

2020: It even stole the snow

The warm front, slinking in like a soulless thief, was, I fear, inevitable.

I strive for optimism, but I suspect not even the most committed pollyanna expected 2020 would deign to grace us with a white Christmas.

The presence or absence of snow on the ground on this particular day doesn't define the season, to be sure.

But I happen to cling to the nostalgic notion that snow enhances an already special occasion. It is, I think, a sort of frozen contrast. When I'm watching my kids peel off the wrapping paper and I can glance outside and see the white berms lining the driveway, the warmth inside our home seems to gain a few soothing degrees.

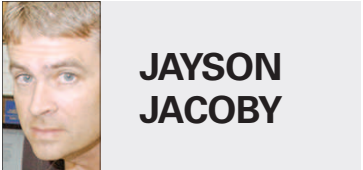
I wasn't a bit surprised, then, considering the toll that 2020 has already taken, that the year would send that warm front, with its balmy south winds, scurrying across Baker County on the winter solstice.

It was a classic 2020 performance.

The year, rather than being content with merely eroding the thin layer of snow, conjured a record-setting high temperature of 56 degrees. By Monday evening, as I peered through our telescope at Jupiter and Saturn rubbing figurative shoulders, not a trace of snow remained at our place.

We might yet manage a white Christmas. The National Weather Service predicts that light snow might begin falling late on Christmas Day.

I don't expect that I'll need my shovel.



JAYSON JACOBY

I was informed the other day that the average alcohol-imbibing Oregonian downs their first Christmas Day drink at 12:32 p.m.

This claim piqued my curiosity not least because of its precision, which struck me as improbably specific.

This statistic was derived from a survey of 3,045 Americans conducted by Recovery.org, according to an email the organization sent me.

I know as much about polling as an elephant knows about trigonometry.

But I think I have a fairly keen understanding of people, and it seems to me that Recovery.org might be underestimating our thirst this year. I suspect a fair volume of bloody marys will be consumed on Christmas. And what with that being a traditional breakfast beverage, I wouldn't wonder that Oregonians won't manage to undercut that 12:32 p.m. time by an hour or more.

I have another reason for being skeptical of that claim, and the source is a second, and very similar, email from the same sender.

This one also deals with the habits of the non-teetotalers among us, although the survey in this case was done by Addiction-Treatment.com. Among its findings is that the average Oregonian drinks on four days in a row during the holidays. That number seems to me awfully low, at least for 2020.

The figure that I really fixed on, though, is that a quarter of respondents say they spike their morning coffee during the holidays.

If one in four Oregonians is fortifying the breakfast mug, then that 12:32 p.m. time for the day's initial tippie strikes me as implausible.

As of this writing I haven't received an email examining Oregonians' preferred tippie for ringing in the new year.

But I'm looking forward to the findings. It's this sort of dogged research that gives us perhaps the clearest picture of how we're dealing with a year of unprecedented upheaval.

I like to whack a shuttlecock around as much as the next person but I've never considered taking anabolic steroids to give me an extra advantage.

Of course my badminton opponents tend to be children rather than Olympians, and my games are played with eternal humiliation at stake rather than a gold medal.

I would have attributed the story to the brilliant satirists at The Onion except that I read it on The Associated Press' website. But even written in the AP's straightforward, just-the-facts style, the story reads like a spoof.

A badminton champion has been banned for two years, including next year's Tokyo Olympics, because she used steroids. Kate Foo Kune, according to the AP, is a four-time badminton champion who carried the flag for Mauritius at the opening ceremony of the 2016 Olympics at Rio de Janeiro.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport — an organization that sounds like it was created, or at least named, by Orwell — denied the athlete's appeal, which was brought by the Badminton World Federation.

(A group whose name also sounds fictional, albeit lacking the Orwellian doublespeak overtones or anything vaguely frightening. How much damage can anyone do with a bunch of flimsy badminton racquets, after all.)

Foo Kune's claim was nothing if not original. She contended that her water bottle was secretly spiked with steroids during the 2019 African championships in Nigeria.

The World Federation described the saboteur as an "ill-intentioned individual," but it seems to me more likely that Foo Kune was targeted by the well-known cabal that controls betting lines on badminton.

Big money in badminton, you know.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.



Rep. Greg Walden bids farewell

As 2020 comes to a thankful close, so does my 22 years of public service in this incredible crucible of democracy — the U.S. House.

I thank my wife, Mylene, and son, Anthony, for always supporting me during my three decades of state and federal service. I will never fully understand all they sacrificed so I could fulfill my duty in office, but I know it was a lot.

I also want to thank my terrific staff over the years, and especially those who helped me build and lead such successful organizations, including my personal office chiefs of staff Brian MacDonald and Lorissa Bounds; my executive directors at the NRCC, Liesl Hickey and Rob Simms; and my staff directors at the Energy and Commerce Committee, the late Ray Baum, Mike Bloomquist and Ryan Long.

