

Isolation and communication

I recently received a call from an out-of-town cousin announcing that she and her husband would be in the area for the weekend and they would like to get together for a visit. Daughter Annie and her Helix basketball teammates were in action on the night of said cousins’ arrival, and so we agreed to meet at the gym and “root, root, root, for the home team” (I realize that Jack Norworth and Albert von Tilzer were not referring to basketball in the aforementioned line, but I tend to steer the conversation to baseball anytime I can).

After the ballgame, we adjourned to the local tavern for refreshment and lively conversation with both family and friends. Among the many topics covered in our visit was my confession that I prefer to reside in an environment devoid of close neighbors and that the foremost requirement I have for a preferred domicile is that it be located off any paved road.

My cousin expressed surprise that I would embrace isolation so readily because of the fact that I thoroughly enjoy conversing with kith and kin (my wife would more accurately describe my condition as being full of BS). I responded that I have long considered myself a “Swiftian misanthropist.” I explained that according to one of my college professors, the accomplished 17th and 18th century Irish

author/clergyman Jonathan Swift despised many of the traits exhibited by humankind, particularly politicians, and deftly satirized them in works such as “Gulliver’s Travels” and “A Modest Proposal.” My professor from long ago stated, however, that Swift loved his friends and neighbors deeply and eloquently praised them in many of his other writings.

Like Swift, I frequently find the actions of men (and women) to be abhorrent in the macrocosm. But in the microcosm of my community and family, I can truly say that I find something laudable in almost everyone I know personally. That having been said, I want to see people when I want to see people.

And I relish occasional isolation and find that the battery of my soul can be most effectively recharged when I am alone and preferably am out of cell phone coverage — or better yet, am without any electronic device at all.

I will concede that the proliferation of personal communication devices has saved lives in times of emergency and has made an incredible amount of information available simply with the touch of a finger (or, if you prefer, via a voice command).

However, I worry about our collective ability to thrive (not simply survive) as a species if we continue to become more reliant upon Google than our own memory and forget how to solve problems by our

own wits or common sense. I also question the effect upon our wellbeing of an incessant need to “be in touch” and a constant quest for self-validation measured by the number of “likes” we have on Facebook.

I am concerned that folks, young and old alike, have already severely compromised their ability to accurately and eloquently convey their thoughts and ideas by the all-too-common sloppiness found in text message misspellings, and are frequently misunderstood because of a poorly constructed e-mail. I cherish the opportunity to read an actual hand-written, heartfelt letter from a friend or relative, especially if the penmanship even remotely resembles my departed grandmother’s Palmer-method style of writing.

I am not especially enamored with our addiction to social media and near-total reliance upon electronic communication, though I have come to reluctantly accept them as part of our modern culture.

I do have grave misgivings, though, about its use by some citizens who are far more powerful than most of the rest of us. I sincerely hope that issues of national importance and potentially global impact will not simply be determined by a flippant “tweet” sent in the wee hours by some misguided self-aggrandizing buffoon.

