

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Mr. President, Japan wants our wheat

When we first heard that President Trump had been dismissive of U.S. wheat sales to Japan, we thought perhaps his quotes were taken out of context.

After all, it was only a month ago the president was touting the value of U.S. farmers and the need for our trading partners to buy more U.S. farm products.

But then we got a transcript from the White House and found that, yes, the president had been dismissive of U.S. wheat exports.

Last week Trump visited a Pennsylvania chemical plant to tout energy production and domestic manufacturing. The official event took the tone of a campaign speech, and Trump launched into a standard riff about bad deals with various trading partners, including Japan.

From the transcript:

“I told Prime Minister Abe — great guy — I said, ‘Listen, we have a massive deficit with Japan.’ They send thousands and thousands — millions — of cars. We send them wheat. Wheat. (Laughter) That’s not a good deal. And they don’t even want our wheat. They do it because they want us to at least feel that we’re OK. You know, they do it to



AP Photo, File

President Donald Trump’s off-the-cuff comment about exporting wheat to Japan struck a nerve among many U.S. farmers who grow the crop.

make us feel good.”

Add U.S. wheat farmers to the list of Americans who feel zinged by an off-the-cuff presidential remark. They aren’t too happy about it either.

In a statement, the Oregon Wheat Growers League said it was “profoundly disappointed” in Trump’s comments.

“The President’s dismissive statements ... demonstrated that he doesn’t

fully appreciate the 70 years of efforts by generations of wheat growers to build the great relationships we have with our customers in Japan,” the league stated in remarks that were reflective of other groups that responded to the *Capital Press*.

Farm groups we spoke to want the president to know that Japanese buyers do want American wheat.

Japan is the No. 1 market for U.S.

wheat, and the No. 2 market for soft white wheat grown in the Pacific Northwest. U.S. wheat has a 50% market share in Japan.

“Our customers in Japan don’t buy our wheat because they are doing us a favor or to make us feel good, they buy our wheat because we have built a relationship with them, earned their trust, listened to their needs, and provided great customer service,” the league stated.

The Japanese buy a lot of U.S. products, not just wheat. At about \$700 million in sales, wheat accounts for just 1% of the dollar volume of exports to Japan, according to Politifacts.com. The Japanese bought \$2.8 billion worth of corn last year.

We hope the president has better command of the facts and was trying to make a bigger point about trade imbalances. But in using wheat exports as a laugh line, Trump was dismissive of U.S. wheat producers — people who have generally been supportive.

It doesn’t seem to us that tearing away at a successful venture is the way to build better trade relations.

But maybe that’s a tactic from the “Art of the Deal” that we’ve overlooked.

YOUR VIEWS

Focusing on priorities

Residents have made it pretty clear, our streets need to be fixed, and City Hall has a plan to do just that. However, it looks like we’ll be treading water until they decide on a funding source, whether it be raising taxes, increasing current fees, instituting new fees or, heaven forbid, cutting or revising city programs to operate more efficiently.

The Parks and Recreation Dept. has spent a great deal of time and resources to develop a new strategic plan, a wish list of future projects. Each is assigned a priority, and the Priority 1 list includes, among other things, an additional dog park, a splash pad that replaces the wading pool at Til Taylor Park, and construction of a river through Olney Cemetery. Another project, building new ramps for the bike trails to the tune of \$25,000, is also on that Priority 1 list.

Remember when the bike people wanted to establish the trails on city property at the airport? The city council reluctantly approved the project as long as there were no city resources or liability involved. The Parks Dept. now appears involved up to its eyebrows with a commitment of city resources to build new jump ramps. With the parks director backing the creation of the game refuge on the north side of the Umatilla River, you can expect city resources will eventually come into play in that area too, especially since the city council removed camping restrictions on all public property.

None of these high priority items address the city’s backlog in maintenance. I think Parks and Rec’s “parks first” priority should be to get the playgrounds up to code. When they rebuild that Community Park playground, I would hope they’d relocate it to an area not so prone to flooding. Considering its history, I don’t take a lot of stock in that “never again” approach to McKay flooding.

When it comes to another dog park, I guess the city council will have to decide which creates the biggest problem, dogs or the homeless, and then act accordingly. Perhaps if each councilor spent a month working for Neighbor 2

Neighbor this winter, they’d gain a little perspective on what they’re dealing with. Then there’s always that recently purchased 6 acres in Riverside that’s available for a campsite.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

Treat addiction as a public health issue, not a crime

The United States is 5% of the world’s population. Yet if we put all of the incarcerated people in the world altogether, one fourth would be Americans. Mass incarceration is destroying hundreds of communities and millions of families across America as we lose the health and well-being of a swath of our society.

