When a cow dies too soon

LINDSAY MURDOCK
FROM SUN UP TO SUN DOWN

She was born blind. We didn't know it until day three. Ian kicked himself for not noticing sooner, but he shouldn't have. At least he noticed. Period.

She lived in our laundry room (aka the mud room ... which is also known as the entry to our home) for two days. She brought hope to Mack and Mason's world. She even brought adventure of sorts because it wasn't the normal that any of us were used to. She brought a bunch of extra love I didn't know they had in them. She also brought a huge mess, but then again, don't we all?

By the second morning I was a bit exasperated by her faint mooing sound — which sounded more like a cry for help or maybe even a desperate plea for pain medication; regardless, it was not music to my ears. And the attempts she made to get to her feet over and over again were painful to watch. I was discouraged by my own problems, miscommunications and exhaustion, and her lack of strength seemed to pull me down even further.

The boys hovered over her, petted her, read her a book or two, did their homework next to her and covered her up — over and over again. I watched with sadness, and even a tinge of regret, knowing she probably wouldn't live and their efforts were somewhat pointless.

I detest watching others suffer, including cows. And especially the baby calves. I had little hope. Even as I tried to muster up a smile or words of encouragement for the boys, I found myself hopeless. Ian would come in and feed her, trying to convince himself that she was doing better, and I would just watch. I wanted to care. I wanted to nurture her, but I just couldn't make myself. I was so stuck in my little pity party of dealing with the messes that seemed to be piling (literally) all over the house whenever I turned my head that one little dying calf was the least of my concerns.

> And for the next 20 minutes I simply sat there and cried — wishing for something different for both of us.

And then, late in the afternoon while I was washing the dirty dishes that had been stacked in the sink since breakfast, there was silence. The mooing had come to an end and her body stopped moving, and that is when I did the most pathetic thing of all. I sat down on the floor of the laundry room and just stared at her. I was lifeless, and so was she. And for the next 20 minutes I simply sat there and cried — wishing for something different for both of us.

A normal rancher's wife probably would have been the one nursing it back to life instead of wishing it was in the barn. Or perhaps she wouldn't be content waiting for her husband to come in to deal with it because she would be in her element of being the "nurturing caregiver." In fact, I'm certain that an average rancher's wife probably wouldn't have sighed a deep sigh of relief when the mooing stopped. A typical rancher's wife isn't me.

I'm still trying to figure out how to live this life I've been given. The disasters. The accidents. The fights for life. The job that isn't a job, but a lifestyle. The life that requires so much of me even after a full day of teaching when I feel like I have little left to give. The life I've lived for 15 years, but still don't have down to a science.

Hopefully, someday, I'll be the one covering the sick calf with blankets, and propping its head up with towels. Someday, I'll be the one nurturing the heck out of the sweet little calf that has made its way into my home like my husband and boys were doing all weekend long. Yes, someday, I'll be more about them and the bigger picture, and less about me.

Yes, someday will be sooner than later.

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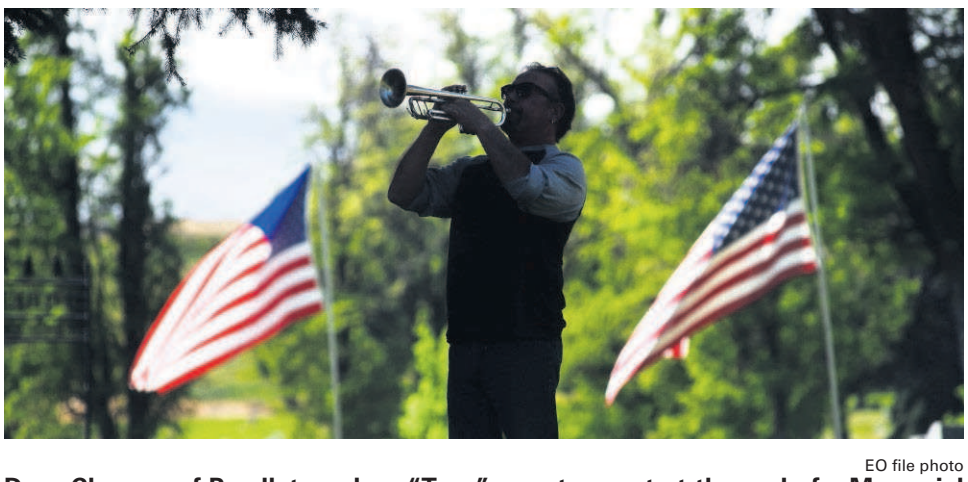
Lindsay Murdock lives in Echo and teaches in Hermiston.



