

OPINION

The opinions expressed in the letters below are “your voice,” and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the *Columbia Gorge News*, its staff, publisher or advertisers.

YOUR VOICE

Spirit of Grace garden

Wow, what a wonderful surprise to see the “Two Churches and a Garden” article in the paper today!

When I was hired to coordinate the Hood River Spirit of Grace garden in 2015, I remember walking around in a field of grass, looking at the space and trying to imagine all the possibilities.

At the time, I thought my job was to create a garden and organize volunteers, but it soon became clear that it was so much more than that.

Cultivating the earth is part of human survival, and sharing this experience with other members of this community changed my life forever. The joys of gardening, and the benefits of eating fresh, organic food, form strong connections and have the power to uplift the human soul.

I want to take a moment here to acknowledge the many people who made the garden possible in those first three years. This was a labor of love by so many individuals, and it is amazing to see this project still continuing to blossom.

If you’re interested in participating in the Spirit of Grace Garden, stop by the FISH Food Bank at 1130 Tucker Road or send an email to Marly Beck at fishgardencv@gmail.com. Thank you!

Susan Randolph
Hood River

Disappointed

Referring to the Feb. 17 letter to the editor titled “Spare Me, GOP,” I am extremely disappointed with *Columbia Gorge News* and especially the Editors Note that was added, that suggested the Klickitat County Republicans support the formation of an “armed anti-government organization in Klickitat County.”

The letter claimed the source of this support was a KCR (Klickitat County Republicans) Facebook page post by KCR Chair Lisa Evans inviting readers to join a non-partisan Liberty First University Online Constitutional Training with KrisAnn Hall.

The Klickitat County Republican Party has been vocal condemning violence conducted in the Capitol as well as Portland, Seattle and elsewhere. Claims suggesting that Klickitat County Republicans are “anti-science, anti-truth, anti-democracy and anti-governing ideology” (whatever that means) are patently false.

We are strongly constitutionalists, believing that the Bill of Rights are to protect our God given rights.

While our approach to governing is different from those espoused by the Democratic Party, we fully

support their First Amendment Rights to free speech.

We do not support attempts to restrict our God given rights. At a minimum, the *Columbia Gorge News* should have reached out to Lisa Evans before publishing such a hostile and incorrect letter to the editor.

Peter Leon
Wishram

An era ended

The era of half truths, and outright lies that the Trump administration once jokingly dubbed “alternative facts” ended on Jan. 20. An era ended, but not before the nation watched in horror on Jan. 6 as the “stop the steal” mob violently smashed their way into the US Capitol and brought our democracy to a shocked standstill.

That mob was incited and inflamed by the last and biggest lie that Trump told; the lie that the election was stolen. Democratic process was fractured that day but not broken.

Impeachment was necessary to document the truth about Trump’s role in the insurrection.

In the end, the evidence in the Senate trial forced Republican leader Mitch McConnell to publicly refute Trump’s lie that the election was stolen. McConnell’s speech laid the blame for the violent actions of the insurrection mob at Trump’s very feet.

Every lawmaker and every voter should think deeply about what McConnell belatedly concluded. If we merely go back to politics as usual without examining our personal responsibilities in promoting truth and exposing lies, the passions of future mobs may yet again threaten our democracy.

Perhaps the novelty of years of Trump’s little lies or “alternative facts” conditioned too many of us to accept lies as a normal thing, just Trump being Trump.

Consider a few examples: Trump at a rally claimed, “I brought so many new car plants and jobs to Michigan;” fact, there were no new auto plants and actually 3,000 fewer jobs for auto workers by election time. Or Trump’s claim, “China will pay for the tariffs;” the reality is that importers pay the tariffs and then we all pay the higher prices for imported goods. His repeated claim, “Mexico is paying for the border wall;” fact, American taxpayers are paying for it. Trump’s claim, “COVID-19 will magically go away in the spring;” fact, by October, 220,000 were dead.

Later on Trump mocked the

Relaxed goat



A mountain goat — *Oreamnus americanus* — on Highway 14, photographed by Hood River’s Stephen Datnoff, who said the goat “was just hanging out on a rocky ledge about 175 feet above Highway 14, just west of the turnabout near Carson.” Photo courtesy Stephen Datnoff

press coverage of raging infections and deaths, lamenting, “COVID, COVID, COVID, you won’t hear another word about it the day after the November election;” the tragic truth is 496,000 Americans are now dead.

