

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Listening, looking ahead

The Baker School Board and school district officials plan to spend a lot of time listening to voters in the wake of the Nov. 6 defeat of a \$48 million tax levy that would have paid to build a new elementary school and upgrade existing buildings.

The board certainly didn't have to try hard to understand the voters' main message.

If votes equaled decibels, the results were deafening — 4,747 voters, 68 percent of those who cast a ballot, were opposed.

Superintendent Mark Witty was realistic in acknowledging, during a board work session last week, that "there's no way" voters would approve a similar bond measure.

And that means the school district won't be building a new elementary school for grades 1-6. The new school was by far the most expensive item — about \$37 million — the bond measure would have paid for.

This at least allows board members and district officials to narrow their scope and focus on the other projects they hope to accomplish.

These include renovating Baker High School, which is at about half its student capacity, to accommodate seventh- and eighth-graders in a separate area. The current enrollment at the middle school exceeds the building's capacity by about 60 students.

The high school renovation is estimated to cost \$11 million, including making the building more secure and energy efficient.

District officials also want to make similar security, safety and efficiency upgrades at other schools, including Keating and Haines.

A bond packaging the BHS renovation and the improvements to other schools likely would be about one-third the total cost of the defeated measure — roughly \$16 million.

That would trim the cost to property owners to approximately 66 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value over about 30 years.

As the board proceeds with its plan to solicit voters' opinions about the future of the district's buildings, this or some other pared down version of the Nov. 6 bond could serve as a basis for the discussion.

The scale of the defeat last month is significant, to be sure — dauntingly so.

Board director Andrew Bryan said during last week's work session that he believes the public conversation about the measure was successful, but "the failure was the dollar amount."

Bryan is right, of course.

What's not certain is whether there is a threshold that would prove palatable to a majority of voters, and if there is, what the dollar figure is.

We hope the district's effort to engage with voters will help to answer those questions.

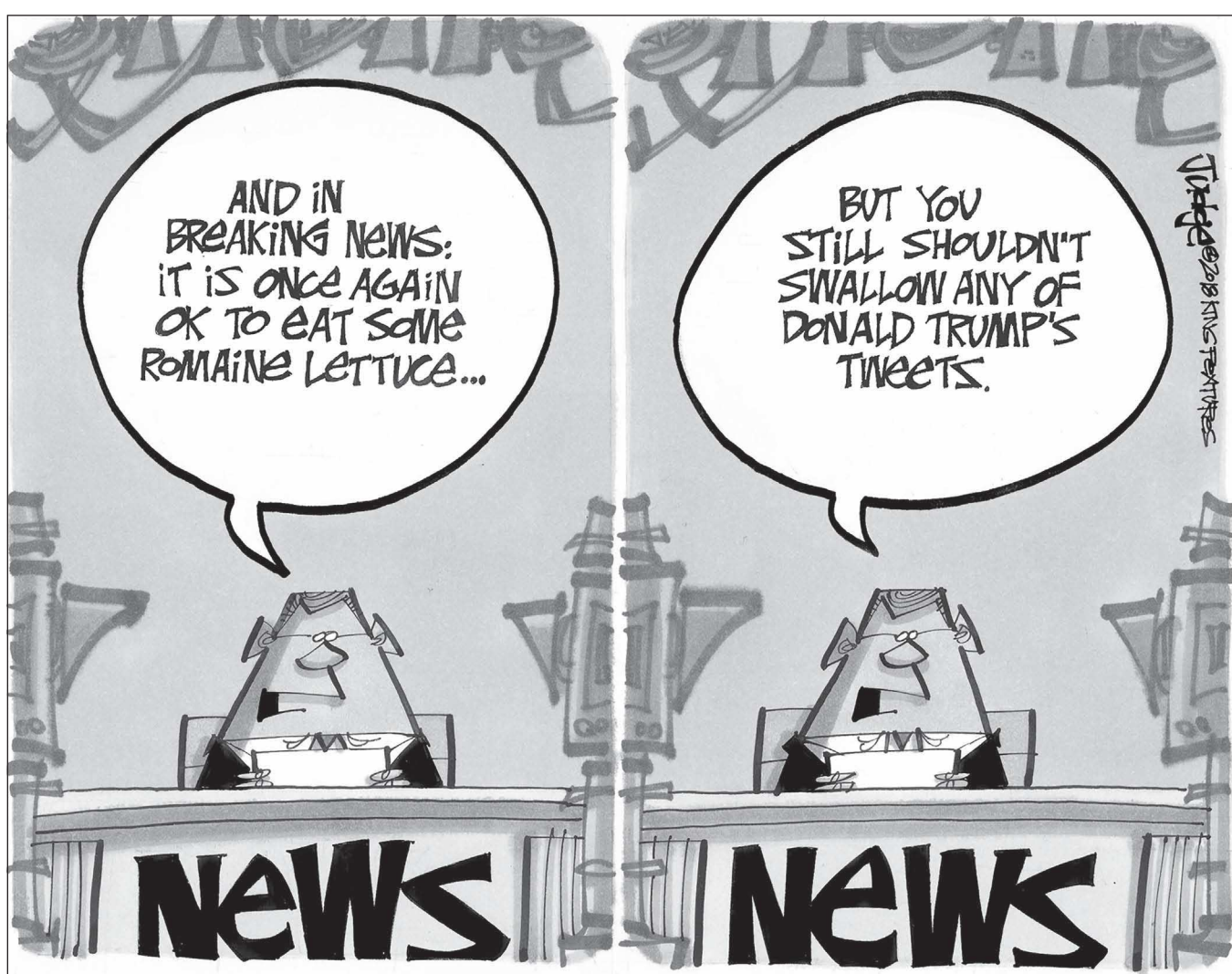
And although we agree with the board's consultant, Connie Potter, who urged board members and district officials to "let it lie for a little bit" and then "listen, listen, listen to what your community has to say," the inefficient use of both the middle school and high school buildings, and the security and energy efficiency issues at existing schools, will continue.

