

Shining a spotlight on agriculture

Agriculture is still king in Wallowa County. With bountiful cattle dotting the landscape and thousands upon thousands of acres of hay grown for forage, there is no denying its economic impact.

Agriculture pays the bills in Wallowa County. Farmers and ranchers pay the lion's share of property taxes that fund public entities large and small.

Today, it's easy to drive by a center pivot irrigation system and not even notice it's there unless it happens to be watering the highway.

Like much of America, fewer and fewer Wallowa County residents have a true personal connection to agriculture.

It wasn't that long ago that everyone was either directly involved in the ag economy

EDITORIAL

Voice of the Chieftain

or knew someone who was. With those connections growing weaker by the year, it is increasingly necessary for agriculture to do a better job of telling its own story.

Farmers and ranchers generally don't believe in tooting their horns. Bragging, most of them have been taught, is not proper etiquette. Many are reticent to try to explain their work for fear people will misunderstand or think them out of touch.

Clearly, the need to tell agriculture's story has never been greater as restrictions and other roadblocks to success threaten a way of life and an economic driver.

To that end, the Chieftain is



unveiling this week a series of stories designed to tell stories of successful farmers and ranchers in the county. If you've never met someone engaged in agriculture, you'll get to know several of them by the time the series ends later this year.

Primarily, you will learn about the innovations that are driving agriculture in the county; How

things are changing dramatically, yet in so many ways, remaining the same.

In some instances, the stories will confirm what you may already know. In other instances, you may learn something new and walk away with a greater respect for the panoply agriculture presents.

Rather than asking you to side with farmers and ranchers

over environmentalists or other interests, we ask that you become educated. Learning why certain things are done a certain way builds a bridge to understanding.

Most who make their living in agriculture will tell you they are misunderstood. Walking a mile in their shoes will help readers learn what makes these unique individuals tick.

The series of stories such as the Chieftain is embarking upon requires farmers and ranchers to place their trust in the media, something they do not do often and something we recognize as a sacred obligation to get the story right.

It is our deep desire that you will find the stories engaging and informative. Read them with an open mind, and as always, we welcome your feedback.

Your input key to economic development

The most powerful and successful communities are those whose citizens are engaged in what's going on around them. Let's keep building Northeast Oregon's strength by getting involved in regional economic planning.

Northeast Oregon Economic Development District compiles a new Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy — affectionately known as the "CEDS" — every five years (with annual updates). 2018 is a CEDS revision year, so the district has been working hard to engage civic leaders in visioning exercises.

Now, it's your turn. Please join us for a public meeting in Wallowa County and share your opinions via our anonymous survey.

Led by the district, local leaders in business health care, education, natural resources and government have explored their hopes for and concerns about Northeast Oregon's economy.

A key finding discovered at a discussion in late January was the need for more collaboration across county lines in order to diversify the economy and provide better-paying jobs for the region. The importance of involving people of different backgrounds, cultures and ages in planning for the region's future was also highlighted.

To gather more perspectives on how best to improve quality of life in Northeast Oregon, the district is hosting several opportunities to participate.

People who enjoy gathering to share food and ideas are invited to attend a forum 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 7 at Community Connections in Enterprise. Fun and facilitated activities will inform participants about the region's current economy and gather input on strategies to provide for jobs, education, housing and other essentials needed to support a healthy economy.

Refreshments will be provided. RSVPs are not required but are appreciated so we don't run out of food. Call 541-426-3598.

People are also invited to complete the Northeast Oregon Strategy Survey, at goo.gl/forms/ZcIABHGHT2qilTk2. Please respond by Mar. 30.

Those of us in government and economic development do not — and don't want to — work in a vacuum. We need your input. We look forward to hearing from you.

Lisa Dawson is executive director of NE Oregon Economic Development.

