# Grads: Learn to make good decisions

EDITORIAL
*Voice of the Chieftain*

In a few days, high school seniors across Wallowa County will graduate from high school. The ceremony is often referred to as commencement. It is a time of moving forward and also looking back.

Students will leave the relative safety of the confines of a familiar school where they have often spent much of their young lives. They'll commence out into a big world that holds great potential but also great peril.

Whether they choose to continue their education, join the military or the work force, there will be challenges. Fortunately, the tight-knit community out of which Wallowa County students grow provides a grounding that others don't have.

No matter how great the preparation, what is ahead can be daunting and a bit overwhelming.

Advice will abound. Grads will be told to make a mark in the world, to hold to their beliefs and to look the world directly in the eye. Never let 'em see you sweat. Don't take any wooden nickels. Keep your powder dry.

Shakespeare's "to thine own self be true" is often tossed out, although if you analyze the words spoken by Polonius in "Hamlet," most literates believe there's an overtone of narcissism that isn't helpful.

It seems appropriate, however, that this time of evolution in the lives of students be greeted with helpful insight from those who have stood in their shoes in the recent and not-so-recent past.

One thing each graduate will experience is the beginning of a lifetime of constant decision-making. We are shaped by the decisions we make. We are deciding what kind of future we want to create each moment.

Learning the art of considering carefully and making the right choices can mean the difference between success and failure. Do our children have the innate skills to assess a challenge and determine the best path forward?

It is not possible for schools, parents or society to teach a child every fact, figure and formula he or she will need to succeed. More important are the coping skills that encourage young people to examine all sides, contemplate the outcome and then move forward.

While not every decision can wait for a protracted period of weighing options, those in-the-trenches decisions are often the most important.

It's difficult to tell young people who often see themselves as invincible and live in an instantaneous world that slowing down and taking a careful look before leaping is a good habit.

It's not how teens are hard-wired. It goes against the popular philosophies of the day.

It is our hope that the Class of 2017 will spend the remainder of their days living a life of quiet contemplation, that the care and feeding of their parents, families, teachers and community have equipped them for success in all their endeavors.

That they will know when to be rugged individualists and when to assimilate, and that above all, they will travel a journey of success and happiness.

Congratulations to each graduate. Our best as you come to the end of one journey and the beginning of another.

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Volume 134

# Time to dump Electoral College

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
*John McColgan*

*This is the third and final column regarding the Electoral College.*

There were several reasons that our nation's founders created the Electoral College. I will consider them under the labels of temperance, slavery and federalism.

**Temperance.** It reflects the notion that a group of well-informed impartial electors would serve as a check against the whims or comparative ignorance of the general population of voters. As previously stated, the evolution of the two-party system and the adoption of a state-by-state winner-take-all allotment of electors have negated this Constitutional intent. Electors do not, in fact, exercise impartial temperate judgment but act as mere proxies for their parties and their states.

**Slavery.** The Constitutional Convention was deadlocked over this heinous institution not primarily because the founders were divided about whether slavery itself should be retained or abolished, but because they disagreed about how slaves should be counted as representation was allotted in the new Congress.

Founders from nonslave states argued that slaves should be regarded as property rather than persons, while delegates from slave states wanted slaves to count in the national census as persons, right alongside other nonvoters, such as women and children.

In the end, according to the terms of the notorious but pragmatic three-fifths compromise, each slave was counted as three-fifths of a person, and the proportion of members of the House of Representatives and the Electoral College was allotted accordingly.

A footnote about this discriminatory aspect of the Electoral College is that "Indians not taxed" were excluded entirely by the provisions of our original Constitution, both from the census and from the voting rolls. It should now be self-evident, to borrow a term from the Declaration of Independence, that these discriminatory aspects of our Constitutional and national history are morally abhorrent, and any vestige of them in today's politics, such as efforts to suppress the rights of every American citizen to vote, should be scorned and eliminated.

**Federalism.** I believe this is the only original purpose of the Electoral College that still has some merit. Federalism means that our country was founded as a nation of states, and that the diversity, rights and semi-autonomy of these states deserve recognition and protection.

Just as The Great Compromise distributed seats and power in the House and Senate with deference both to population and parity, so too the same formula in the Electoral College reflects that balance of power and respect for diversity.

But on the other side of that argument, we might properly ask why each voter from sparsely populated states should really have more electoral clout in our selection of a president than each voter from more urban states.

Why should Wyoming, for example, have three electors when the overall population of that state amounts to only around three-quarters of a typical Congressional district? Much as we rural Oregonians might admire Wyoming, we could rightly wonder why each of their voters should have more than three times the electoral clout of each of ours, and about four times as much electoral power as each voter from California.

Especially as our population becomes more mobile and as more voters opt to be affiliated with neither of our two major political parties, the Electoral College probably makes less sense with each passing year. Most surveys show that a majority of Americans no longer support it.

Moreover, history has proven that this system clearly favors one party over the other. In five elections, the result of the popular vote for president was effectively overturned by the Electoral College. Every hard-luck winner of the popular vote who was outdone by the Electoral College (Andrew Jackson in 1824, Samuel Tilden in 1876, Grover Cleveland in 1888, Al Gore in 2000 and Hillary Clinton in 2016) was a Democrat.

And considering that this tumultuous result has occurred in two of our last five presidential elections, the pattern is apt to continue.

Short of abolishing the Electoral College, two proposals are in vogue to amend it. One would allocate most votes according to the popular vote winner of each Congressional district, but this arrangement might exacerbate unfairness, because it would subject electoral voting to all the vagaries and chicanery involved in Congressional gerrymandering of districts.

The second proposal, called the National Popular Vote, would allot each state's electoral votes according to which candidate won the national popular vote and would take effect only after enough states to constitute an electoral majority had approved it.