EO file photo
Dave Chorazy of Pendleton plays "Taps" on a trumpet at the end of a Memorial Day ceremony in 2014 at Olney Cemetery in Pendleton.

Private funding for our public water? No, thanks

KAREN KNUDESEN
Comment

President Donald Trump has unveiled a $1.5 trillion plan to rebuild our nation's crumbling infrastructure, including the pipes and treatment plants that keep clean water flowing from our taps. But if you read the fine print, his plan offers just $200 billion in federal funds; the remaining $1.3 trillion is expected to come from other sources, including private investors.

Private investment in water systems might look like a good deal to those who want to limit federal spending; it certainly appeals to cash-strapped cities and towns. And the need is great: The American Society of Civil Engineers gives our nation's drinking water facilities a "D" grade, and says $1 trillion will be needed to fix them over the next 25 years.

But private investment comes at a cost. Fundamentally, it means handing over our most essential resource to those who put profits before the public interest. That's what we learned here in Missoula, Montana, where we recently wrested control of our water system away from a multinational corporation.

Missoula is unusual in that our water system was privately owned since the town's founding in the 1870s. Our first water entrepreneur was "One-Eyed Riley," whose delivery method involved a yoke and two buckets. Since then, the system passed through many hands, but was never well managed. Compared to neighboring towns with public utilities, Missoulians endured high rates and poor service. Necessary capital improvements were not made, and the system steadily deteriorated.

When the Carlyle Group purchased our water system in 2011, we hoped the situation would improve. But we soon realized the fundamental tension that lay between Carlyle's goal of generating a short-term profit and Missoulians' need for safe, clean water over the long haul. After a four-year court battle, we purchased our water system from Carlyle for $84 million. Now, for the first time in our town's history, ownership of our water system — its pipes, pumps, wells, water rights, wilderness lakes and dams — has landed where it belongs, in the hands of the people, where it can be managed for the public good, for all time.

Unfortunately, other cities seem headed the other way, seeking private financing as the answer to their water woes. Many will be disappointed: Private investors require high rates of return, so they are unlikely to support projects that won't pay off sufficiently.

If there is money to be made from water, look out. Population, pollution and climate change are squeezing global drinking water supplies, so investors — including commercial bottling plants — are rushing in. There are disturbing accounts of bottling plants targeting a town's good water source, only to deplete local water wells, dry up wetlands and drain streams.

Some people assume that private management means greater efficiency and lower rates. Yet the reverse is often true. *The New York Times* analyzed three communities where private equity firms manage water or sewer services. In all three places — Bayonne, New Jersey, and Rialto and Santa Paula in California — rates rose more quickly than in comparable towns. In Bayonne, the price of water skyrocketed by nearly 28 percent after the private equity giant Kohlberg Kravis Roberts took charge of the city's system.

That's why some cities that had gone private — from Ojai, California, to Fort Wayne, Indiana — have seized their water systems back from private ownership.

While the price tag can be daunting, public investment is the better option. State and local governments already provide the lion's share of money for water infrastructure, and federal funding is available through the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (though those funds are flat-lined in the president's proposed 2019 budget). There are also collateral benefits from public investment. The Economic Policy Institute found that spending $188.4 billion on water infrastructure would yield $265 billion in economic activity and create 1.9 million jobs.

In Missoula, we are reaping the benefits from public ownership of our priceless water assets. Decisions about our water are made right here in town, not in a distant boardroom. Instead of short-term profits, our priority is long-term water security, a critical concern in the era of climate change. We don't have to worry about rates going up to fatten investors' wallets, and there are less tangible benefits, including a more intimate connection to the resource on which all life depends.

So here's our advice: If your community hopes Trump's infrastructure bill will fix your water system, be sure to read the fine print. And if you're lucky enough to control your own water, never give it up without a fight.

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Karen Knudsen is a contributor to Writers on the Range, the opinion service of High Country News. She is the director of the Clark Coalition, based in Missoula, Montana.