James McKe
White Salmon

Vaccine comfort

Yesterday (Feb. 24) was the day my husband and I received our first COVID vaccinations.

We were delighted about how well thought out and smoothly it went. Our initial sign-up was very easy. As soon as we qualified by age, I called the Health Department and was told to go on their website, which I did. Right at the top of the page is a banner that says, “CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP FOR A COVID VACCINE.” We clicked on that and filled in the information requested and I was able to pick a time and date for me and then my husband. Doesn’t get much easier than that. I was delighted.

We drove to the college. As we got up the hill near the college, we saw the first of the signs directing us to the building. What a big building! It was just right for the needed space. Once we got inside, we were guided by smiling, friendly people. Everything was explained to us

and we were moved from station to station where we got instructions and filled out paperwork. Hardly any waiting and there was a great big window through which we could see the landscape. Once we got our shots, we waited 15 minutes, during which time I noted the screened area with a couple of beds for folks who might need them. Not being used, but available. There was also some food available for those who might need it.

All in all, it was a great experience and we already have our appointments for our second shot. This was as memorable as getting the sugar cube with the polio vaccine when we were kids.

Thank you for making it all possible.

Sandee and John Burbank
Mosier

Oppose SB 16

Oregon Senator Findley is on the committee hearing Senate Bill 16. This bill would violate Oregon’s land use laws by allowing up to 100 new houses not related to farming to be scattered across 200 acres of exclusive farm use lands in Eastern Oregon bordering Idaho.

These are productive farming and ranching lands. Farming and ranching make up Malheur County’s largest job provider, generating over \$350 million annually in agriculture

sales.

Housing and food production should not be played against one another in this way by treating working lands as vacant lands.

This bill would harm the eastern Oregon border region permanently. It would take investment away from Ontario, which has plenty of land available for residential development.

Please ask Senator Findley to oppose SB 16. Allowing homes on farmland that are not related to farming runs counter to Oregon’s land use program and sets a terrible precedent.

Sheila Dooley
Mosier

Vaccines all around

I have had the good fortune to be an office volunteer in Hood River County and a vaccinator in Goldendale, helping get vaccines into as many arms as possible as well as being the recipient of both vaccines myself. In every contact, whether I was the patient or the volunteer, I met with incredibly organized, giving, professional and caring people who understand their value in helping to end this international emergency.

When I have gone to the site to sign up as a volunteer, many

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It is your opinion, let it be heard

Recent questions to our letter to the editor rules have prompted us to clarify our policy.

We have encouraged those who disagree or agree with letters printed to share their voice and send us letters for publication in *Columbia Gorge News*. Our newspaper offers civil discourse on our opinion page.

The *Columbia Gorge News* opinion page is our platform for letters from readers. It is a playground where you can come out and play, meet new people, and most importantly write something you want to share with readers.

You might not always like what is said on the playground, but everyone is invited to participate.

We encourage letters from our readers, all of our readers. We do not necessarily agree with all the letters submitted, but as long as they are not malicious, and do not have inaccurate or misleading information, we print them.

If a letter is in question, we have a few simple (most of the time) steps we can take to get it printed:

(COMMON LETTER) Johnny sent in a letter about school lunch. He had an opinion about why the

school serves fish sticks instead of pizza. He hates fish sticks and says most of his friends do, too.

Columbia Gorge News will call Johnny and let him know we received his letter. We will ask him to clarify how he knows his friends hate fish sticks; he says they all throw them in the garbage together on fish-stick day. Good enough. *Columbia Gorge News* agrees to print the letter.

(LETTER INCLUDING FACTS) Johnny sent in a letter about school lunch, with the same information as before. But he goes on to say the fish sticks are wasting the school’s funding because most end up in the garbage when served at lunch. He also said the average money wasted each day on fish sticks was \$xxx dollars. *Columbia Gorge News* will call Johnny and ask him to clarify how he knows how much money was wasted by the school on the days they serve fish sticks. Johnny says he did some research and agrees to share his research with us. CGN reviews the research and agrees to print Johnny’s letter with an editor’s note citing where Johnny found his information.