Much as I cherish my own role as an Elector in 2008, I would recommend either the adoption of the National Popular Vote plan or the abolition of the Electoral College. Most of the reasons it was originally established are no longer relevant in America today. The time has come to place more faith in the collective wisdom of our voters than our founders did, and to amend or abandon a system where the will of the voters can be "trumped."

*John McColgan writes from his home in Joseph.*

# Tourism has its ups and downs

WAHL TO WALL
*Paul Wahl*

This weekend marks the official kick-off of the tourist season in Wallowa County. I am anxious to experience it.

This is the third area of the country I've worked where tourism has played a large role in the local economy.

For several years, I was the editor of the Kern Valley Sun in Kernville, Calif. That's in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas east of Bakersfield, Calif.

Lake Isabella was the big draw. Each summer, thousands of tourists would flock into Kernville, population 800 at the time, and things would be bonkers for some months.

Then ... nothing. It was six months of feast and six months of abject famine. There was also the variability of the lake as a tourism magnet. It was operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which controlled the dam that created the lake.

Nowhere in its operational manual was there a section on tourism, so if water were needed downstream, they'd open the floodgates and the lake would all but disappear. And the tourist season right along with it.

When that happened in April, you knew it was going to be a tough summer for those who depended on people coming to the lake to fish and otherwise recreate. Locals pushed for years to encourage the U.S. Forest Service to take over the operation, since they found that organization to be much easier to work with than the Corps, or as they were affectionately known, "that bunch of overactive beavers."

Lake Isabella was considerably larger than Wallowa Lake. It was also beautiful and provided a terrific backdrop for residents and visitors alike.

The years when water was low, it was referred to fondly as Lake Wasabella.

Some years later, my sojourn took me to Solvang, Calif., to be the editor of the Santa Ynez Valley News. Solvang is a Danish community. Think Leavenworth, Wash., but with Frikadeller rather than sauerbraten.

Nearly three million tourists a year traipsed through that community. They came by the busloads. Traffic backed up eight miles in both directions into town on weekends. Even on a weekday, parking was at a premium.

Solvang had lively local politics, generally pitting the tourism interests in town against the permanent residents. Most of them would just as soon have put a fence around the city limits and kept everyone who didn't live there away.

Unbelievable amounts of sales and bed tax revenue were generated, which also made for juicy wars over how to spend it. The camps usually divided up between those who wanted to use it to generate more tourism and those who wanted to use it buy open space — and keep it open. Santa Barbara County in those days was about as anti-development as you could get.

Some years after Solvang, we lived for a short while on the banks of Lake Okoboji in northeast Iowa. It was a small lake that was heavily polluted with chemicals that ran off the surrounding farmland. No one seemed to think that was an issue worth addressing.

The Arnolds Park Amusement Park on the banks of Lake Okoboji was dubbed the "Iowa Disneyland." The theme park had been rescued from decay by a group of locals whose goal it was to restore it to its former glory.

It was an uphill battle. Somehow the revenue generated during the exceedingly short season was mostly enough to cover the cost of operating with little left over for investing in upgrades.

The big draw was the historicity of the area. Some of the summer guests were fourth generation coming to Lake Okoboji to stay in campy 50s-style lodges, boat, fish and otherwise escape the banality that is Iowa.

Wallowa County has a lot going for it, first and foremost its natural beauty. It will be exciting to experience my first "high season" and learn more about tourism in yet another setting.

*Wahl is editor of the Chieftain and enjoys playing "hometown tourist."*

# Free-market does not work in healthcare

LETTERS to the EDITOR

I was impressed with the detailed and concise arguments presented by Rick Bombaci in his guest column in the May 17 Chieftain.

I have friends and neighbors in Wallowa County who have benefited under the ACA, or Obamacare, and other people who saw their premiums go sky high. Under Obamacare's Medicaid expansion Oregon's 2nd District insured 129,000 residents, the largest number of any Republican district in the country.

At the same time, ranchers and farmers were particularly hard hit, as were the self-employed, because they were not covered by employers or the Medicaid expansion. They had to buy insurance on the individual market, and it became prohibitively expensive.

As Bombaci noted, the free market system does not work in the healthcare arena. There are too many unknowns for the consumer to realistically research healthcare, especially in an emergency, too many opportunities for insurance companies to profit from illness and disease and too many poor people locked out.

In consequence, the country has the most expensive healthcare in the world. We do know that single-payer, government healthcare works with existing programs such as Medicare and military coverage.

Maybe it is time to move toward helping all citizens of this country. We can and should be able to provide affordable healthcare for everyone.

**Ann Browder**
*Enterprise*

## Don't burn garbage

Ever smelled a noxious odor coming from your or a neighbor's burn barrel, burn pile, wood stove or incinerator? If so, you were breathing toxic fumes.

Even though it's illegal in Oregon to burn materials that cause toxic fumes such as plastics, construction waste and other materials, many or most of us who live near others in Wallowa County likely have at least one neighbor who still does.

Here are a few facts:

• All garbage releases toxic chemicals when burned, even paper.

• Smoke from burning garbage, especially plastics, can cause cancer, asthma, birth defects and infertility.

• Burning garbage releases dioxins that settle in the soil effecting the food from our gardens.

• Because of the slow and inefficient combustion that takes place in a burn barrel, one burn barrel releases as much toxic matter into the air as a municipal incinerator.

That last one is not to be missed. Imagine that. Burning garbage in a burn barrel releases as much toxic material into the air as a municipal incinerator. That's huge. Please remember that before you take the truly radical action of sharing the cancer and other health effects with your family and your neighbors by burning your garbage.

**Leon Werdinger**
*Joseph*

## 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.

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).