EAST OREGONIAN
Founded October 16, 1875

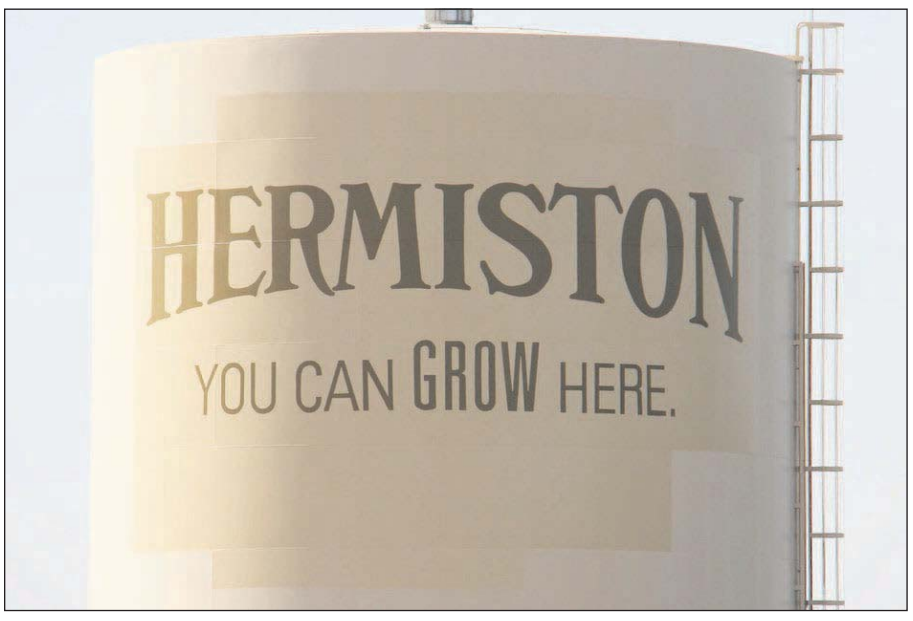
KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON
Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW



EO Media Group file photo

This photo of the Hermiston water tower shows the logo that was painted over the old watermelon and the two-toned background caused by the oxidation of the old paint.

Do the melons make the town?

If you picked up last weekend's *Wall Street Journal*, beneath stories about wars abroad, national politics and IPOs, there was the Hermiston water tower in all its pixelated, hedcut glory.

Page one of the best-selling newspaper in North America. Not bad, right? The tower shown like a beacon of small-town America, of the West, of watermelons. Good things for Wall Street to remember still exists.

The story itself, "A town known for watermelons is suddenly ripe for change," was classic *WSJ* soft news — taut and interesting, a small glimpse that illuminated a bigger issue. Agriculture is becoming a more professional endeavor. Cities are becoming brands. Change causes problems.

It's a good reminder of the controversy — certainly not helped by a mistmatched paint job across the city's most visible façade — that has simmered in Hermiston for more than a year.

We'd argue that a city's "brand" is a bit of an overrated concept. "You can GROW here" is pithy and succinct and true, but it's never solely brought a family or a job to town. Hermiston melons, you can argue, have. In fact, they helped make the town a town, even if they now only make up a small percentage of what is produced here.

> Agriculture is becoming a more professional endeavor. Cities are becoming brands. Change causes problems.

The Hermiston watermelon means something. It's lucky that the fruit itself is one of the few foods near universally beloved And it conjures up hot summer picnics, childhood and sticky cheeks and chins. Good things.

But growing watermelons can conjure up other images: low-tilled fields as far as the eye can see, hard manual labor, dirt — things that a family or tech company may not find appealing when deciding where to move.

