

ELECTION 2017

Those running in May deserve our praise

If you’re a registered voter — and we sincerely hope you are — your ballot for the May election should have already arrived in your mailbox or will shortly.

This election is a far cry from last November’s big kahuna, but essentially not any less important. A case could be made that it’s more important than the Presidential election.

The process of selecting who will represent you on cemetery district boards, fire district panels and school boards is part of the fabric of our democracy and our community.

The school board races are the only ballot measures that have drawn sufficient candidates to produce an actual race. Keeping the governance of schools as close to the taxpayer as possible has served our nation and our county well.

Having a say in how the portion of money the local board controls is as simple as a phone call or a visit to a board meeting. It’s about as grass-roots as it gets.

Same for all of the other races on the May ballot. The idea is local control and self-determination.

This week, we hand our “everyday heroes” award to the stalwarts who allowed their names to be put forward. It’s not always an easy job, there is often not much in the way of remuneration and people can at times be disagreeable.

Being an effective elected official — from U.S. President down to the Lostine Cemetery District — is a calling. Thankfully, our community continues to have folks who are willing to serve when called.

That said, we would also like to remind readers that no one tossed a name in the hat for several positions that are open in May.

It’s not too late. You can launch a write-in campaign.

The Wallowa County Clerk’s Office, which does yeoman’s work where elections are concerned, will need your ballot returned by May 16 to be counted. Let’s plan to have 100 percent voter participation, and be sure to congratulate the winners and thank them for their service on May 17.

Agree? Disagree? Let us know what you think. Write a letter to the editor and send it to editor@wallowa.com or add your comment online at wallowa.com.

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain



Understanding the electoral college

This is the second in a three-part series about the Electoral College.

As I noted last month, Article II and the 12th Amendment of the Constitution lay the groundwork for what has become known as “The Electoral College.” But the Constitution leaves it up to the states to determine how Presidential Electors are chosen and even how their votes are allotted.

With the aim of minimizing the possibility of corruption, Article II declares that “No Senator or Representative, or Person holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector.”

The original vision was that electors would be chosen by the people of each Congressional district in each state, and that because these electors would not be beholden to any candidate, they would exercise well-informed judgment when they cast their votes for president and vice president.

The founders had serious reservations regarding the wisdom of the public at large, and they wanted to establish a buffer against the selection of presidential candidates who might, in the words of Hamilton, have a talent for “low intrigue, and the arts of popularity.”

But the forces of politics and history soon moved in a different direction. Within a few years of the Constitution’s adoption, states beginning with Pennsylvania and Maryland adopted a winner-take-all system for allocating electoral votes. By 1836, all states were operating by this system, and today, only Nebraska and Maine

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

have modest variations.

This development did not sit well with some of the architects of the Constitution. Both Madison and Hamilton argued that winner-take-all format violated the original intent of the system and reduced electors to mere proxies for the state’s popular vote.

The exact method of selecting electors varies by state and by party and can be changed according to state law and party by-laws. I cannot give you details for each state, but I can tell you how Oregon’s Democratic Party chose me as one of its seven electors in 2008.

I ran for Congress as a Democrat in the Second Congressional District in 2002 and 2004, and over the course of these campaigns, I met Democratic activists throughout the 20 counties of the district. When my wife Pepper and I moved from southern Oregon to Joseph in 2005, I continued to be involved in politics at a local party level.

I was elected first as vice chair and then chair of the Wallowa County Democratic Central Committee in 2006. In 2007, I was elected chair of the Second Congressional District Democratic Committee at the state level of the Democratic Party of Oregon.

One of the duties and privileges of that position was being designated by the par-

ty as one of Oregon’s seven Presidential Electors, in the event the Democratic presidential candidate might win the election in 2008.

In the summer of 2008 after Obama won the Democratic nomination, I along with other potential electors from every state, signed a pledge to vote for Obama for President and Biden for Vice President, if they prevailed in November in our state. They did.