One rejection by voters shouldn't discourage the district from trying to deal with those problems. Based on last week's work session, we're confident that district officials will keep trying to find an acceptable solution.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

## 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.



# Symbolism won't save salmon

The image of an orca mother carrying her dead calf in Puget Sound was a visceral and heartbreaking reminder of the plight of these iconic animals. It's also a reminder that if we hope to save the orcas, we need to focus on science-based actions that we can take now.

Emotion and passion are understandable but unhelpful — unless they translate into clear-eyed thinking and measures that will benefit the orcas as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, some groups are taking advantage of the passion swirling around the whales' plight to push their own spill and Snake River dam removal agendas, which won't help the animals now or later:

- Spilled water at the federal dams has reached levels that put young salmon in jeopardy, yet these groups seek higher spill levels that would violate water quality standards explicitly established to protect salmon and other aquatic species. Why? Because spill increases the dams' operating costs — and increasing costs boosts prospects for dam removal.

- Everyone familiar with these issues knows that dam removal would require an Act of Congress and millions of dollars of federal funding, which would take years. Deconstruction of the dams, even proposals to "dig a ditch" around them, would take even longer.

Most importantly, Snake dam removal doesn't equal a safe future for the orcas. There simply is no scientific basis for such claims. In fact, NOAA Fisheries scientists have been clear that three factors are equally responsible for the orcas' decline — prey availability, toxic contaminants, and noise and vessel traffic. Moreover, Snake River chinook are not the only or most important part of the whales' diet, according to NOAA.

Yet anti-dam groups continue to present Snake dam removal as a silver



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bullet that will save the salmon and the orcas. It is both a false promise and a powerful fundraising tool.

Don't take my word for it; I head up an advocacy group that supports the Snake dams. Listen instead to Dr. Peter Kareiva, who last fall co-authored an article with UCLA graduate student Valerie Carranza entitled: "Falty to Symbolism No Way to Save Salmon" (and I submit, by extension, orcas). It should be required reading for anyone involved in salmon or orca restoration in the Northwest.

