

Another scary leak at Hanford

“It’s an example of a culture at Hanford of ‘We don’t have problems here. We’re doing just fine.’ Which is a total lie,” former Hanford Nuclear Reservation worker Mike Geffre recently told Seattle’s KING 5.

Geffre was reacting to news that a supposedly super-safe, double-walled underground storage tank for highly radioactive waste has a major leak in the space between its inner and outer walls. Geffre warned officials in 2011 about the potential for such an event, but a response was ridiculously slow in coming.

EDITORIAL
Voice of the Chieftain

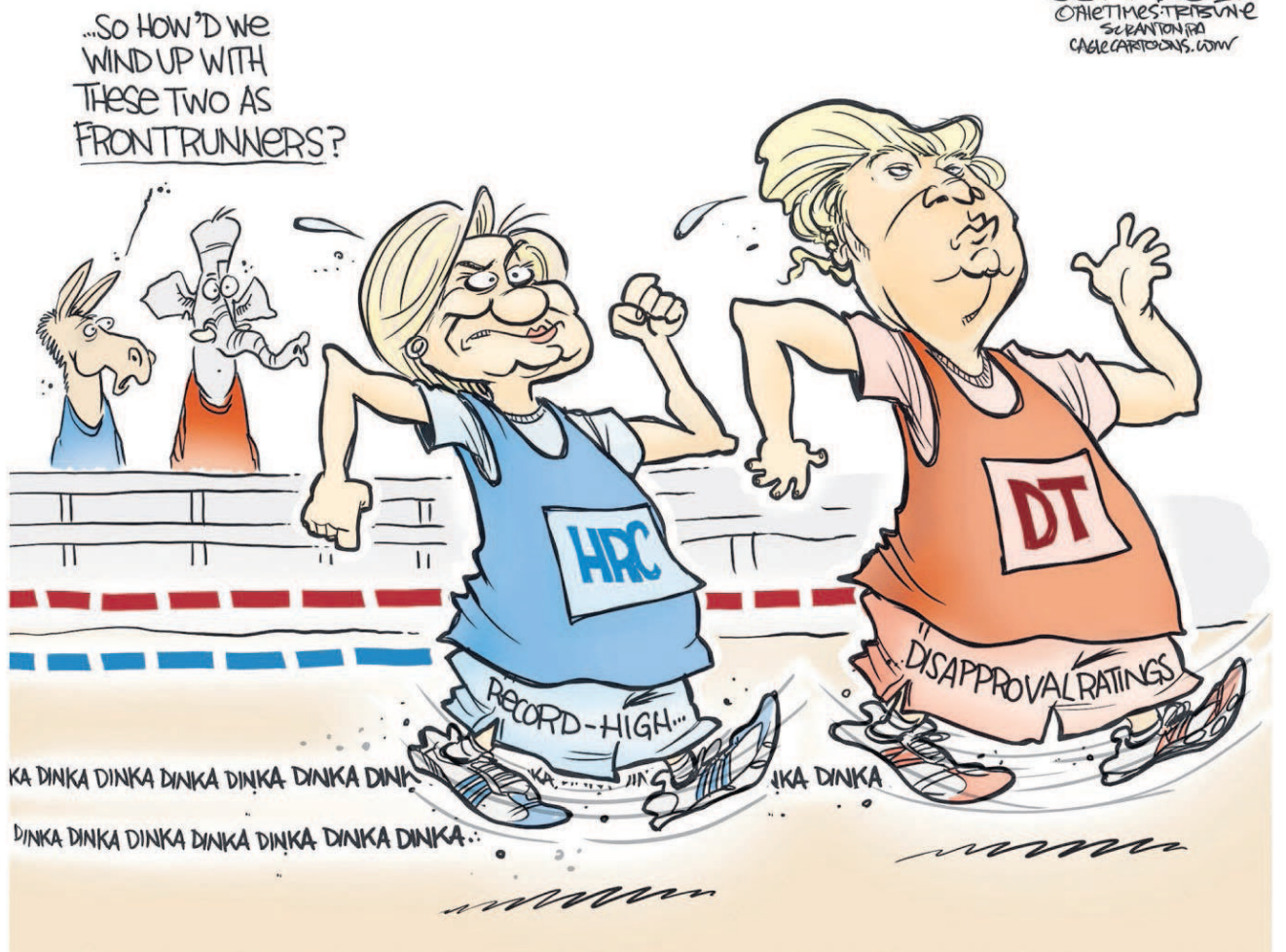
Washington state’s Department of Ecology sought to allay public worries, saying there is no sign that sludge created during plutonium production made it past the tank’s outer shell into the environment. To its credit, the state been a more zealous watchdog than other parties involved in Hanford oversight. But its reassurances are starting to ring hollow.

