

# You are the ‘u’ in public budget process

One of the popular catch phrases that arose out of Watergate in the ‘70s was “follow the money.” Back then, it generally referred to the attempts by Pres. Richard M. Nixon to “buy” whatever he wanted, including elections.

Here’s another way to think about it. Each June, taxing entities across Wallowa County engage in a process to create a budget or spending plan for the coming year. A good way to know what is going to be accomplished — or perhaps not accomplished — can be determined by following the money.

**EDITORIAL**  
Voice of the Chieftain

If it’s not in the budget, you can bet it’s not going to happen. The idea of budget-setting from the beginning was that taxpayers would take conscientious notice of how a county, city, school district or special district proposed to spend its money, and that would be part of the checks and balances of the American system.

Somewhere along the line, most of us became too lazy and apathetic to care a great deal about who was spending what, as long as our sacred cow wasn’t on the auction block.

Public notices advertising budget hearings are generally greeted with a corporate yawn. It’s not unusual for only one or two members of the public to show up for these sessions.

Then along comes a year when revenues are short and decisions must be made to present a balanced budget. Left with little or no public input, the elected officials in charge of the process do their best to craft solutions. Most of the options are not popular.

When taxpayers complain, it’s generally pointed out to them that the budget process is conducted in a public forum, and they were conspicuous by their absence.

While that statement is true, it’s a bit like slapping someone in the face to tell them how much you appreciate them.

Elected officials can help constituents discover and engage in the budget process by being proactive as the work begins to unfold. A public education process would go a long way.

Reaching out to key constituency groups who may be interested in the negotiations could be effective. Conducting evening or Saturday hearings might broaden the base of participation as not everyone is able to leave work for a weekday mid-morning gathering.

We recognize that the Chieftain could do a better job of getting ahead of the information curve when budget season approaches. There needs to be a broader commitment to covering the budget process for all public entities before it begins. Public officials need to be more willing to discuss budget options in preparing those stories, rather than asking us to wait for the ink to dry on the budget document before commenting and explaining their choices.

And yes, the public needs to do its part by showing a much greater fiduciary responsibility.

Most budgets need to be approved and submitted by June 30. That’s not a lot of time to make an impact for this year, but that’s not a reason to sit this one out.

A good step forward would be to plan to attend the hearing on the future of the Wallowa County Library 10 a.m. Tuesday, June 13, at the Wallowa County Courthouse.



# More than sunshine this spring

The sun is shining outside my patio door. Laundry is hanging on my makeshift line. These past mornings I am awakened by an introductory chorus of robin songs, which crescendo into countless sparrows chirping in the lilac trees outside my bedroom window.

I’ve been measuring the progress of spring up the valley by the blooming of glacier lilies. In March, I stopped at the Minam campground coming home from La Grande. A patch of six-inch glacier lilies with lemon yellow blooms draping over their stems greeted me.

While spending a day at Indian Crossing last week, I came upon glacier lilies beginning to bud, and drew a deep breath of relief. Spring is here.

I am so grateful. Last winter was a tough one for many of us. For me, it was a huge learning curve. My frustration was borne from having scheduled my need to be anywhere but home for different activities.

My vehicle was stuck several times in the snow. I just had to deal with it. I watched lifetime residents of Wallowa County relaxing during the same winter, because they knew to stay home in such weather.

**WALLOWA GIRL**  
Katherine Stickroth

Lesson learned. I’m planning not to plan my winter by going places. I’m grateful for my Wallowa County elders who teach me how to live and enjoy this place I call home.

I’m thankful for the people I’m acquainted with — some closer than others. While driving along the Imnaha, I encountered a fellow columnist and his friend and had a friendly exchange about morels with an invitation to leave some in their truck as I made my way out.

A small celebration of my sixth decade on this earth was shared last month with friends. Nothing fancy. Just the joy of getting to be with friends on a special occasion.

“What’s it feel like to be 60?”  
“I’ve heard 60 is the new 40, and I’m going to roll with that,” I reply.

As Father’s Day approaches, I’m grateful for the fathers who protect and provide for their children. Not all do, as evidenced in my growing-up years. But

I’ve had men at key times enter my life who filled the blank spaces.

Mr. McCraney, my first boss, taught this young teenager to look people directly in the eyes when talking to them. Dick Perry, another boss, recognized my potential as an engineer. He taught me how to design construction jobs and enjoyed my creativity. I call them “my fathers by heart.”

I appreciate fathers who coach baseball or softball teams and include the least player with words of encouragement. I know of ranchers who donate calves to young people for 4-H projects. There is a kind man who gave a neighborhood child a kite, just so she would look up.

So fathers, if you’re out mowing the lawn or driving to Safeway and a memory strays in that asks the question, “I wonder what ever happened to that kid?” here’s the answer.

We’re still looking up. Because of you.  
Happy Father’s Day.

