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KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
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MARISSA WILLIAMS
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OUR VIEW

Free the Hammonds

At the end of their terms presidents typically grant pardons or clemency to a host of federal inmates whose cases are too politically controversial for all but a lame duck to handle.

It's time that President Obama grant Dwight and Stephen Hammond clemency and allow them to return to their Oregon ranch.

Ranchers in Oregon's Harney County, father and son have a long history of disputes with the Bureau of Land Management over grazing allotments. Dwight Hammond was convicted of one count related to a fire that burned 139 acres of BLM land in 2006. Stephen Hammond was convicted of one count related to the 2006 fire, and a separate count related to a fire in 2001.

The Hammonds received a fair trial and were found guilty. Many believe they had just cause to start the fires and deserved no punishment even if they had technically broken the law. The jury found otherwise, and the original trial court handed down fair, and lenient, sentences.

In addition to lengthy probation, Dwight Hammond received six months in prison, his son one year. The original prison sentences were served.

But those sentences ignored the minimum mandatory five-year sentence prescribed by the federal arson statute. The government appealed, the sentences were overturned and the trial court ordered the Hammonds to serve out the remainder of new five-year sentences.

They have been in federal prison for a year. That's enough.

When the crack cocaine trade was destroying minority communities, Congress was pressed to set a strong deterrent. It used its constitutional authority to remove judicial discretion in sentencing. It was deemed to have worked so well on inner city drug offenders that the concept was applied to a wide range of federal crimes.

That is the law. To quote Dickens, the law is an ass.

We understand the appeal of mandatory sentencing. It's easy, and it demonstrates that criminality won't be tolerated. But the purpose of prosecution is to serve justice. It's not supposed to be easy. Removing judicial discretion to weigh the circumstances does not serve justice, even if in some

cases judges err and are too lenient. Sometimes, the cause of justice is served by leniency.

President Obama must think so, too. He's spent the last couple of years speaking out against mandatory sentencing. To punctuate the point, he has granted clemency to drug offenders whose mandatory sentences he has judged unjust and overly punitive given the circumstances of their crimes.

By coincidence, the original judge in the Hammonds' case found a mandatory five-year sentence overly punitive given the circumstances of their crimes.

The Hammonds have served enough time, justice has been served. The president should commute their sentences to time served and send them home.



Dwight H.



Steven H.

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Culture corner

In November, Portland author and teacher Brian Doyle received terrible news. According to Doyle, doctors found "a big honkin' brain tumor" inside his head and his chance of survival was grim.

Many fans and readers went to his "Book of Uncommon Prayer" to try to digest the news. And that is certainly a helpful option.

But perhaps another way to celebrate a top Oregon writer is by reading his 2015 novel "Martin Marten." Set in the hamlet of Zigzag, on the side of Mt. Hood, the book focuses on a 14-year-old boy named Dave as he navigates his entry into high school. But it focuses equally on a newborn marten — yes, the weasel-

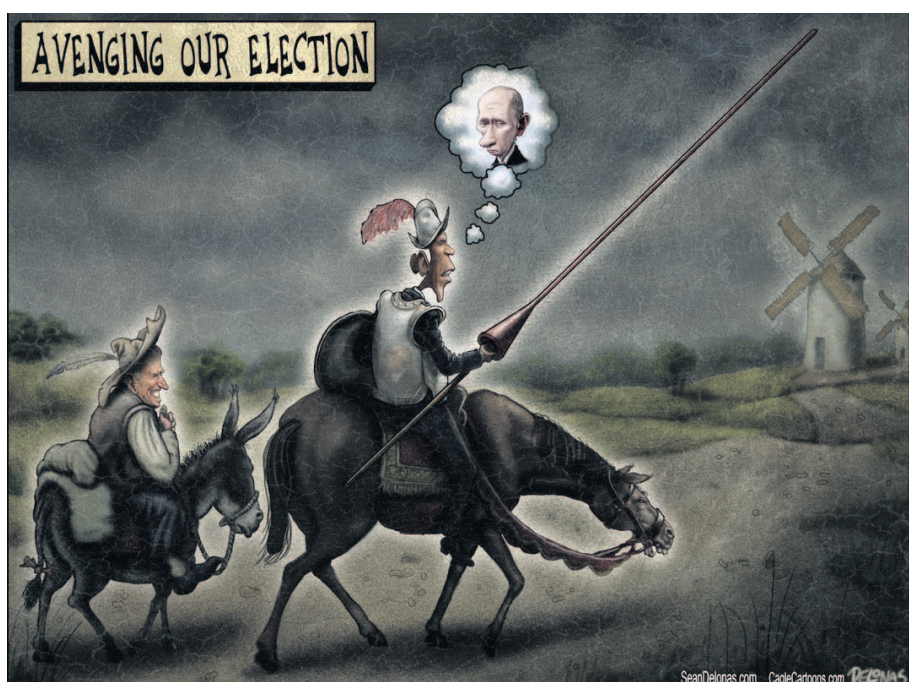
kind of animal — who lives above Dave on the mountain. Their lives intersect, and the remarkable mystery of life and survival echoes throughout their story.

