

EDITORIAL

# Reservoirs again show their value

Reservoirs in and around Baker County have shrunk to comparative puddles, mute evidence to the severity of the drought that has persisted into autumn.

Yet when we look at the steep, dusty shores that were under water last spring we imagine how different things would be if the reservoirs didn't exist.

Most particularly we wonder how much less productive the area's farms and ranches would have been without reservoir water to irrigate their crops.

Certainly it would have been difficult, and for some farmers impossible, to raise water-intensive crops such as potatoes and alfalfa.

Residents who remember the era before Mason Dam was built across the Powder River in 1968, creating Phillips Reservoir, no doubt recall that the river all but dried up by the time it reached Baker Valley.

A similar situation prevailed in the Burnt River Valley before Unity Dam was built in 1938, and along the lower Powder River prior to the construction of Thief Valley Dam in 1932.

More recently, Wolf Creek (1974) and Pilcher Creek (1983) dams west of North Powder have supplied water to the North Powder Valley.

These and other reservoirs have transformed the former boom and bust cycles of spring flood and summer drought into a more reliable source of water throughout the season.

This has contributed to agriculture remaining one of the most important drivers of the county's, and region's economy.

We sometimes take for granted the water distribution system. But a summer like the one that just ended reminds us that the efforts that built dams in decades past continue to yield dividends to the county's residents.

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



## Your views

### Harvey has proved that he deserves to be re-elected

In examining our choices for Baker County Commission Position One, it is clear that both candidates have established successful businesses. Both can successfully manage business accounting and balance their books. Over the last four years Bill Harvey has proven he is up to the job of effectively managing the County's budget. However, managing fiscal assets and overall economic health of our county takes more than accounting skills, it takes charisma. It requires organizational skills, salesmanship, proactive relationship-building and maintaining an effective environment for working with individuals and corporations that fuel the economic engine of our local government.

During his tenure Commissioner Harvey has proven abilities in the latter skill set. In just one case, there has been tremendous savings to Baker County, in the negotiation of a benevolent gift from one of our most valued private employers, Ash Grove Cement, when they contributed \$310,000 out of their pocket to assist the County in the demolition of the abandoned plant in Lime. He, by invitation, has represented Baker County

at the congressional subcommittee on forest action issues in Washington, D.C., to defend our stake in managing and accessing our national lands. We have seen the long hoped for advent of a new food store, Grocery Outlet, and the many jobs it will bring. Under Bill Harvey's leadership, the County is healthy with a promising future. Yes, it takes more than accounting, and Bill Harvey has what it takes.

Please join me in re-electing Bill Harvey.

Chuck Chase  
Baker City

### No need to build an expensive new school

I noticed in the Herald that the big spenders want to build a new school. I drove around the City Hall, the Courthouse and the School District office building and guess what, no money trees. I hope the school plans to teach math as they say the bond will be \$48 million over 30 years. Many local residents will never see this debt paid off, not to mention cost overrun, plan changes, upkeep, repairs and parking lots for cars and buses as most students will have to be transported. This will be

a little far for walking. Then comes the sweetheart of all — if we think property tax is crazy now, just wait, an increase in property tax is a lifetime tax that never goes away.

Our older school buildings are well-built so why not let local contractors do some renovation every year and keep the money at home? And also help some of the working people make a living. There have been many important and some famous people in Baker over the years and they were helped along by good teachers, not the fancy classroom. I had a good friend in the Sumpter area that went to school at Lockhart, a one-room school with one teacher teaching eight grades. There was a woodstove for heat and the restroom was that little building in the back yard. This friend finished high school at Baker High, got married, took a job as manager of a Standard Oil gas station, worked nights, attending college during the day, and graduated with a 4.0 average in engineering. This is just one story of many Baker people, so we will have to let the taxpayers decide.

Grover Mann  
Baker City

GUEST EDITORIALS

# Don't micromanage Oregon's public school curriculum

**Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:**  
A high school freshman from Lake Oswego, Claire Sarnowski, is on a mission. She, with the help of state Sen. Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, and Holocaust survivor Alter Wiener, hopes to persuade the Legislature to require high schools to teach about the Holocaust.