LETTERS to the EDITOR

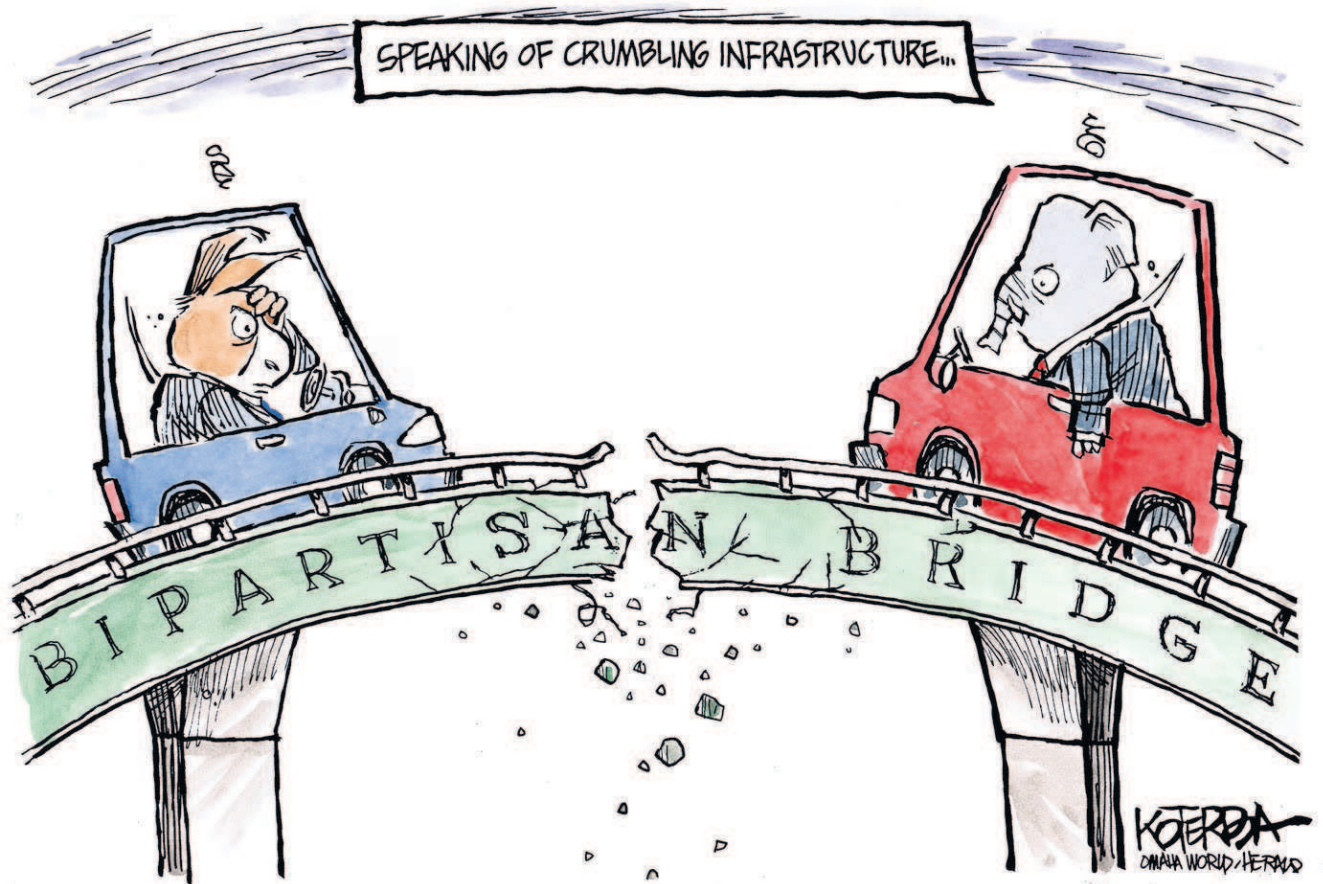
Appreciated column's 'responsibility' theme

Thank you for the very thoughtful Wahl to Wall column in the Chieftain Feb. 14.