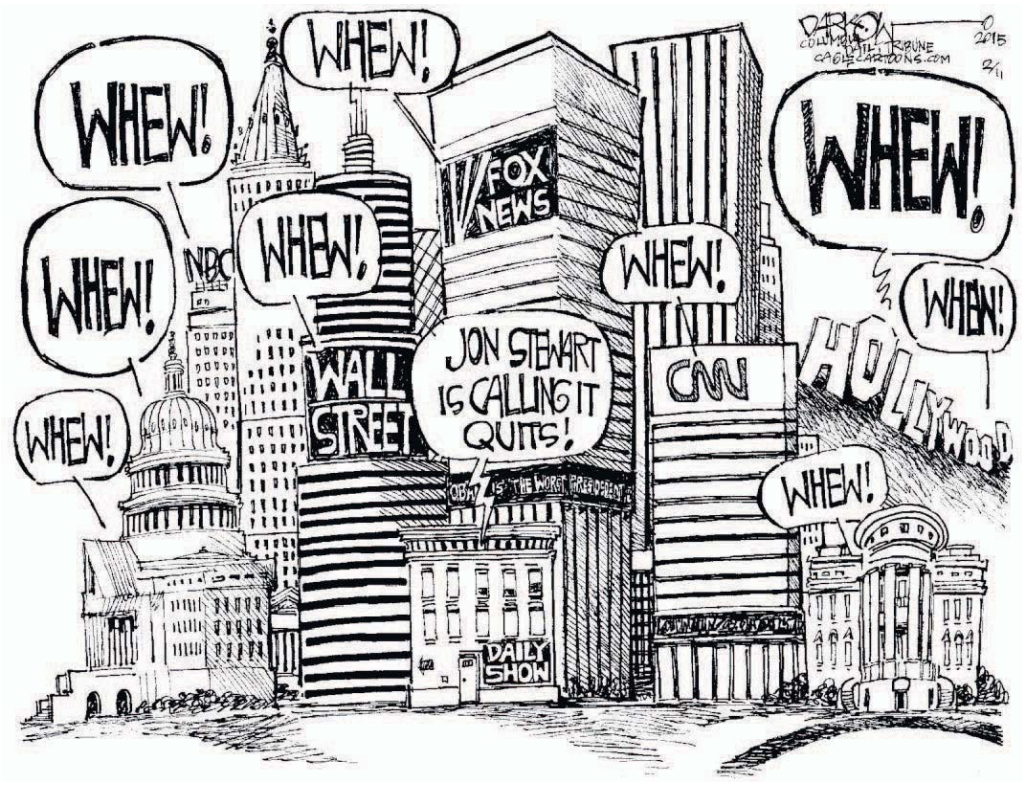
It's for those reasons the city wants to shift its "brand identity." But we'd argue that shift isn't done with new letterhead. It's done with the cultural change that's been happening for years. No one decides to move to a town based on what's written on the water tower. While a pithy line and good typography are helpful, it doesn't connect us to what the city is really about.

We know what they do with birds in Portlandia. If you want it to sell in Hermiston — if it's a box or a water tower or the city itself — you'd do well to put a watermelon on it.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

Society is more than an economy

MARK BITTMAN
Comment

The world of food and agriculture symbolizes most of what's gone wrong in the United States. But because food is plentiful for most people, and the damage that conventional agriculture does isn't readily evident to everyone, it's important that we look deeper, beyond food, to the structure that underlies most decisions: the political economy.

Progressives are not thinking broadly or creatively enough. By failing to pressure Democrats to take strong stands on everything from environmental protection to gun control to income inequality, progressives allow the party to use populist rhetoric while making America safer for business than it is for Americans. No one seriously believes that Hillary Clinton will ever put the interests of Main Street before those of her donors from Wall Street, do they? At least not unless she's pushed, and hard.

It's clear to most everyone, regardless of politics, that the big issues — labor, race, food, immigration, education and so on — must be "fixed," and that fixing any one of these will help with the others. But this kind of change must begin with an agreement about principles, specifically principles of human rights and well-being rather than principles of making a favorable business climate.

> Because food is plentiful for most people, the damage that conventional agriculture does isn't readily evident.

Shouldn't adequate shelter, clothing, food and health care be universal? Isn't everyone owed a society that works toward guaranteeing the well-being of its citizens? Shouldn't we prioritize avoiding self-destruction?

Plenty of Democrats, even those who think of themselves as progressive, would not answer yes to those questions. Some would answer, "Don't be naïve, that's impossible," and others would say, "All we need to provide is equal opportunity for all and let the market sort it out." (To which I'd reply, "Talk about naïve!") I'm fine with disagreement, but I'm not fine with standard public questions like "How do we create a better climate for business so it can provide more jobs?" Consider what this implies about the purpose of people, to say nothing about the meaning of life. The business of America should not be business, but well-being.

Think about it this way: There are two kinds of operating systems, hard and soft. A clock is a hard system. We know what it's for, we know when it isn't working, and we know that 10 clock experts would agree on how to fix it — and could do so.

Soft systems, like agriculture and economics, are more complex. We don't all agree on goals, and we don't agree on whether things are working or in need of repair. For example, is contemporary American agriculture a system for nourishing people and providing a livelihood for farmers? Or is it one for denuding the nation's topsoil while poisoning land, water, workers and consumers and enriching corporations? Our collective actions would indicate that our principles favor the latter; that has to change.

Defining goals that matter to people is critical, because the most powerful way to change a complex, soft system is to change its purpose. For example, if we had a national agreement that food is not just a commodity, a way to make money, but instead a way to nourish people and the planet and a means to safeguard our future, we could begin to reconfigure the system for that purpose. More generally, if we agreed that human well-being was a priority, creating more jobs would not ring so hollow.