“This is catastrophic,” Geffre told KING 5. “This is probably the biggest event to ever happen in tank farm history. The double shell tanks were supposed to be the saviors of all saviors” as far as keeping waste away from people and the environment. A current Hanford worker said, “The primary tanks weren’t designed to stage waste like this for so many years. There’s always the question, ‘Are the outer shells compromised?’”

Three of Hanford’s other double-shell tanks have the same design as the one now in the news.

Millions live downriver from Hanford. As massively expensive as the cleanup has been — around \$40 billion so far, with maybe \$75 billion more in the offing — it will pale in comparison to damages from a major toxin spill into the air and groundwater.

Citizens must use every political and legal tool to impose competent and responsive management on this dreadful fiasco.



The perils of lawn care toxicity

As a white woman who has lived much of her adult life in Eastern Oregon, I was sobered by last week’s guest editorial that cited statistics regarding the premature mortality of white women in Eastern Oregon.

According to the author, the key culprits in our early demise consists mainly of poor lifestyle choices — too many cigarettes, not enough vegetables, not enough exercise, not enough money. I don’t doubt that these are contributing factors.

But the author overlooked two other “elephants in the room.” Namely, our bioregion’s reliance on “ag” and lawn-care chemicals, and our geographic destiny as “down-winders” (from the Hanford nuclear facility).

You might ask: “Then why aren’t the white men of Eastern Oregon dying off

LETTERS to the EDITOR

earlier as well?” It’s because the female anatomy was blessed with a higher ratio of fat cells, which means women absorb and store more toxins.

Returning home from a bike ride yesterday, within a few blocks of my apartment my eyes and nose started to burn and I could taste and smell the tell-tale metallic tang of herbicides (most of which contain glyphosate, a confirmed carcinogen). It seems the lawn Nazis had been busy in my absence. It’s a wonder any birds are chirping in the aftermath.

So you might consider the unintended consequences the next time you grab your spray pack — you could be doing in

more than the dandelions.
Cathy “Silent Spring” Sterbentz
Enterprise

Bad advice from Qualle

I find it strange that Barrie Qualle, who I am sure must be an upright, law-abiding citizen, suggests that “... any rancher that is a little careful could kill a wolf and get away with it” (April 20). This cowardly and illegal act could result in one year in jail and a \$6,250 fine. So, I hope that if you are “cowboying on the Zumwalt ... and see wolves within rifle range ... and dispatch any of them,” as he advocates, that you do get caught and serve your time and pay your fine.

Clem Falbo
Joseph

Tell a teacher how much they mean to you

Have you told your child’s teacher how much you appreciate them? The week of May 2-6 is National Teacher Appreciation Week. Besides a parent, a teacher spends the most amount of time with a child.

It is not a typical 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. job. Teachers are there before the start of school and often remain for several hours after school. They spend evenings grading papers and tests. They often come to school on the weekends to prepare lessons. Then there are the night meetings and after-school conferences with parents. They often are asked to assume extracurricular assignments such as coaching and advising, with little in the way of compensation. All of this means they have less time to spend with their families.

It is not true that teachers “get all that time off in the summer and during the holidays” (this is a common misconception). During the summers teachers must take classes and attend workshops to maintain their certification (usually paid for out-of-pocket).

They return to class a couple of weeks before the beginning of school in the fall to make sure their classrooms are attractive and engaging to enhance your child’s learning experience. They often must purchase their own supplies, and if they want to do an enrichment activity outside of the curriculum (and which teacher has never done this?), they pay for it out-of-pocket.

Due to cuts in budgets they are asked to work more, do with less and accept reductions in benefits. They are under constant pressure to prepare for — and make sure their students do well on — state tests. They also must endure the comments from the public and politicians who say being a teacher is easy, and anyone can do it. Couple all of this with increased class sizes, decreased teaching days and the increase in the number of children with special needs and you have a work load not everyone can do. Sometimes the teacher with a large class is lucky enough to have an aide in the classroom ... sometimes not.

Teachers do more than just teach

GUEST EDITORIAL

Ann Bloom

your child. They are mandatory reporters, which means that state law requires them to notify the authorities in suspected cases of abuse or neglect. They tie shoe laces, and dispense ice packs and Band-aids to ease the hurt of playground mishaps. They are the driers of tears and the shoulder to cry on when the world isn’t going a child’s way.

They are counselors, consultants, cheerleaders, disciplinarians, monitors of your child’s progress in school and much, much more. And remember, teachers could not do all they do without the support of the principal and staff. It takes more than one person to teach a child.

You may ask yourself, “Why should I support the schools and teachers when I don’t have children or grandchildren in the school system?” Here are several reasons. When you were in school the

people in your community who didn’t have children in the school system supported the schools and teachers. Without schools and teachers we would have an illiterate and uninformed electorate. Finally, children in the school system will be the decision makers of the future — in essence, they will be making decisions that will affect you in the future.