Kareiva has an impeccable science vita: Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and National Academy of Sciences, former Chief Scientist at The Nature Conservancy, current Director of UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability. He knows the Northwest's endangered salmon issues intimately. As Director of Conservation Biology at NOAA's Northwest Fisheries Science Center from 1999 to 2002, he was charged with examining management options for Snake River salmon.

Here are key points from the paper:

- "There is no doubt that dams have caused salmon declines, but the operators of the dams have spent billions of dollars to improve the safety of their dams for salmon, and it is not certain that dams now cause higher mortality than would arise in a free-flowing river."
- "The problem is that a complex species and river management issue had been reduced to a simple symbolic battle — a battle invoking a choice between evil dams and the certain loss of an iconic species."
- "... it has become clear that salmon

conservation is being used as a "means to an end" (dam removal) as opposed to an "end" of its own accord."

The paper also describes how, in 1999, environmental groups supporting Snake dam removal ran a full-page ad in The New York Times, stating that if the dams were not promptly removed "wild Snake River spring chinook salmon, once the largest run of its kind in the world, will be extinct by 2017." Kareiva and Carranza point out: "As we write this, it is 2017, the dams remain, and spring/summer chinook numbers are much higher than they were when that confident prophesy of extinction was printed."

The authors continue: "Symbolism is visceral and compelling. Another advertisement used in 1999 to advocate dam breaching depicted a young girl looking at a salmon mounted on the wall with the epithet 'extinct 2017' and was captioned, 'if we do not remove the dams, our children will never be able to see a wild salmon spawning.' But symbolism makes everything a black-or-white choice. It also makes it harder to negotiate and sustain solutions that must satisfy diverse stakeholders with diverse values ... it need not simply be a choice between fish and hydropower."

Salmon face myriad obstacles to survival in the rivers and ocean, throughout their complex life cycle. Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet for restoring them or the orcas — not dam removal, not added spill. Anti-dam groups that continue to oversimplify one of the Northwest's toughest challenges do a huge disservice to the public, the science and the species.

*Terry Flores is executive director of Northwest RiverPartners, a nonprofit alliance of farmers, utilities, ports and businesses in Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Montana.*

## GUEST EDITORIAL

# A legal victory for real Oregon wine

**Editorial from The Medford Mail Tribune:**

Oregon vineyards and wineries have labored for years in the shadow of the much larger and better-known California wine industry. Now federal regulators have ruled that a Napa Valley vintner can no longer use an Oregon label on his California-made wines. That's a victory for Oregon's growing and increasingly respected wine industry.

The Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, a part of the federal Treasury Department, ruled last week that Joe Wagner, owner of Elouan Winery and Copper Cane Wines and Provisions, must surrender nine wine labels, including Elouan and The Willamette Journal.

The unsuspecting wine consumer could be forgiven for being taken in by the label on The Willamette Journal,

which says in part, "This Pinot Noir was cultivated and crafted to honor the unique area where it was grown. The Willamette region of Oregon's coastal range is a place credited over decades for its vibrant and fresh style."

But despite the flowery prose, The Willamette Journal is not an Oregon wine.

The grapes come from Oregon, but Wagner explained in an interview published Nov. 1 that the grapes were layered with dry ice and trucked to Rutherford, California, where the wine was made.

Wagner said his company changed the labels on his wine after regulators told him he couldn't claim an Oregon appellation such as Willamette Valley, a federally recognized American Viticultural Area. But other wines, such as Elouan pinot noir, continued to be sold with Oregon

on the label. The popular wine app for smartphones, Vivino, lists Elouan No. 23 among the top 25 "Oregon Pinot Noir wines" as ranked by Vivino users. So apparently the wine is good, but it's not made in Oregon.

Unfortunately for Wagner, Oregon law says all wine labeled as Oregon wine must be made in the state, not just grown here. State Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis, brought the matter to the attention of the Legislature in September, showing colleagues a case of Elouan wine labeled as "Oregon Coast" Pinot Noir — not a recognized AVA and where no pinot grapes are grown — and listing the Willamette, Rogue and Umpqua valleys, which are real AVAs, underneath that heading.

Let the buyer beware — and let Wagner's company learn some geography.