The book is good for all ages, and may really speak to young teens. But a word of warning: This is no Disney-fied version of nature — animals eat other animals with gusto and joy throughout its pages.

The book, at its, core, is a tribute to life in all its various forms. It's about finding the joy in just existing, whether we are a human being, a marten, a gargantuan elk or a

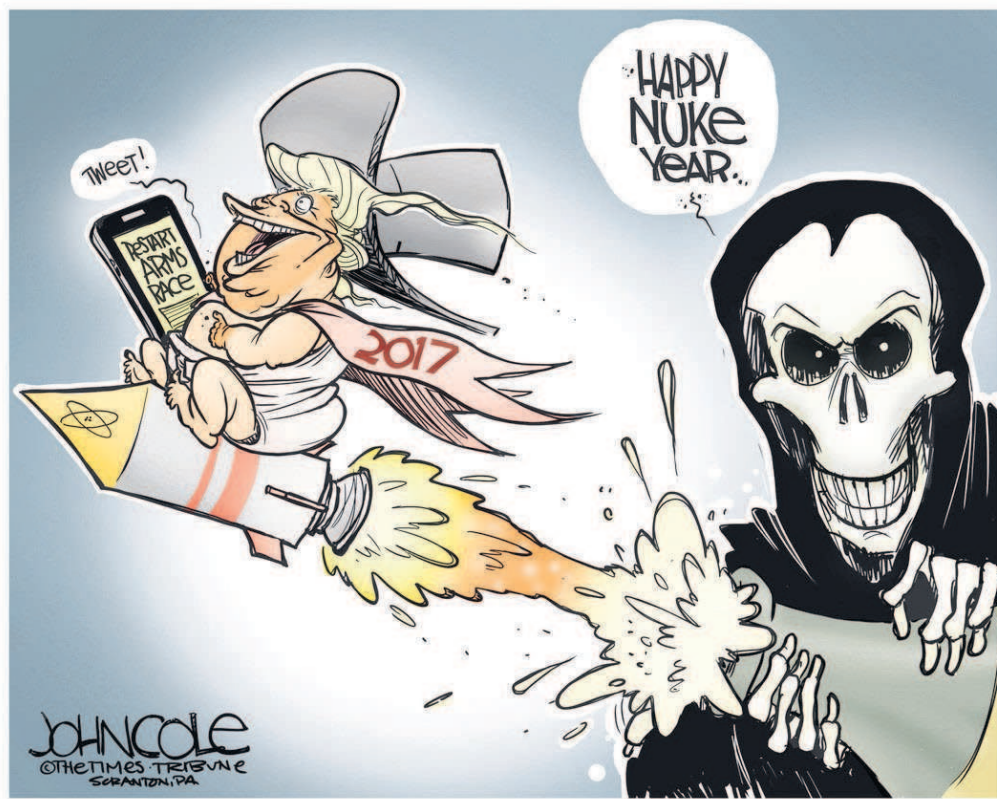
tomato plant. Sometimes it's good to be reminded.

— Tim Trainor is opinion page editor of the East Oregonian.



LETTERS POLICY

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OTHER VIEWS

A month without sugar

It is in chicken stock, sliced cheese, bacon and smoked salmon, in mustard and salad dressing, in crackers and nearly every single brand of sandwich bread. It is all around us — in obvious ways and hidden ones — and it is utterly delicious.

Its sugar, in its many forms: powdered sugar, honey, corn syrup, you name it. The kind you eat matters less than people once thought, scientific research suggests, and the amount matters much more. Our national sugar habit is the driving force behind the diabetes and obesity epidemics and may be a contributing factor to cancer and Alzheimer's.

Like me, you've probably just finished a couple of weeks in which you have eaten a lot of tasty sugar. Don't feel too guilty about it. But if you feel a little guilty about it, I'd like to make a suggestion.

Choose a month this year — a full 30 days, starting now or later — and commit to eating no added sweeteners. Go cold turkey, for one month.

I have done so in each of the past two years, and it has led to permanent changes in my eating habits. It wasn't easy, but it was worth it. It reset my sugar-addled taste buds and opened my eyes to the many products that needlessly contain sugar. I now know which brands of chicken stock, bacon, smoked salmon, mustard and hot sauce contain added sugar and which do not.