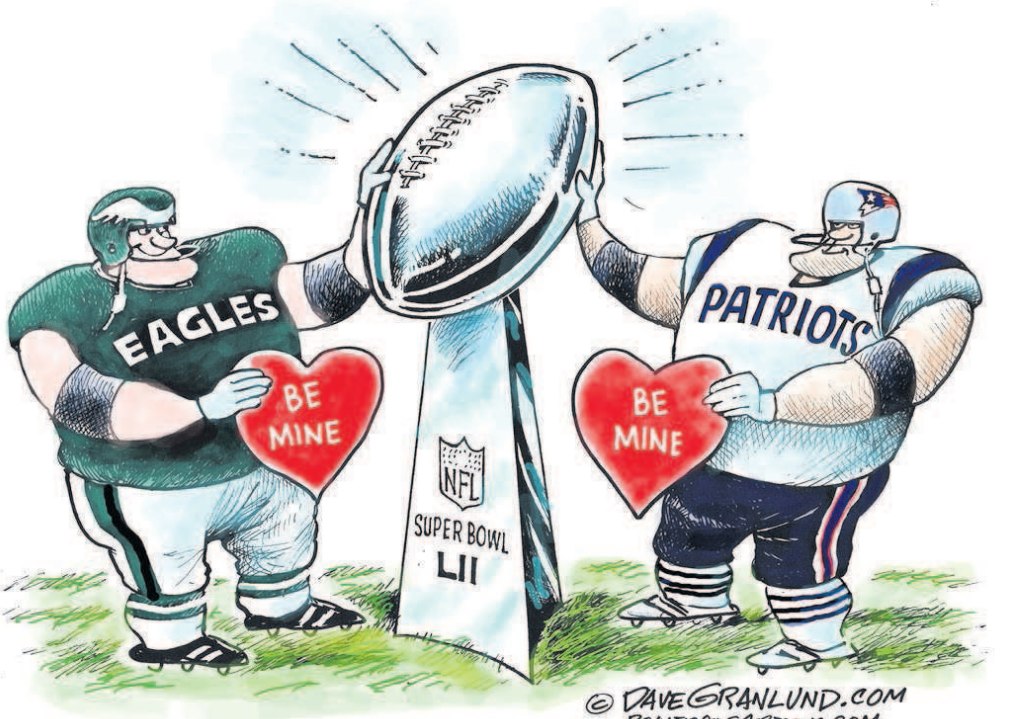
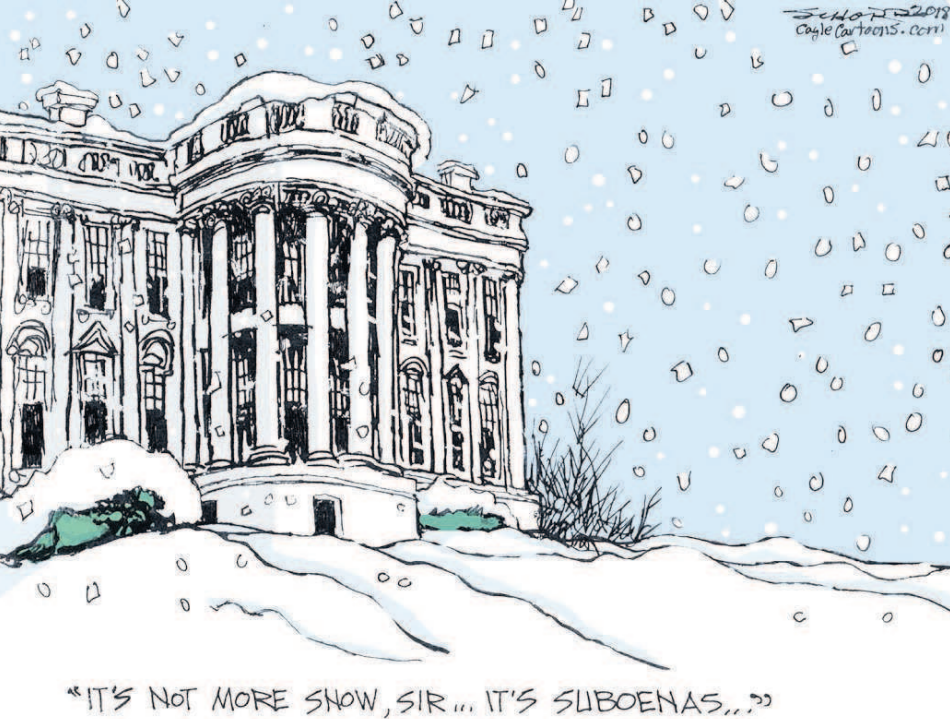
I also hope that so-called statesmen (or women) who are “the most-qualified candidate we have ever had” for a particular office will be held to the same standard as the rest of us when scrutinizing electronic records.



MATT WOOD
FROM THE TRACTOR

Like Jonathan Swift, however, I am an eternal optimist and shall steadfastly maintain my faith in humanity — so long as the view of my fellow man is one from afar.

Matt Wood is his son’s hired man and his daughter’s biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.



Transmission line will benefit entire region

Recently, there has been an uptick in letters to the editor about Idaho Power’s Boardman to Hemingway transmission line project. While we want the public to share their opinions, Idaho Power also wants the information shared to be accurate and fair.

Transmission lines provide flexibility to balance regional energy needs. They are designed to handle any type of power generation and provide the ability to economically serve customer demand over large geographic areas. B2H is a low-cost option to serve Idaho Power customers, including about 19,000 in Oregon.

Analysis shows the need for B2H to provide energy to customers is still strong. The B2H project was initiated in 2007, after first being identified as a cost-effective option in Idaho Power’s 2006 Integrated Resource Plan. The year-long IRP process is thorough and transparent, and involves members of the public who devote months of hard work to the end result.

Over the last decade, there has been much analysis and collaboration between B2H stakeholders to determine a line route that minimizes impacts. These stakeholders include farmers, ranchers, local and state governments and those interested in preserving the Oregon Trail.

We see these collaborative conversations continuing, even though the Bureau of Land Management has approved us to site the line on the public land it manages.

We are committed to minimizing any visual impacts from B2H. The right-of-way will be 250 feet at its widest only, and some towers allow us to be as narrow as 150 feet in some locations. The average tower height will be around 140 feet. In some areas, we expect to use alternative tower types to mitigate visual impact to the Oregon Trail.