*Katherine Stickroth is a Wallowa County-based freelance writer who also blogs at allowagal.com.*

# When a lie becomes reality

A free society must function on trust. Religion attempts to build trust and trustworthiness. But with today’s lying to gain advantage, integrity is suffering.

**LETTERS to the EDITOR**

Adolf Hitler said, “The great masses of people ... will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one.” Some lying is necessary, e.g. to lead a lethal adversary astray or to comfort a dying patient in denial.

All groups hold political and sometimes religious beliefs that help us cope with the harsh realities of life but may not be true.

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# Dog hair and pre-existing conditions

“What a nice dog,” Greg Walden’s aides told me.

And they were right. She was awfully groovy. She’d do this thing where she’d lean in and rub her forehead back and forth on your shins or kneecap in kind of a backscratcher move, but for her eyebrows instead. It was a little weird, but also charming somehow.

She was doing this forehead massage technique using the legs of Greg Walden’s aides so I warned both of these young fellas about the hair. This dog we’re talking about was a husky mix and the exodus of fur from these creatures is sometimes just astounding. Gets everywhere and likes to stay there, weaving into the fibers of clothing.

Like, for instance, dark pants on suits worn by two aides of Greg Walden.

“Aw, that’s no big deal,” they said and kept petting her so she kept right on working those steel wool hairs of hers into their suits.

This was years ago. Back then I worked at the radio station, and Walden was in town talking about pressing matters. While he was in the radio booth doing his interview, my dog and I were keeping Walden’s retinue company out in the front room.

Pretty soon we see through the window of the recording booth that Dave Nelson and Greg Walden are nodding and shaking hands, so the interview is



**AND FURTHERMORE**  
Jon Rombach

wrapping up — and here’s what stuck with me from this otherwise unremarkable encounter: the two aides are suddenly extremely concerned about dog hair on the fabric of their suits.

“We’re going to a wolf meeting next,” they said, furiously brushing their pant legs with their hands. “We can’t have wolf hair on our clothes.”

More frenzied brushing.

Couple things I’d like to pause and consider here. For context, this was back when wolves in Wallowa County had fairly recently become a thing. OK, next item: clearly my employers were pretty chill if I could have my dog with me in the office, but I daresay the casual bring-your-pet-to-work policy may have been revised had I, say, brought a ... I don’t know ... wolf into work.

Yeah, huskies can have that look about them, but my dog weighed about 50 pounds. So, you know, big coyote at best. It’s almost a compliment if Greg Walden’s aides thought Wallowa County was Wild West-ish enough that a large coyote or pygmy wolf would be hanging out in a place of business.

Fast forward to present day. My dog died a few years back, rest her furry soul. Lived to be 18. What finally got her was a pre-existing condition of 18 times seven being a lot. Sad!

Pre-existing condition talk is what reminded me of that dog hair encounter. Walden has been in the news lately, trying verbal bank-shots to explain why sick people not getting health care is probably a good thing. I couldn’t exactly follow the logic of his argument.

There was a lot of English being applied to the words so they were spinning pretty fast. But that image of his guys jumping up and trying to rid themselves of what they just said themselves was a good thing they were happy about ... that’s the clip my brain now plays when I observe a politician peddling an antidote to wellness.

Well, I’m running out of room here, so I’m afraid I won’t be getting to the real-life examples of people I know getting hosed if their pre-existing condition keeps them from seeing their doctors. To be fair, though, this prospect of people losing health coverage will allow — quoting Greg Walden here — “more flexibility for states to innovate.” So that’s a solace.

Good luck with brushing the dog hair off your pants, Congressman.

*Jon Rombach is a Wallowa County-based columnist for the Chieftain.*

# Library one of Wallow County’s treasures

Wallowa County is full of treasures. Many are obvious — majestic mountains, beautiful productive valleys, the lake, historic buildings and friendly people.

There is one treasure that is no so obvious. In fact, it is almost hidden — Wallowa County Library. I passed the building many times before stopping one day to discover what was inside. What a surprise.

I became so enamored by the library, its services and its stellar librarian that I began donating materials.

One of the things that impressed me about Sue is her motto “you have to meet

**LETTERS to the EDITOR**

people where they are,” and that she does. The programs of the Wallowa County Library are numerous and geared specifically for the county. One of my favorites is “Deliver-Me-A-Book,” a wonderful outreach to homebound providing them with personalized literary materials and a social contact that means a great deal.


I spend a lot of time in Wallowa County and participate in many activities there. The libraries are one of the draws. I find that communities that see the value

in and promote literacy and libraries are the best communities.

While I recognize the budget problems, I urge citizens to find a way to keep the county library at its current service level. From newborns to senior citizens, the county library is helping and influencing the community and beyond. Don’t lose it. When it is gone, you may find there is a domino effect and other libraries may go as well.

I urge each of you to attend the hearings on June 13 and Sept 13 at 10 a.m. and support your library.

**Annette Byrd**  
*Elgin*



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