To teach in the state of Oregon, a person must have a five-year degree and pass a background check. It helps to have a little experience, too. The beginning base salary for a teacher in this state is \$34,302. If you have a master’s degree the salary is approximately \$48,000. The average teacher salary for the state is a little over \$57,000, achieved after many years of teaching (according to oregonteachingdegree.com). The average teacher salary in the nation is \$53,128.

This may seem like a lot, but to put this in perspective, if a teacher has a family of six, the federal poverty guideline is \$32,570. This means a begin-

ning teacher could probably qualify for SNAP benefits (formerly food stamps) and other related programs. In addition to the fact said teacher is probably saddled with a lot of student loan debt. If you are a teacher it is safe to say you are not in it for the money.

The next time you see your child’s teacher, remember this: your child won’t remember who won the Super Bowl or which actor was popular or what music number was at the top of the charts during their school life, but they will remember the teacher who taught them fractions, how to read, how to have a dream and how to reach for the stars; I know I have.

So, to all the teachers, friends who are teachers and professors who influenced my education, to you I say “thank you!” And when you see your child’s (or grandchild’s) teacher, please be sure to thank them for all they do for your child and the hundreds of other children they teach.

They’ll appreciate it.
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USPS No. 665-100

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Wallowa County’s Newspaper Since 1884
Enterprise, Oregon

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PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY BY:
EO Media Group

Periodical Postage Paid at Enterprise and additional mailing offices

Subscription rates (includes online access)	1 Year
Wallowa County	\$40.00
Out-of-County	\$57.00

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

See the Wallowa County Chieftain on the Internet
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POSTMASTER — Send address changes to
Wallowa County Chieftain
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Volume 134

Lengthy trip offers lessons in science

In March my wife Pepper and I went on a wonderful trip that included short visits to Indiana and Hawaii and a longer exploration of New Zealand. In Indiana we met our new grandbaby Hazel and celebrated with her jubilant parents, our son Isaiah and his wife Lauren. Then we flew to Honolulu, where we stayed for two days, taking the opportunity to visit the Pearl Harbor Memorial while also squeezing in a driving loop of the island of Oahu. In New Zealand, we landed in Auckland, rented a camper van and toured both the north and south islands for a little over three weeks before ultimately flying out of Christchurch. We saw beautiful countryside and spectacular coastline and did plenty of fun things, including horseback riding, golfing, zip-lining and museum visits.

As a reader you might expect that this column would focus mainly on those bits of entertainment, but there you would be mistaken. Instead, because our first visit to the southern hemisphere left me mulling over certain curiosities, I would like to discuss primarily two topics: circles and going in the wrong direction. And for kids, teachers or just inquisitive adults, there might even be a lesson in geography, math or science along the way.

We live on a big ball called Earth that spins around in a circle once a day and revolves in a much bigger circle around the sun once a year. Because the Earth’s axis — the imaginary line around which it spins — is “tilted” relative to the sun, we get more or less sunshine at certain times



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

of year. At our summer solstice, the north pole has sunshine all day long. In December, the same is true at the south pole. In March, at about the time of the equinox when we were traveling, the sunshine is about equal in Oregon and New Zealand, and because both places are at about similar latitude (each is about halfway between the equator and the closest pole), our spring weather and their fall season are comparable.

In any part of the world, the sun rises approximately in the east and sets in the west, and here up north we are accustomed to seeing the sun traveling through the southern sky during the day and moving from left to right. What I did not know until visiting New Zealand was that down there, the sun follows a pathway through the northern sky and appears to be moving from right to left. That was a head-scratcher for me, and because we had a lot of overcast days it took awhile to notice.

Another little known international conspiracy is the decision by certain people — who are probably still bitter that the British lost the American Revolution — to drive on the wrong side of the road. Countries closely affiliated with Great Britain historically have joined in this plot to befuddle American drivers

by placing their steering wheels on the wrong side of camper vans, reversing the proper location of the turn signals and windshield wipers, and traveling around roundabouts clockwise. All of this causes Americans to look foolish and perplexed as we try to figure out how to make our way around a beautiful country where people do not drive correctly.

Then there are the imaginary circles that are perpendicular to the equator, which we human beings have mutually agreed to draw around the Earth. There are 24 of them, and they are also known as time zones. They jut around a bit, especially in odd places such as Oregon, Idaho and Indiana, but usually they are about a thousand miles apart at the equator and they converge at the north and south poles. Just to make things more interesting, we also have devised something known as the International Date Line, which is not for lonely, single people but rather so that we can experience time travel when we fly across it. For instance, on our trip to New Zealand practically an entire day vanished in the blink of an eye, whereas on our return trip we had the joy of flying for about 44 hours on a single Wednesday. Moreover, twice on our return flights, according to the date and the clock, we appeared to arrive at a destination prior to our time of departure.

If you need any of that explained to you further, I would be happy to visit your classroom or we could have coffee together sometime.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.