For a long time, I have wondered what happened to the word and attitude of "responsibility." More often, we hear people speaking of "freedom" and either demanding more freedom or complaining that their freedom is being taken from them.

It is time that we realize that there is no freedom without responsibility.

Evelyn Swart
Joseph



Children, moms and the NRA

I have no quarrel with hunters, in fact, I wish we had more of them and that we could figure out a way to sell wild meat commercially and reduce the growing national deer herd.

But that's not today's discussion. Today it's mass shootings, especially on school campuses and especially with semi-automatic weapons with large magazines. It's also guns of any kind in the hands of those who should not have them.

I think and hope we are at a turning point in the national discussion about guns and violence because the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High in Parkland, Fla., scene of the latest mass school shooting, are speaking up.

They're writing editorials in the New York Times challenging elected officials in their home state and most importantly joining forces with students, mothers — and dads — across the country to dare elected officials to take on the National Rifle Association.

Although an early advocate for gun registration and some sensible restrictions, the NRA has powerfully opposed all such restraints for more than 40 years.

In something that could have been scripted for a movie, David Hogg, a 17-year-old student journalist at Stoneman Douglas, interviewed classmates as they huddled in classrooms and closets while the shooting went on.

"I recorded those videos because I didn't know if I was going to survive," he said. "But I knew that if those videos survived, they would echo on and tell the story. And that story would be one that would change things, I hoped. And that would be my legacy."

Another high school junior and sur-



MAIN STREET

Rich Wandschneider

vivor, Cameron Kasky, leads a "Never Again" student campaign on Facebook, calling out elected officials by name and telling them that prayers and sympathy are not enough.

Kasky, maybe the most articulate 17-year-old on the planet, told dithering prayerful politicians that "People say it's too early to talk about it ... If you ask me, it's way too late."

At other high schools across the country, students rallied in solidarity, staged walkouts to protest Washington's inaction in protecting students and teachers and made plans for a national protest day. A gun control advocacy group, "Moms Demand Action," is setting up a parallel student group.

Can it work? There's some evidence from Sandy Hook, the site of the 2012 killing of 20 young students and six teachers.

In its wake, Connecticut lawmakers under pressure from moms and dads enacted laws expanding an existing ban on the sale of assault weapons, prohibiting the sale of magazines with more than 10 rounds and requiring the registration of existing assault rifles and higher-capacity magazines.

The state also required background checks for all firearms sales and created a registry of weapons offenders, including those accused of illegally possessing a firearm.

Gun deaths in Connecticut have dropped more than 30 percent.

Oregon, like California and Connecticut, has more laws on the books and fewer deaths per thousand than do Texas, Florida and their NRA stronghold kin. When I was on the Enterprise school board in the '80s — before Columbine, Sandy Hook and Stoneman Douglas — Oregon Fish and Wildlife would call us when they got a poached deer or elk, and we would have it sent to the butcher and processed for what was called "Cowboy Macaroni."

And pickups in the school parking lot had gun racks and guns in them. Some students hunted after school. The NRA taught hunter safety classes so young kids could hunt.

And every year there were thousands of lethal drunk-driving accidents. And then along came MADD — Mothers Against Drunk Driving — formed by moms who had lost children to drunk drivers.

By the late '80s, "designated drivers" were common; I remember Wayne Davis telling me that alcohol had been a big contributor to the auto-body business before MADD.

He said that cleaning up alcohol-related car crashes had been the worst part of his work.

Al Hoffman Jr., a Florida-based developer and Republican fundraiser, will no longer donate to politicians who take money from the NRA, and is writing to cohorts suggesting they do the same.

Is this the turning point?

Columnist Rich Wandschneider lives in Joseph.

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P.O. Box 338 • Enterprise, OR 97828
Office: 209 NW First St., Enterprise, Ore.
Phone: 541-426-4567 • Fax: 541-426-3921

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Newsroom assistant editor@wallowa.com
Ad sales consultant Jennifer Powell, jpowell@wallowa.com
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