I know that Triscuits and pita bread are our friends. They have only a few ingredients, and no sugar. Wheat Thins and most packaged sandwich breads, on the other hand, have an ingredient list that evokes high school chemistry class, including added sugars.

If you give up sugar for a month, you'll become part of a growing anti-sugar movement. Research increasingly indicates that an overabundance of simple carbohydrates, and sugar in particular, is the No. 1 problem in modern diets. An aggressive, well-financed campaign by the sugar industry masked this reality for years. Big Sugar instead placed the blame on fats — which seem, after all, as if they should cause obesity.

But fats tend to have more nutritional value than sugar, and sugar is far easier to overeat. Put it this way: Would you find it easier to eat two steaks or two pieces of cake?

Fortunately, the growing understanding of sugar's dangers has led to a backlash, both in politics and in our diets. Taxes on sweetened drinks — and soda is probably the most efficient delivery system for sugar — have recently passed in Chicago, Philadelphia, Oakland, San Francisco and Boulder, Colorado. Mexico and France have one as well, and Ireland and Britain soon will.

Even before the taxes, Americans were cutting back on sugar. Since 1999, per capita consumption of added sweeteners has fallen about 14 percent, according to the Agriculture Department.

Yet it needs to drop a lot more — another 40 percent or so — to return to a healthy level. "Most public authorities think everybody would be healthier eating less sugar," says Marion Nestle of NYU. "There is tons of evidence."



DAVID LEONHARDT
Comment

A good long-term limit for most adults is no more than 50 grams (or about 12 teaspoons) of added sugars per day, and closer to 25 is healthier. A single 16-ounce bottle of Coke has 52 grams.

You don't have to cut out sugar for a month to eat less of it, of course. But it can be difficult to reduce your consumption in scattered little ways. You can usually find an excuse to say yes to the plate of cookies at a friend's house or the candy jar during a

meeting. Eliminating added sugar gives you a new baseline and forces you to make changes. Once you do, you'll probably decide to keep some of your new habits.

My breakfasts, for example, have completely changed. Over the past few decades, typical breakfasts in this country have become "lower-fat versions of dessert," as Gary Taubes, author of a new book, "The Case Against Sugar," puts it.

Mine used to revolve around cereal and granola, which are almost always sweetened. Now I eat a combination of eggs, nuts, fruit, plain yogurt and some well-spiced vegetables. It feels decadent, yet it's actually healthier than a big bowl of granola.

How should you define sugar during your month? I recommend the definition used by Whole 30, a popular food regimen (which eliminates many things in addition to sugar). The sugar that occurs naturally in fruit, vegetables and dairy is allowed. "Nobody eats too much of those," Nestle says, "not with the fiber and vitamins and minerals they have."

But every single added sweetener is verboten. No sugar, no corn syrup, no maple syrup, no honey, no fancy-pants agave. Read every ingredient list, looking especially for words that end in "-ose." Don't trust the Nutrition Facts table next to the ingredient list, because "0 g" of sugar on that list really means "less than 0.5 g." Get comfortable asking questions in restaurants. And avoid the artificial sweeteners in diet sodas, too.

Part of the goal, remember, is to relearn how a diet that isn't dominated by sweeteners tastes. I've always liked fruit, but I was still pleasantly surprised by how delicious it was during the month. When I needed a midday treat, a Honeycrisp apple, a few Trader Joe's apricots or a snack bar that fit the no-sugar requirement saved me.

Finally, be careful not to violate the spirit of the month while sticking to the formal rules: Have only one small glass of juice a day, and eat very little with added fruit juices.

There were certainly times when I didn't enjoy the experience. I missed ice cream, chocolate squares, Chinese restaurants and cocktails. But I also knew that I'd get to enjoy them all again.

The unpleasant parts of a month without sugar are temporary, and they're tolerable. Some of the benefits continue long after the month is over. If you try it and your experience is anything like mine, I predict that your new normal will feel healthier and no less enjoyable than the old.

David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for The New York Times.

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

U.S. Senators

Ron Wyden
Washington office:
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5244
La Grande office:
541-962-7691

Jeff Merkley
Washington office:
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3753
Pendleton office:
541-278-1129

U.S. Representative

Greg Walden
Washington office:
185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6730
La Grande office:
541-624-2400

Governor

Kate Brown
160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, OR 97301-4047
503-378-4582

Senator

Bill Hansell, District 29
900 Court St. NE, S-423
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1729
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

Representatives

Greg Barreto, District 58
900 Court St. NE, H-38
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1458
Rep.GregBarreto@state.or.us

Greg Smith, District 57
900 Court St. NE, H-482
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1457
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us