(LETTER INCLUDING PERSONAL ATTACK) Johnny sent in his fish stick letter, with information on his research, but went on to say he blames the school lunch server, Ms. Smith, because she always serves him extra fish sticks. *Columbia Gorge News* will call Johnny and let him know personal attacks are not allowed on our opinion page, and that he needs to edit or remove this part of the letter before we will print it. Johnny agrees to do so. (In some cases, simply removing names can fix this issue. Johnny could revise the letter to blame the school for serving him extra fish sticks without personally naming Ms. Smith.)

(LETTER INCLUDING INFORMATION THAT ISN’T BACKED UP) Johnny sent in his fish stick letter, with information on his research, but without the personal attack. He goes on to say he hates the school lunch program because they never make him the food he likes to eat. He is going to ask his friends to boycott the school lunch program. They will eat peanut butter and jelly for as many days as it takes for the school to change

their school lunch program to serve the foods Johnny and his friends like. Johnny said other nearby schools in the area always serves food the students like. *Columbia Gorge News* will call Johnny and ask him to support his claim about other schools with facts before his letter runs. Johnny’s friends from the other schools do their own research and show Johnny that their school cafeterias waste less at lunch. Johnny adds his friends research to the letter and explains his sources in his letter. CGN agrees to publish his letter with an editor’s note about where Johnny found his information.

It is rather simple. Generally, if letters are truthful, can be proven as truthful, and are not personally attacking an individual, they will be printed.

An editor’s note is used on some letters. We prefer to have the letter writer clarify or edit on their own, but sometimes we need to put a note showing where the information was discovered by the letter writer — where Johnny did his research on the money wasted on fish-stick day, for example. This

tells us and you, our readers, that it was legitimately researched, or the writer, at the least, attempted to verify the information.

The opinion page is for you, our readers. It is where many can engage in a variety of views.

Words can be misunderstood; writers do not always express the intentional meaning of their letters. We try to clarify those situations, whenever possible. We might need to edit for grammar, adherence to our policies, or length of letters. Throughout the process, we strive to avoid inserting a bias or opinion of our own when doing so.

Our editors’ notes are written by one of our two co-editors or by the publisher.

The reporting team will then review the note during the proofing and editing process.

It’s not a foolproof system, but again, our goal to get your voice heard in our communities and to be as fair as possible in the process.

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Elba Offices, 288 E. Jewett Street, Suite 650
White Salmon, WA 98672

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
P.O. Box 1910, The Dalles, OR 97058

CONTACT US

The Dalles
541-296-2141

Hood River / White Salmon
541-386-1234
ColumbiaGorgeNews.COM

Publisher
Chelsea Marr
chelseam@gorgeneews.com

Editorial:

Kirby Neumann-Rea, Editor
Mark Gibson, Editor
Trisha Walker, Reporter
Jacob Bertram, Reporter
Walker Sacon, Reporter
Oregon News Tips/Press Releases
Washington News Tips/Press Releases

Billing/Office:
Lisa Ann Kawachi

Kirbyn@gorgeneews.com
MarkG@gorgeneews.com

Trishaw@gorgeneews.com
JacobB@gorgeneews.com
WalkerS@gorgeneews.com
ORnews@gorgeneews.com
WAnews@gorgeneews.com

billing@gorgeneews.com
LisaK@gorgeneews.com

Mailing Addresses:

PO Box 1910, The Dalles, OR 97058
PO Box 390, Hood River, OR 97031
PO Box 218, White Salmon, WA 98672

Advertising:

Niki Piacente, Digital Ad Director
Kim Horton, Sales

Legals:
Oregon:
Washington:

Subscriptions:
Shania McClary, Supervisor

Obituaries:
Classifieds:

sales@gorgeneews.com
NikiP@gorgeneews.com
KimH@gorgeneews.com

ORlegals@gorgeneews.com
WAlegals@gorgeneews.com

Subscribe@gorgeneews.com
ShaniaM@gorgeneews.com

obits@gorgeneews.com
classifieds@gorgeneews.com