And I want to thank the thousands of volunteers and supporters of my many campaigns over the years. We did it together and we did it for the right reasons — to leave our state and country better than we found it.

I also want to thank some important mentors in my life, starting with my parents, who grew up during the Great Depression and taught me the importance of giving back to the community, working hard, always being honest and not judgmental.

I want to thank those along the way who gave me career opportunities, including the folks at KTVF/KFRB Fairbanks who put a 17-year-old kid in charge of producing and directing the 11 p.m. nightly TV news. To Roger Martin, Vic Atiyeh, Gary Wilhelms, and Denny Smith, I learned so much from working for each of you. And to Speaker Larry Campbell, time and again you showed Oregon how principled leadership produces results. It was great sport serving alongside you as Majority Leader of the Oregon House.

I want to thank the church, school, and Scout leaders who influenced my life in such a positive way, with a special shout-out to the late Earl Fowler, my high school vice principal and student body officer advisor, whose counsel when I was student body president at Hood River Valley High School in 1973-74 was as valuable then as it is now. I remember he once intoned: "When there is a leadership vacuum, fill it." He expected us to step up and lead.

I am indeed thankful for the opportunity the people of Oregon have given me to represent them here in Congress. It's a responsibility I've always taken seriously as I faithfully tried to do my best to represent them. After all, this is their office, not mine. I was simply entrusted to use the powers bestowed upon it for their benefit, something I never forgot. It's part of why I've

returned home nearly every weekend and will soon complete my 644th round trip when Congress adjourns for the year.

My team and I put special emphasis on taking care of the men and women who wear — or have worn — our nation's uniform and defended America's freedom. We helped thousands of Oregon veterans and their families receive the benefits they earned and deserved. We worked to strengthen the mission at Kingsley Air Field and open veterans' clinics throughout the district. We are so blessed to have these brave men and women risk their lives so we can enjoy ours. America owes them a debt we can never fully repay.

Having grown up on a cherry orchard outside of The Dalles, I always had great admiration for those who farm and ranch and feed us. I worked hard to protect their way of life, defending farmers and ranchers from bad policy proposals. I defended their water rights. I protected their land, starting with saving Steens Mountain. Moreover, I supported ag research and water conservation efforts throughout the district. And while we made much progress on both fronts, my one regret is that we could never find the key to unlocking a durable and fair solution to the water crisis in the Klamath Basin that could pass in Congress.

We did make progress to improve forest management, even though I'm disappointed Congress has dragged its feet in enacting much more reform to make our federal forests healthier and more resilient to climate change. It was 17 years ago last week that President Bush signed the Healthy Forest Restoration Act into law. Hopefully, in the next Congress you all will heed the guidance of our Yale Forestry grad and colleague Bruce Westerman, and modernize how we manage this great American resource before it all goes up in smoke.

Having spent six years as chair of the Telecommunications Subcommittee, I'm proud of the bipartisan work we did to open up a spectrum for advanced communications, enact First Net for our first responders, and expand access to high speed internet — although much work remains to fully connect Americans. With the RAY BAUM's Act we even reauthorized and modernized the FCC, which hadn't been done in decades.

As chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, we took on the deadly epidemic of drug overdose and combined more than 60 bipartisan,



GREG WALDEN

legislative initiatives into the Support Act, which, while focused on the opioid crisis, provides support for our communities to help all with addiction. We modernized our mental health laws, stepped up medical research, and fully funded the Children's Health Insurance Program for a decade — something that has never been done before.

We also modernized the FDA and its approval processes for medicines and medical devices. Thank goodness we made these changes, which have already proved their value during this pandemic.

We also unleashed a cleaner energy revolution in America that created thousands of new jobs, and reduced America's carbon emissions, too. Energy innovation holds the process to a stronger economy and a healthier environment.

As you can tell, I'm passionate about good public policy and using the resources we have among ourselves in the Congress to get good things done for the American people. It wasn't easy to decide to voluntarily leave this wonderful institution, but I'd long ago decided I didn't want to get voted out or carried out. I was confident I'd win reelection and my health is good, so I leave on my own terms, feeling good about that which I've helped improve in the lives of those who entrusted me election-after-election.

I'm a big fan of Theodore Roosevelt. His writings have also had an impact on my life. Just as my high school advisor encouraged us to fill leadership vacuums, so did Roosevelt laud those who climbed into the arena. So, I close with President Roosevelt's words:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

God bless you, my colleagues, family and friends, and may God Bless this great country of ours.

Greg Walden has represented Oregon's Second Congressional District, which includes Baker County, since 1999.

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

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- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number

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