of Elgin

Congressman hopes politics align on dams

Proposal includes removing earthen berms at 4 Lower Snake River hydroelectric dams

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Nearly two decades ago, Republican President George W. Bush stood on a bank of the Snake River near Pasco, Washington, and declared that four hydroelectric dams would not be torn down on his watch, though many blamed them for killing endangered salmon.

This month, Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson of Idaho issued a bold plan that called for removing those same dams to save the salmon. In between those two acts were decades of litigation that show no sign of ending and \$17 billion worth of improvements to the dams that did little to help fish.

Now the question is: Can Simpson's plan win approval from Congress and the Biden administration and help save an iconic Pacific Northwest species from extinction?

Other Republicans are vowing to save the dams. Democrats have come out in support of Simpson's plan, which calls for spending \$33 billion to breach four dams, replace the lost hydroelectric energy with other sources and ensure that irrigation, river navigation and flood control will continue as before.

The issue of what to do with the Snake River dams has long divided the Pacific Northwest, with Democrats generally siding with saving the salmon and Republicans saying it's foolish to remove hydropower resources in the era of climate change.

But Lindsay Slater, Simpson's chief of staff, said the political winds are blowing in favor of a solution to this decades-long controversy.

For one thing, the Biden administration is preparing a massive economic relief package for the nation, and Simpson wants the Northwest to designate this solution to the salmon issues for the region's share of the package, Slater said. For another, Democratic control of the Senate has propelled numerous longtime senators from the Northwest into committee leadership positions for the first time in years, he said.

"There is all this seniority in the Northwest," Slater said, pointing to Washington Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell and Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden.

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Sheriff Cody Bowen stands in the Union County Sheriff's Office in La Grande on Friday, Feb. 19, 2021. Bowen won the election in November 2020.

Changing of the sheriff

Cody Bowen brings new eyes, new thinking to Union County Sheriff's Office

By PHIL WRIGHT
The Observer

LA GRANDE — A little dust and dirt showed on the black polo shirt Union County's new sheriff wore, a reflection of the work he's been helping with just feet from his cramped office.

Sheriff Cody Bowen took time late Friday afternoon, Feb. 19, for an interview with The Observer. Three days earlier the lanky Bowen kicked a hole through a wall in a nearby room, signaling the start of some demolition and renovation. The move was as much symbolic as literal.

That wall divided the break areas for the patrol deputies and their supervisors, creating small spaces for both. Removing it and adding some other upgrades, he said, makes the space more useful and roomy. It also shows he wants the sheriff's office to function as a team.

Now almost two months into the post, Bowen said he aims to be a hands-on sheriff, out on patrol and available, who is not looking to micromanage his staff. He said the supervisors in the sheriff's office are experienced and capable of overseeing patrol, correction and dispatching services.

"I want them to be able to do their jobs,"



Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen leans over a piece of drywall in the sheriff's office on Friday, Feb. 19, 2021. One of Bowen's first acts as sheriff was to begin making renovations to the headquarters in La Grande, including tearing down a wall between deputies and supervisors.

he said. "That's why they're there. Let them shine."

Getting into the job

Bowen jumped into the race for sheriff in late January 2020 to defeat his then boss.

Boyd Rasmussen was seeking a fifth term amid rumors the Oregon Department of Justice was investigating him for misusing the office. The DOJ in late April revealed it looked into several accusations against

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U.S. pandemic toll: in 1 year, half a million lives

By JOCELYN GECKER
Associated Press

Just one year ago, America had no idea.

Life in February 2020 still felt normal. Concern was building about a mystery respiratory illness that had just been named COVID-19. There was panic buying, and a sense of trepidation. Yet it was tempered by a large dose of American optimism. The coronavirus still felt like a foreign problem, even as U.S. authorities recorded the country's first known death from the virus.

Precisely a year later, America is hurtling toward a horrifying milestone of 500,000 deaths from COVID-19.

A relentless march of death and tragedy has warped time and memory. It became easy to forget the shocking images, so many day after day, of scenes once unthinkable in a country of such wealth and power. As the year unfolded, Associated Press photographers formed a pictorial record of suffering, emotion and resilience. It shows the year that changed America.

Looking back, we can see it happened in phases.

The crisis felt far away

Last February, Americans still greeted each other with

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Medical workers treat a patient on April 20, 2020, whom emergency medical personnel delivered from a nursing home showing symptoms of COVID-19 at a hospital in Yonkers, New York.

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WEATHER Full forecast on the back of B section

Tonight
24 Low
A little snow

Wednesday
38/19
Periods of sun

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Email story ideas to news@lagrandeobserver.com.
More contact info on Page 4A.



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