

From the Editor  
**We're rolling  
 — finally —  
 at full staff**

For the first time in months The Observer's newsroom is operating with a full staff.

Diligent sports editor Ronald Bond left in October 2020 to take the helm of one of our sister papers, the Wallowa County Chieftain. Soon after, we had Kaleb Lay here and cranking out stories, but he then departed Feb. 5 for other endeavors. We had other changes in between those events.

But we hired Alex Wittwer on Feb. 8. His photography skills made an immediate improvement to the look of the newspaper.



**PHIL WRIGHT**  
OBSERVER EDITOR

But the rub is, the EO Media Group, our parent company, hired Alex as a multimedia regional journalist who would produce content for all our related publications in Eastern Oregon. We've not been able to move him into that role because our newsroom was one reporter shy.

That is changing with the arrival of Davis Carbaugh.

He started working as The Observer's newest reporter on Friday, May 7, after driving all the way from Virginia Beach, Virginia, for what amounts to his first real newspaper job. Davis has a bachelor of arts in communication from Virginia Tech, where he spent the two years before coming here as the sports editor for the university's independent, student-run newspaper, the Collegiate Times.

So he has some sports reporting chops.

I know there are readers looking forward to more sports coverage, and now we have a reporter with the ability to deliver that content. You can check out his coverage of the La Grande-Baker baseball game in today's paper. But Carbaugh is not just going to be a sports reporter. He will cover a variety of topics, from local governments to summer events and whatever else we throw his way.

We however are not going back to the days of lengthy game recaps. We will have some recaps, but they will be shorter and punchier. Our sports reporting will continue to focus on features rather than game play.

Still, we now will have local, fresh content for sports in the paper and the website, [www.lagrandeobserver.com](http://www.lagrandeobserver.com).

Some of our newsroom members, though, remain constants.

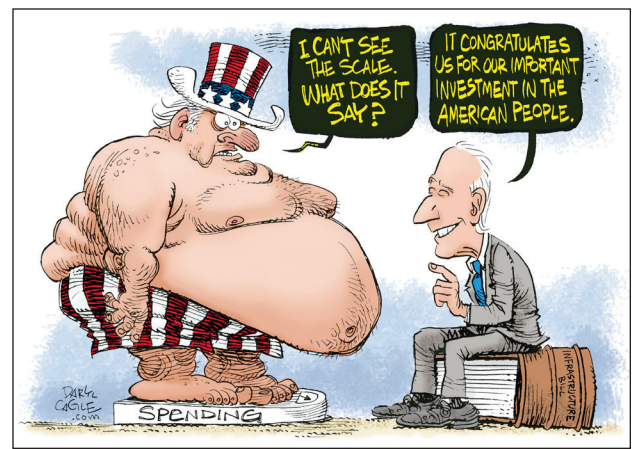
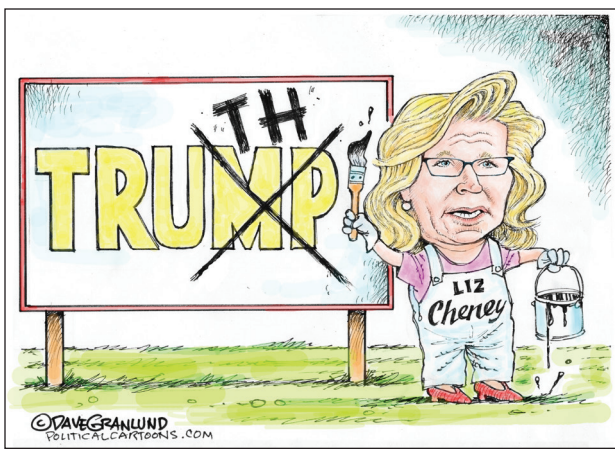
Lisa Lester Kelly continues to be the newsroom clerk, a job title that belies all she does — copyediting, putting in obituaries, handling letters to the editor, providing content for the paper and GO! Magazine.

And of course the venerable Dick Mason still cranks out more news stories than just about any reporter I can think of.

With more than half our newsroom new at this place (I'm still rather new here), we're taking steps to deliver a more consistent news product. To that end, I'm implementing a fact-checking protocol. You might think those are given in newsrooms today, but they are not.