We have worked to limit the number of new roads we need to build. In fact, over half the necessary access will use existing roads. We’re making every effort



MITCH COLBURN
Comment

to minimize the crossings of active creeks and streams, especially those that are habitat for salmon and trout.

In analyzing the need for a new resource to serve customers, we considered many options, including distributed generation (such as roof-top solar), demand-reduction and energy efficiency.

These options can supplement B2H, and we’re willing and able to use those resources. But the reality is those small-scale sources are not able to replace the benefits of a 1,050 megawatt transmission line.

Building and operating B2H will cost money. Idaho Power is a publicly held company, and does provide its shareholders a return on their investment — just like businesses all over the world. However, our mission as a company is to ensure our customers have the energy they need, 24/7. Idaho Power and our regional project partners, Bonneville Power Administration and PacifiCorp, are building B2H to serve our customers.

Those customers will ultimately pay for this project that benefits them. That is something we’ve always been very transparent about. The cost estimate for B2H is \$1 billion to \$1.2 billion. However, Idaho Power currently only has a 21 percent stake in the project, meaning that our customers — including those we serve in Oregon — will not see anywhere near \$1.2 billion total reflected in their energy prices.

Customers expect safe, reliable, low-cost electrical power whenever they need it, and that requires infrastructure. The existing system does not have enough capacity for periods of high demand, or to reliably and economically serve future customer needs. Fortunately, there is a solution in B2H, which will ensure customers have reliable, responsible, fair-priced energy for decades to come.

Mitch Colburn is Idaho Power’s Resource Planning and Operations Director.

Trump climbs the Swiss Mountain in Davos

This past week, President Trump surprised the world’s economic and political elite by joining them in Davos, Switzerland, for the World Economic Forum. Every year leading figures in business, politics, and science gather to discuss the challenges facing the global economy. This year’s theme was “Creating a Shared Future in a Fractured World.”

Many of the leaders thought President Trump and his America First policies were helping create some of the fractures. You might have thought that President Trump, a strong advocate of American first and a critic of globalization, was like Daniel entering the lion’s den.

President Trump emphasized the growth of the American economy, the record-setting stock markets, and the lowest unemployment rate in 17 years. He pointed to the first major tax cut since 1986, and an aggressive approach to deregulation. America, he said, was open for business. He invited businesses from around the world to take advantage of his pro-business policies, the best universities in the world, and the best workers in the world. You could almost hear a more elegant version of President Coolidge’s now famous saying that “America’s business is business.”

He repeated the by now familiar line that he is putting America first just as other countries should put their own citizens first. But he stressed that America first does not mean America alone. Beyond the recent success against ISIS in Syria and about his concern about rogue regimes (North Korea and Iran), he did not dwell on foreign policy.

His remarks on international trade are important and, in part, surprising. Just a few days prior, President Trump had imposed tariffs on imported solar panels and washing machines. Many in the business world feared that this was the harbinger of a possible trade war. Instead, he stated his commitment to free trade but also stated it must be fair trade. He called for reciprocal treatment rather than policies that put America at a disadvantage. He would, he said, no longer tolerate practices that include the theft of intellectual property, subsidized exports, and state-directed industrial policy.

China was not mentioned by name. But his statements had to be intended for Chinese ears.



KENT HUGHES
Comment

He went on say that he was ready to negotiate beneficial trade agreements with all countries, including the countries that are part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations. He even went so far as to say that he could negotiate with the entire group “if it is in the interests of all.” He would, he said, expect a substantially better deal. At a separate session, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said there could still be negotiations on the U.S.-EU (known as the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) trade pact. Opening a series of Asian markets that include Japan could be good for American farmers and ranchers.

Trump also challenged the assembled business leaders to work for a globalization that works for everyone. He called on them to recognize that it is their workers and customers that stand at the center of their success. Leaving too many behind, he said, would endanger globalization.

Financial and business commentators on Bloomberg and CNBC were positive about the speech, noting that he was clear but not confrontational. They

thought the speech would be welcomed by global business leaders, just the group he hoped would invest in America. At the end of his remarks, Trump received a rousing round of applause.

Other commentators may have noticed that there was no new vision or memorable phrase in his speech. Long-term political observers (and sometime participants like myself) would have welcomed a Wilsonian call to “make the world safe for democracy” or President Kennedy’s promise to “support every friend and oppose every foe” or Ronald Reagan’s invocation of America leading by being an example for the rest of the world.

President Trump’s message was closer to the ground. America is back, America is open for business. A growing America is good for America and the world. He called on the Davos participants to eliminate unfair trade practices and to make a global economy that works for all.

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