

EDITORIAL

Right choice  
on roosters

The common metaphor to describe an unnecessarily aggressive approach — using a sledgehammer to drive a nail — occurs to us when considering the Baker City Council’s recent debate about roosters.

We think the Council’s ultimate decision, to reject a proposed ordinance that would have banned roosters within the city limits, was the right one.

We’re not downplaying the citizen complaints about crowing roosters that prompted City Manager Fred Warner Jr. to bring the ordinance to councilors in July. Certainly the city has an obligation to try to respond to such complaints.

But this particular problem already had a potential solution by way of an existing city ordinance dealing with “unnecessary noise.” Section 97:07 of the property maintenance ordinance reads: “No person shall make, assist in making or permit any loud, disturbing or unnecessary noise which either annoys, disturbs, injures or endangers the comfort, repose, health, safety or peace of others for a period of five minutes or more in any fifteen minute period except as exempted for construction activities.” A subsection more specifically deals with roosters, as it defines as a violation “The keeping of any bird or animal which by causing frequent or long-continued noise shall disturb the comfort and repose of any person in the vicinity.”

But the City Council, by approving the first two of three required readings of the proposed ordinance banning roosters outright, provoked a not-surprising outcry from residents, some of whom don’t raise fowl but who consider the rooster’s distinctive call an audible symbol of small-town life.

One opponent presented a petition with 175 signatures during the Council’s Aug. 14 meeting.

Councilors, to their credit, respected this response — a relatively unusual show of solidarity for a City Hall proposal.

We hope the episode will remind city officials, when they’re considering ways to respond to residents’ complaints, to take a thorough look at existing regulations before proposing new ones that are broader than they need to be.

From the Baker City Herald editorial board. The board consists of editor Jayson Jacoby and reporter Chris Collins.



Your views

OTEC’s magazine story is pure propaganda

Someone once noted that “the whole point of good propaganda” (is that) “You want to create a slogan that nobody’s going to be against ... Nobody knows what it means, because it doesn’t mean anything. It’s crucial that it diverts your attention from a question that does mean something. ...”

Which brings me to the August 2018 issue of OTEC’s Ruralite. Nestled amongst articles on county fairs and photographing dead people, and ads shilling vinegar as a miracle cure, was an article offering slogans aplenty and another highlighting the D.C. Youth Tour. These were meant to burnish the reputation of OTEC as a community-minded citizen, but careful reading reveals just empty slogans and half-truths.

The article “It’s a Matter of Principles” contained seven warm and fuzzy headliner slogans, but I’ll concentrate on the first: “The Power of Membership,” with translations along the way.

- “local members call the shots.” If you can get through all the obstacles for getting elected as a well paid director, they will have to listen to you, otherwise forget it.
- “We are accessible. You can call or email us and know someone here is listening.” Of course they listen, but they don’t have to respond, especially if you ask essential questions pertaining to rate studies or employee compensation.
- Directors “have only two things in mind: ... keeping the lights on and keeping costs affordable.” Except for bloated administrative salaries and pet projects like sending well-heeled teens to lobby in D.C., which despite OTEC’s

repeated statements, does affect rates. Every penny spent on pet projects could have been spent on capital projects like substations.

Speaking of rates, OTEC’s were not raised but Idaho Power’s residential rates decreased by 3.27 percent recently, so many OTEC members would still be better off with Idaho Power.

As for my enquiries, OTEC would not even provide critical information needed to understand whether they are treating all classes of ratepayers fairly or whether total compensation for various positions is adequate or extravagant. So no, as a member you don’t call the shots, and your power is very limited. Looks like the uncooperative co-op to me.

Christopher Christie  
Baker City

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.

- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.
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Library Association besmirches beloved author

I deplore racism.

I applaud people who try to squash it whenever it scuttles, cockroach-like, into public view.

And I appreciate that others endeavor to remind Americans of our country’s sordid historical record of treating both Native Americans and African Americans.

But I don’t see what racism, and the commendable campaigns to confront it, have to do with an award for children’s literature that was named for Laura Ingalls Wilder on its creation more than half a century ago.

The American Library Association (ALA) feels differently.

The organization earlier this summer removed Wilder’s name from the award it first bestowed, to Wilder herself, in 1954, three years before she died at age 90.