I set out early Dec. 14, 2008, to drive from Wallowa County to Salem. The roads were icy here and all along I-84 and I-5, and I was glad to have a 4-wheel drive Subaru with studded tires. The next day, I proceeded to the State Capitol where I met with the other six electors in the senate chambers.

We voted at noon in tandem with other electors across the county. Each elector was issued two paper ballots, one for President and one for Vice President, and the results were tabulated and recorded, with seven votes for Obama and seven votes for Biden.

The results of our vote in Oregon were presented and announced Jan. 8, 2009, along with the results from each of the other states and the District of Columbia, in the U.S. Senate, and the election became official.

I will always feel both honored and humbled to have had a small part in the election of President Obama and in the history of our great country.

John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.

Hardships were a part of history

I am reading a book this week that I hope to share with readers in a future edition: “Tough Enough: 25 Years in Hells Canyon” by Virginia Woods Meyer. It tells the story of the Wilson family and their experiences when the U.S. government decided to pursue a “taking” of their land to create Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.

The book is based on remembrances recorded by Doris Wilson. That name should be familiar to many in Wallowa County. Doris and Lem were the parents of Ray Wilson, a long-time saddle-maker.

Meyer, who lives in Meridian, Idaho, has received many positive comments about the book. As a newcomer to the area, I appreciate her deep dive into local history.

Several people have taken time to share historical insights with me, which is most appreciated.

ANOTHER BIT OF historical data came from Janelle Collins, who sent us her mother’s obituary for publication. Leona Darlene Carper Collins belonged to one of Wallowa County’s first families.

Her mother came from West Virginia over the Oregon Trail. It took four months.

You can only imagine what type of trip that must have been. Hardy hardly begins to describe the survivors of the

WAHL TO WALL

Paul Wahl

Oregon Trail.

Her story resonated with me. My ancestors on both sides are of German from Russia heritage.

They were part of the emigration by ethnic Germans from Germany to Russian (mostly what is today Crimera), where they were actually originally recruited and welcomed.

Things went well for a while, but the change in Russian politics and economic conditions exacerbated by a series of famines sparked the industrious Germans to leave in droves.

In my case, they came to the United States and began the trek across the country looking for a place to live in peace, speak their language and farm the land. My ancestors settled initially in South Dakota, but in 1906, began taking advantage of the offer of homesteads in North Dakota.

Today, it’s not unusual to stop to have lunch in a small North Dakota restaurant and be served Kneophla soup. It’s a cream-based concoction filled with tiny

pillows of dough. I ate my share of it growing up when flour and cream, the two primary ingredients, were plentiful.

If you are German from Russia, I would welcome the opportunity to reminisce with you perhaps over a bowl of kase Knoephla or some rivel soup.

I WANTED TO take the opportunity to remind readers that the fun and information doesn’t stop after you read your print edition of the Chieftain.

We have been working hard as a staff to be as active as possible on Facebook. If you haven’t stopped by, please do so this week.

We’re easy to find. Open Facebook and plug in Wallowa County Chieftain. You’ll be whisked right to our front door.

Last week we had a lively discussion of the news of the day, lots of event photos as well as the upcoming eclipse in August.

Wallowa County isn’t in the direct path of the eclipse, but as one of our Facebook readers pointed out, we are close enough that visitors will find their way here before or after the Aug. 21 event.

We also included a handy map of the trajectory the eclipse will take across Oregon.

Wahl is the editor of the Chieftain who celebrates his German from Russia heritage.

Letters Policy

Letters to the Editor are subject to editing and should be limited to 275 words.

Writers should also include a phone number with their signature so we can call to verify identity. The Chieftain

does not run anonymous letters.

In terms of content, writers should refrain from personal attacks.

It’s acceptable, however, to attack (or support) another party’s ideas.

We do not routinely run thank-you letters, a policy we’ll consider waiving only in unusual situations where reason compels the exception.

You can submit a letter to the Wallowa County Chieftain in person; by mail to P.O. Box 338, Enterprise, OR 97828; by email to editor@wallowa.com; or via the submission form at the newspaper’s website, located at wallowa.com. (Drop down the “Opinion” menu on the navigation bar to see the relevant link).

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