Reform to end mass incarceration will require sentencing reductions across all categories of offending that would take sentencing back to where it was in the 1980s. Americans are increasingly willing to see drugs and addiction as a public health issue and not only as a criminal justice issue. The shifting attitudes likely in part reflect the reality that opioid addiction is as prominent in rural Eastern Oregon as it is in inner-city communities. Churning drug offenders into and out of prisons where treatment options are few and post-release outcomes are dismal has done little to address the underlying problem of drug addiction and demand.

It is time that we recognize the limits of the war on drugs and begin treating drug use and abuse as a public health problem that cannot be solved by a criminal justice response. However, if we released all currently incarcerated drug offenders, we would still boast an incarceration rate among the highest in the world. Mandatory sentences need to be eliminated, and not just for drug offenses, but for most offenses. It is time that we renew our faith in the judiciary to achieve the punishments objective without compromising public safety.

Sally Sundin
Walla Walla

OUR VIEW

Bend newspaper buy is an opportunity

When Heidi Wright called me June 3 to suggest that our company should take a look at bidding on Bend’s daily newspaper, *The Bulletin*, I was at once startled, skeptical and intrigued.

We hired Heidi as our chief operating officer in June 2017 — away from *The Bulletin*, where she had been the chief financial officer of its parent company, Western Communications. At that point, we had just bid on two other newspapers out of Wescom’s bankruptcy in Baker City and La Grande.

Pursuing the *Bulletin* prospect, the board of EO Media Group convened two impromptu meetings. For the first of these sessions, at the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, we invited *Daily Astorian* Publisher Kari Borgen, who had also worked within Western Communications. Asked what she thought of the opportunity, Kari said: “It’s exciting and it’s scary.” That typified our deliberations, during which we probed the risks and assessed the promise.

My daughter, Susan Forrester Rana, flew up from Oakland for our second board meeting, during which we set our top bid for *The Bulletin*. By this time my cousin, Kathryn Brown, had made contact with a longtime family associate who is an executive of the Bank of Eastern Oregon. In addition to that bank financing, Heidi was speaking with prospective investors in Bend who were eager to have our pursuit of ownership succeed.

The auction on July 29 occurred in the office of the Portland law firm Tonkon Torp. Our group — including my cousin Kathryn, Heidi, our CFO Rick Hansen and our lawyers — were placed in one room while the three-man team from Adams Publishing Group was in another. Rhode Island Suburban Newspapers, the party that made the initial bid on *The Bulletin*, did not show up for the auction. To honor our family’s ambitions and the gravity of the moment, Kathryn wore a Pendleton jacket that had belonged to my mother, Eleanor.

At 10 a.m. we moved to another conference room — the bidding site. When the Adams trio entered, we stood to greet them. Mark Adams, the company’s CEO, sat two seats away from me; Heidi was to my left. In a thrilling auction that would last 15 minutes, Adams would be their bidder, Heidi ours.

The bidding requirement was to raise by

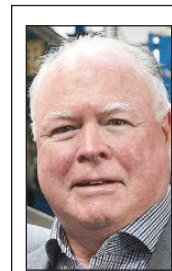
minimum increments of \$50,000, beginning at \$2.55 million. After the initial round of bidding drove the price to \$3.05 million, the Adams group left the room to confer privately. There was a second conference at the \$3.45 million mark, after which Mark Adams jumped the bid to \$3.6 million. Heidi hesitated for what seemed to me 20 seconds. But Rick clocked it at 15 seconds. Even though we were below our ceiling, her hesitation seemed an eternity. Instead of raising our bid, Mark Adams graciously congratulated us on our acquisition.

In taking ownership of *The Bulletin*, our company is not simply buying another property. It is taking hold of a journalistic opportunity that will become immensely significant to all of Oregon. With the decline of formerly influential daily newspapers such as *The Register-Guard* of Eugene and others, *The Bulletin* will become a beacon in a part of Oregon that is gaining economic, cultural and political significance. *The Bulletin* will become a heavyweight partner for our Eastern Oregon newspapers in Umatilla, Union, Baker, Walla and Grant counties — and for our papers on the Oregon and Washington coast and the *Capital Press* as well.

Our newspaper group fosters a culture of collaboration. That has allowed us to punch well above our weight. In collaboration with the Pamplin Media Group, we have formed a statehouse bureau that reverses the decline in coverage of the Oregon Legislature and state agencies. In 2006 our papers collaborated on a series of articles about climate change. In addition to pieces that were informed by science, each newspaper developed cameos of scientists, naturalists, farmers and fishers who spoke about what they were noticing in their region’s natural environment. That series won an award of Special Merit in the national Grantham Prize competition.

The environment and climate change are the primary issues of the 21st century. Our series — 12 years old — is ripe for an update. And *The Bulletin*’s participation in such a venture would give a new series even more impact.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of *The Daily Astorian*, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group. Contact him at sforrester@eomediagroup.com.



STEVE FORRESTER

COMMENT