And we now have our first iteration of a style and format guide for The Observer. We are a member of The Associated Press, and we follow AP style overall. But like community newspapers everywhere, we have a bundle of organizations, local governments, events and more that we need to be consistent with reporting on and identifying. Having and adhering to a style guide is another step to delivering consistency.

That was a major goal of mine when I took this job about 18 months ago. Consistency, however, is not something we just obtain. Rather, it's a goal we work toward in every edition. With our staff and procedures now, I'm more confident we can up the quality of what we provide to you, our readers.



Other Views

**Senate Bill 499 should become law**



**EARL BAIN**  
SB 499 PROPONENT

For over six years of my life, I was wrongfully incarcerated in an Oregon prison. I was convicted in Malheur County of a crime I did not commit and falsely labeled as having abused my own child. I was living a nightmare, but I couldn't wake up.

Last year, Gov. Kate Brown granted me a pardon on the grounds of my innocence, the first time she has issued a pardon on that basis. I no longer carry the labels of "felon" or "sex offender" but the problems stemming from my wrongful conviction are far from over.

Due to my conviction, I lost the good career I had in the military and can't go back to it. I am a combat veteran who served my country in Afghanistan, but that didn't count for anything when the state took everything from me and sent me to prison.

Since returning to the community, I have spent thousands of dollars on polygraph tests, which my parole officer repeatedly forced me to take, assuming I was lying when I said I was innocent.

The greatest loss, though, was

time with my daughters while they were growing up. During my time in prison, I was not allowed to see or talk to them at any time. I wasn't even allowed to send them a letter.

Trying to overcome all of this has been a tremendous struggle for me and my family. The stigma of my wrongful conviction is such that every time I meet someone new, I have had to worry about what they are thinking about me. I have had to try to find words to explain that I'm not who my conviction said I was.

I'm free now, and my innocence has been recognized, but I'm still trying to rebuild my life. I had to start over when I got out of prison and the challenges I face have not come to an end just because I no longer have the wrongful conviction on my record.

People like me are just asking for a fair shot. We lost everything and it was the criminal justice system that took it from us. I believe it's time for Oregon to recognize exonerates and address the harm that has been done to us. I am an innocent man, but those are just words. How can the state be allowed to take everything away from me and shrug its shoulders after I am exonerated?

Fortunately, there's an opportunity for Oregon to do the right thing. A bill currently being consid-

ered by legislators, Senate Bill 499 by Sen. Kim Thatcher, R-Keizer, would provide a fixed amount of \$65,000 in compensation per year of wrongful incarceration to exonerates who meet certain criteria, as well as \$25,000 for years spent on parole, post-prison supervision or the sex offender registry.

Our neighbors in Idaho passed similar legislation this year, and the governor recently signed that bill into law. If Idaho can do it, so should Oregon.

Seeing SB 499 become law would mean more than just financial compensation that would allow me to get back on my feet and give me a chance to support my family the way I should have been doing all those years I was locked up.

This bill represents the state of Oregon admitting they sometimes get it wrong. And for wrongfully convicted people like me, that means more than words can say.

*Earl Bain was wrongfully convicted in Malheur County in 2009 and spent six years in prison. After the complaining witness in his case recanted her story, with the help of the Oregon Innocence Project he was pardoned on the grounds of innocence by Gov. Kate Brown in August 2020.*

Letters

**Help stop the alien plant invasion**

Have you ever stopped to pull and toss a sticker out of your socks? Or pulled a burr or stick-tight out of your dog's haircoat? Kicked off your boots, or emptied pant cuffs or pockets into the wind? Transported livestock? Carried home bedding plants? Hauled animal feeds? Pulled a trailer out of a weed patch and headed down the highway? These are just a few of the ways you may have inadvertently spread weeds.

Now Union County voters have an opportunity to intervene. Please vote yes for the five-year weed control bond. Help stop the alien invasion.

Ann Brown  
Union

**Trees make La Grande beautiful**

I enjoyed The Observer's front-page feature article May 1 about the trees of our community. It was such

a complete article that with paper in hand we should be able to go out and check out these trees, and further appreciate them.

Teresa Gustafson, I am grateful for your continuing work, pushing ahead to plant trees this year. It continues to amaze me what a difference trees make, especially this time of year. La Grande is so beautiful right now.

Jo Carmichael  
La Grande

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