Sadly, even if we did agree, complex systems are not subject to clever fixes. Rather, changes often have unexpected results (that shouldn't happen with a clock), so change necessarily remains incremental. But without an agreement on goals, without statements of purpose, we are going to continue to see changes that are not in the interest of the majority. Increasingly, it's corporations and not governments that are determining how the world works. As unrepresentative as government might seem right now, there is at least a chance of improving it, whereas corporations will always act in their own interests.

It's been adequately demonstrated that more than minor tweaks are needed to improve life for most people. Let's try to make sense of where the world is now instead of relying on outdated doctrines like "capitalism" and "socialism" created by people who had no idea what the 21st century would look like. Let's ambitiously and publicly philosophize — as the conservatives do — and think about what shape a sensible political economy might take.

The big ideas and strategies for how we should manage society and thrive with the planet are not a set of rules handed down from on high. To develop them for now and the future is a major challenge, and we — progressives and our allies — have to work harder at it. No one is going to figure it out for us.

■

Mark Bittman writes (mostly) about food for the Times Opinion pages, and is The Magazine's lead food columnist. He is the author of "VB6: Eat Vegan Before 6:00" and "How To Cook Everything." Follow Mark Bittman on Twitter and Facebook.

YOUR VIEWS

Science is clear on vaccines — it's responsible and smart

How ironic that Garnet Olson's anti-vaccine letter ("Measles? What's the big deal?" Feb. 3) appeared just below the political cartoon depicting the ignorance of the current anti-vaccine movement. As a former healthcare provider, I make no apologies for my anger at this pseudoscience fad.

Perhaps Olson and other anti-vaccine advocates have forgotten that measles killed approximately 1,000 Americans per year prior to the advent of the vaccine. Perhaps they don't know that in countries without widespread access to the vaccine, measles is responsible for four percent of all deaths of children under five years old.

And perhaps they simply choose not to believe that vaccination is not linked to autism or any other mental disability — this belief is the result of a small study that has since been revealed as fraudulent, has been retracted, and for which the author of the study lost his license to practice medicine. Yet the anti-vaccine crowd clings to it as though it were true.

Science — real, objective, peer-reviewed science — has proven beyond any doubt that vaccines save lives and they do not cause any mental impairment. They protect not only those who receive them, but also those who are too young to be vaccinated, or who have immune system deficiencies and cannot be vaccinated.

So be responsible. Be smart. Trust the real science. Vaccinate your children.

Bill Peckenpaugh
Pendleton

County response to voter bill an appalling decision

Thank you *East Oregonian* for reporting on the action of the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners in the Feb. 7 edition. I am appalled by the decision the county commissioners made to oppose HB 2177.

What data did Chairman Murdock and the board use to determine which unregistered voters show no interest in voting? Did they consider "undue burdens and hardships" of citizens trying to survive in our modern world before passing judgment? Did the board consider a large portion of the 14,000 unregistered voters they say "have never made an effort to vote" are 16- to 18-year-olds who can legally register early if encouraged to do so?

Do you realize what message you are sending these young people, the other members of this unregistered group of voters, and our community at large when not doing all you can to encourage voter registration? They know. In recent years, throughout our country, individuals are continually reaching out to become acknowledged, valued members of a group. We see this through religious organizations, gang affiliations, sports teams and partisan politics.

"We take for granted in this country the voting process. It's really a very elaborate complicated process, but it lies right at the heart of the democratic system," said American statesman Lee Hamilton.

Elected Umatilla County officials should use every means possible to involve all our citizens in the voting process and assist in educating the public on the issues facing our county, state and nation.

That is the only way we can maintain a strong democracy. We spend millions of dollars fighting wars to bring democracy to foreign countries, but won't allocate more money to include and assist our own citizens registering to vote. We need to acknowledge the sacrifices of our predecessors and soldiers and bring the enthusiasm of voting back to America.

If the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners can find money to give to the privately-owned Cunningham Sheep Co. for wolf abatement because they had to hire three more employees, buy four new sheepdogs and build a new sheep camp, then the commissioners can surely work with Oregon's Secretary of State, Kate Brown, to mitigate the costs of sending postcards and ballots to encourage and register an estimated 14,000 new voters.

"In the Soviet Union, capitalism triumphed over communism. In this country, capitalism triumphed over democracy," wrote American writer Fran Lebowitz.

Let's work to change this perception.

Anne Emmons
Hermiston

Hayes' outside expertise a benefit to her work, the state

I have no doubt that Cylvia Hayes is an expert on the policies, values and goals of Governor Kitzhaber's administration. *The Oregonian* has been very critical of her past professional service, portraying it as a conflict of interest with her consultation role within the administration. Obviously *The Oregonian* would prefer that any consultant for the administration have no professional experience.

Therefore I urge *The East Oregonian* to promote the readers to pursue quality, excellence and technical expertise as hobbies so that they can be qualified consultants for the administration.

Ronald J. Bensel
Pendleton