The reason for the decision, according to the ALA, is that Wilder’s beloved “Little House” books, which were first published in the 1930s and 1940s and describe her family’s experiences during the 1870s and 1880s, “reflect racist and anti-Native sentiments and are not universally embraced.”

The ALA covers quite a bit of ground here. There is a vast difference, after all, between books that are “racist and anti-Native” and books that are “not universally embraced.”

If the latter criterion is so important as to warrant changing the name of a 64-year-old award, then



JAYSON JACOBY

I’m not so sure but that the ALA ought to stop handing out the honor altogether.

I doubt any of the books written by past recipients is embraced by everyone, nor are future winners likely to achieve absolute acceptance.

E.B. White, for instance, must have offended someone in the pro-rodent faction with his “Stuart Little.”

And surely some readers found White’s depiction of the American farm in “Charlotte’s Web” overly simplistic and slightly patronizing.

But not as patronizing as the ALA itself.

After reading several accounts of the organization’s decision to excise Wilder’s name from its children’s literature award, I can think of no better word to describe its attitude.

The underlying message, it seems to me, is that authors who write about 19th century America must assume that young readers are incapable of understanding how societies’ attitudes can change, and for the better.

Rather than write truthfully about history, including some of its inevitably unsavory aspects, authors should either sanitize their

depictions or ignore them altogether.

A joint statement by ALA President Jim Neal and Nina Lindsay, president of the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the ALA whose board voted 12 to 0 to delete Wilder’s name from the literature award, in effect concedes that authors who write accurately about 19th century attitudes toward racial issues should expect to be shunned by the people who presume to decide what children ought to read.

Although they acknowledge the popularity of Wilder’s books, Neal and Lindsay say that because those books are “a product of (Wilder’s) life experiences and perspective as a settler in America’s 1800s ... (they) reflect dated cultural attitudes toward indigenous people and people of color that contradict modern acceptance, celebration, and understanding of diverse communities.”

By this standard, children should not read about the Civil War or the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Both events, like those Wilder describes in her books, happened during the 1800s. And both certainly reflect cultural attitudes quite different from those of today.

Yet the ALA, rather than recognize our historical flaws and accept their considerable value in explaining how we’ve advanced as a society, seems to prefer that we pretend the flaws don’t exist.

But that’s not even the most nox-

ious thing about the organization’s decision.

The ALA has also soiled Wilder’s reputation — and not because she celebrated racism or endorsed the terrible way our government, and many of our citizens, treated Native Americans.

Obviously she would never have become a literary icon had her work borne the unmistakable stench of the unabashed racist.

In reality Wilder is “guilty,” by the ALA’s curious standards, only of writing truthfully about her experiences — experiences which were considerably more nuanced than the ALA, with its reference to her books’ “racist and anti-Native sentiments,” implies.

Anyone who has read the “Little House” series knows that although Wilder’s mother feared and hated Native Americans, both Laura and her father felt much differently. The books hardly stand out as a one-sided, simplistic examination of 19th century race relations and attitudes. Indeed I believe Wilder’s work has not only entertained generations of readers — myself and my own children among them — but it has also challenged them to consider complicated topics.

Yet the ALA, or so it seems to me, is troubled by the notion that readers, or at least young readers, would even think about racism, lest they somehow be infected by hatred rather than inoculated against it.

The ALA issued a statement

noting that its decision to remove Wilder’s name from the award was not “an attempt to censor, limit, or deter access” to her books.

This is the sort of statement only a scheming politician would embrace.

Naturally the ALA, which to its credit has been a staunch opponent of book-banning campaigns, wants to burnish its credentials in this respect.

But its claim that renaming the award isn’t intended to “censor, limit or deter access” to Wilder’s books is insulting. Of course the ALA isn’t yanking “Little House on the Prairie” from library shelves — that’s a straw man that the ALA conveniently propped up for itself.

Yet any reasonable person recognizes that when a respectable organization such as the ALA brands Wilder’s books as racially insensitive — so insensitive, in fact, that allowing her name to remain on a coveted award would smear its future winners with some indelible stain — then some parents will be more likely to steer their kids to a different shelf.

A sad spectacle, that is, for an organization which claims on its website, even using capital letters unnecessarily, that “Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion are fundamental values of the association and its members.”

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.