Fly your American flag March 29

STEVE BATES
Comment

In 2017, Congress passed a law to permanently designate March 29 as Vietnam War Veterans Day. That law was signed by the President.

The law, known as the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017, encourages the display of the United States Flag on March 29 in honor of our Vietnam War Veterans. Here are a few reasons why we should fly our flags on March 29:

Fifty years ago, the United States military and its allies were responding to the advances of the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong. This is known as the Tet Offensive, which lasted 30 days. This was a campaign of surprise attacks against military and civilian command and control centers throughout South Vietnam. There were two additional offensives by the North Vietnamese that year. 1968 proved to be the bloodiest year of the Vietnam era. There were more war casualties that year than in any other.

The era of the Vietnam War was a tumultuous period. The war lasted 20 years and spanned three decades. It has been established that the start of the Vietnam War was November 1, 1955, and the official end was April 30, 1975. (Some believe the end to be May 15, 1975.)

Almost 3 million United States military personnel served in Vietnam. Millions more served in other locations during that 20-year span.

More than 58,000 died in Vietnam.

More than 700 Oregonians were among those killed in action in Vietnam.

Four Oregon families lost two sons in Vietnam. A total of 39 families nationwide experienced such a loss.

There were military personnel missing in action in Southeast Asia. Roughly 1,600 Americans are still unaccounted for.

There were prisoners of war.

Most of the Vietnam warriors who came back to the United States were never welcomed home. Many of our uniformed veterans were spit upon, ridiculed and attacked for honoring the call of their nation.

Today, there are Vietnam War veterans suffering from maladies due to exposures to infecting sources such as Agent Orange. Many who were awarded a Purple Heart are experiencing complications attributed to their battle wounds.

In addition to flying our flags on March 29 we, as Oregonians, should honor our Vietnam War veterans with a mandate of support for a Vietnam War Memorial on the Oregon State Capitol grounds.

Such a memorial would honor those who served during the Vietnam Era regardless of their location of service. It would demonstrably honor all who served in Vietnam. Furthermore, this memorial would remember those who gave their life, forfeiting their American Dream so that we could live ours.

Our Vietnam War veterans have endured a great deal of controversy, heartache and physical discomfort for varying reasons. A memorial to honor their service on the Oregon State Capitol grounds will be our way of saying "welcome home," albeit almost 50 years late.

It is appropriate that a Vietnam War memorial be placed on the grounds of the Oregon State Capitol. This will demonstrate our state's commitment and gratitude to our Vietnam veterans. This memorial will enable our state residents to better understand the struggles of our Vietnam War veterans.

Let us honor and memorialize our Vietnam War veterans for generations to come.

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Steve Bates is a life member of the Associates of the Vietnam Veterans of America. He serves as chair of the committee on memorials and remembrance and is president of the Vietnam War Memorial Fund.

YOUR VIEWS

American biofuels need support from Congress

The debate surrounding the Renewable Fuel Standard has intensified and become much more complex recently. The efforts of a handful of oil refineries to portray the RFS as an unfair law to their bottom lines has attracted political opportunists like Senator Ted Cruz to fight on their side. In times like these, when the opposition ramps up considerably, we must reflect on how lucky we are to have great biofuel champions in industry, Congress and the White House and encourage them to keep up the fight.

An eastern coast oil refiner's downfall was the perfect opportunity for oil lobbyists and Sen. Cruz to exploit. Sen. Cruz has campaigned for months to reform the RIN system and has held the confirmation of Bill Northey to his U.S. Department of Agriculture position hostage until he got what he wanted. He argued on behalf of the oil industry, who only want to see the RFS weakened and their control of the pump strengthened. If their plans ever came into fruition, it would come at the cost of farmers already seeing declining incomes and hard-working employees at over 200 biorefineries across the country.

Thankfully, Senators Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst have been there every step of the way to combat these attacks. At a biofuels meeting in the White House last week, they represented farmers and biorefinery workers everywhere in defending the RFS and seeing that Northey was finally confirmed to his USDA position, where he'll join the Iowan senators' fight to promote American biofuels.

With more biofuel meetings with President Trump on the horizon, it's now more critical than ever that our leaders in Congress know that this is exactly the kind of farm-friendly, pro-biofuels work we wished of them when we cast our vote for President Trump.

Kraig Hoene
Lebanon