It's a worthy subject without question, particularly in this era of heightened ethnic tensions in the country and worldwide. That said, many high school world history textbooks

include sections on World War II in general and the Holocaust more specifically.

There are good reasons not to add a specific curriculum requirement to what the state's high schools must offer. Tinkering with curriculum that way is, generally, bad business.

What Oregon students need is a broad curriculum that, for many students, is a stepping stone to college but for about 40 percent of graduates, likely the end of the educational line. That means history classes that routinely

teach about African-American history, as one example, and the Holocaust, as another. Both shed light on major influences on the modern United States, in the case of African-American history, and the modern world, including the U.S., in the case of the Holocaust.

Neither should be there simply because supporters believe the topics are important. In the case of the Holocaust, it's a required part of high school world history classes in this state, and world history is required for gradu-

ation. American history classes surely already include discussions of African-American life, as well. Teachers should not be forced to cut attention to some other important part of a history curriculum because another part has outspoken support for increased attention.

Again, both topics are important ones, and worthy of inclusion in any high school curriculum. That's not true of every topic, however, and lawmakers must be wary of jumping on the history bandwagon of the moment.

# NAFTA rewrite should boost exports from the Midwest

**Editorial from The Chicago Tribune:**  
Donald Trump's approach to trade policy, as with many topics, is different from that of past presidents. His scripts typically include plenty of threats, complaints and drama, designed not just to get his way but to keep the public engaged.

Not being drama critics, we'll let others judge the entertainment merits of his strategy. But when it comes to tangible results, his renegotiation of NAFTA has worked better than his detractors expected.

The new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, came to fruition in cliffhanger talks with Canada that ended Sunday. It retains most of the valuable parts of the 1994 trade deal, which was designed to facilitate more commerce and greater economic integration among the United States, Canada and Mexico. Under it, trade among the three has grown from about \$290 million to \$1.2 trillion.

But as you would expect of an economic compact drafted before the internet, email and

mobile phone use became part of every facet of life, it was due for a renovation to accommodate changes in these North American economies. The ones agreed on by the three governments in recent months reflect that need.

For the Midwest, NAFTA has been a boon. Automakers have gained from being able to make and assemble different components wherever efficiency dictates. With some tweaks — which, regrettably, will make it more expensive to build vehicles in Mexico — the new accord largely preserves that system.

It's no accident that the two biggest customers for Illinois exports are Canada and Mexico, and sales have grown at a solid pace in recent years.

That corn you see being harvested when you drive through the countryside? In a normal year, about 40 percent of it is shipped to our North American neighbors. A tariff war with either or both of them, which might have erupted had the talks failed, would have taken a heavy toll on heartland farmers.

There are other useful steps, notably stronger protections for intellectual property, which is a particular U.S. strength. Canada and Mexico obtained commitments that they won't be subject to the 25 percent auto duties Trump has threatened to impose on other countries.

He won a big concession by persuading Ottawa to take steps to open up its highly protected dairy industry — which has long blocked U.S. competition with import quotas and tariffs as high as 300 percent. We take it as good news that Dairy Farmers of Canada immediately denounced the change. Wisconsin and other Midwest dairy farmers, who lost sales after Canada tightened its rules last year, are likely to take a more positive view.

Trump correctly dropped his demand to get rid of the independent tribunals set up in the original treaty to resolve disputes about trade policy. Some trade hawks see them as an infringement on American sovereignty, but they serve to ensure a fair process to everyone. Keeping them was perhaps the highest prior-

ity for Canadians — who otherwise would have to litigate in American courts, where U.S. companies would enjoy a home-field advantage. The panels function to promote free commerce under established rules, something that benefits all three nations.

NAFTA created a mostly open continental market that fosters trilateral growth, cooperation and progress — and, not least important, Midwestern prosperity. In concluding the new pact, the administration deserves credit for preserving that fundamental achievement.

Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Letters are limited to 350 words. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days. Writers must sign their letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Email letters to news@bakercityherald.com.