

Mandatory minimums imprisoned Hammonds

Now that the Hammonds are coming home, how about an effort to curtail the mandatory minimum sentences that kept them behind bars?

After President Trump pardoned the Hammonds yesterday, freeing them from the remainder of the five-year mandatory minimum sentence for burning federal land, we hope new discussions will emerge about the efficacy of removing judicial discretion with mandated sentences.

The Hammond case is the perfect example of how these laws with noble intentions — ensuring justice for the worst offenders — may sound great but fail to provide actual justice.

The Hammonds were convicted by a jury of their peers for a federal crime after a fire they ignited on their rangeland burned onto public land.

The federal crime carried a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison.

The original judge did not believe a five-year sentence was proportionate with the crime committed. He declined to enforce the mandatory sentence and issued lesser sentences.

The problem was that the sentence was mandatory, which meant the judge lacked the discretion to alter it, regardless of the circumstances.

If mandatory minimums did not exist, the Hammonds' story could have ended when the judge handed down a sentence he believed fit the crime.

Instead, the lesser sentence was appealed by the prosecutors, and the appellate court ruled that mandatory sentences are indeed mandatory.

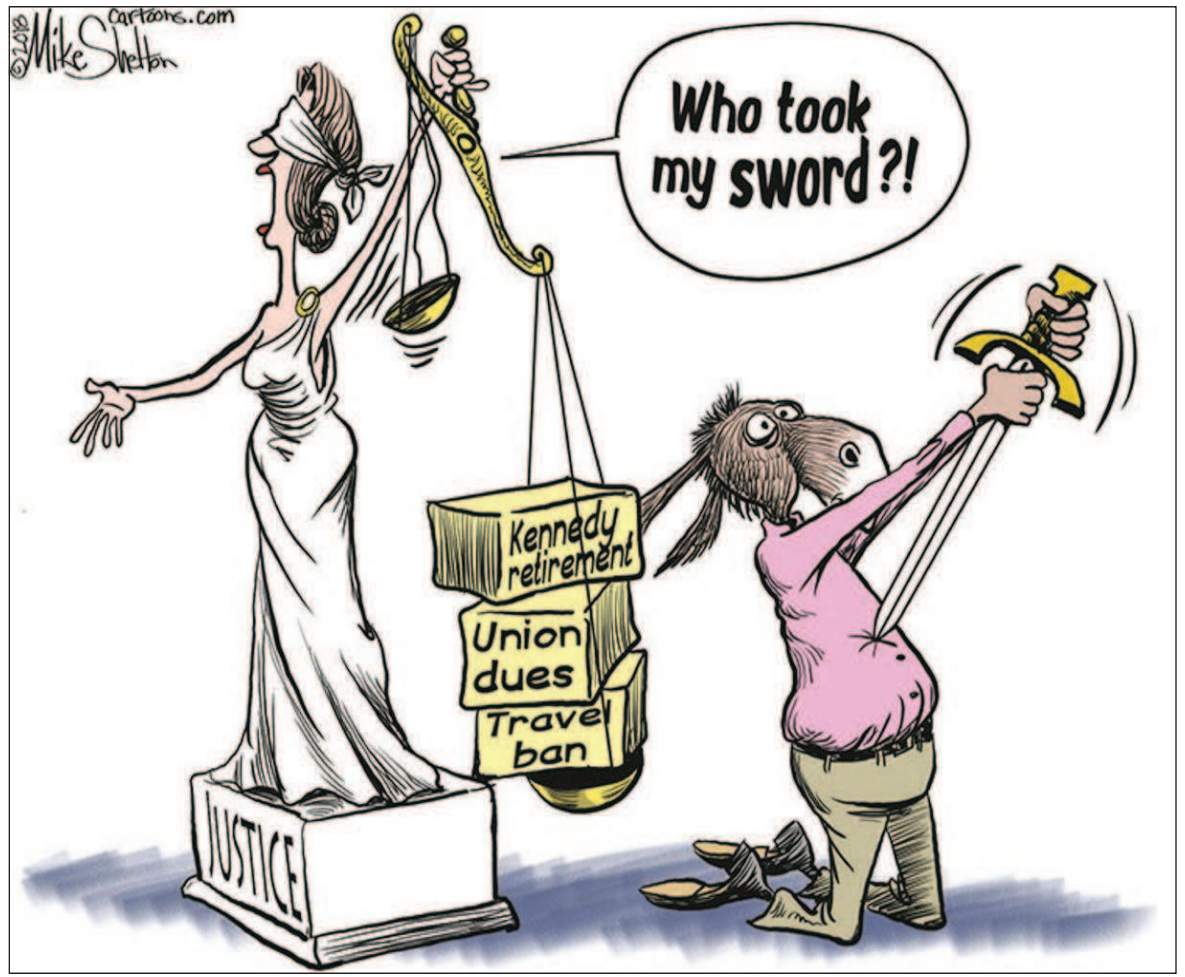
That's how the law is written. The original judge, despite his conscience, had no authority to issue a lesser sentence. The law removes this discretion.

So the Hammonds were ordered back to prison, where they have been incarcerated for another two and a half years, after serving their original sentences.

The presidential pardon will allow these two men to return home to their families, but it will not prevent the problem from occurring again. As long as mandatory minimum sentences are on the books, judges will lack discretion to dispense sentences commensurate with the crimes.

We are glad the Hammonds have finally been freed. We agree the five-year mandatory minimum sentence did not fit the crime for which they were charged.

We hope lawmakers will learn from this example and end mandatory minimum sentences.



GUEST COMMENT

Our communities and quality of life

By Jim Bahrenburg
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

I hear and read that most or all of rural America is in trouble. I feel rural communities are the backbone of this country, and every rural community faces economic, family and personal challenges.

Most rural communities still provide us with a quality of life we can't find anywhere else, even if making ends meet is sometimes or always tough.

There's a lot of national news about the country's infrastructure that's in poor condition. Here in Grant County and each of our local communities, every one of us are the infrastructure that holds things together and makes things happen.

For the past 45 years, this county has given me a quality of life, and I wouldn't be here today if I hadn't had the help, support and guidance from all my neighbors, friends and even people who have always thought I was a little odd.

Looking back, I realize how much in my life here I've taken for granted, including the sacrifices my parents made for me back when I knew I was always right. It's easy to take for granted what we have until a hurricane like Katrina hits New Orleans and Puerto Rico or a fire on Canyon Creek and cancer changing Cheryl Hubbard's life after years of dedication to the Dayville community.

We are all capable of putting our differences aside and working together to make our communities, Grant County and our personal lives better.

"A house that is divided cannot survive" in this present world of nations warring with them-

selves and with their neighbors. For many years, I have felt Grant County is one of the few counties that could become self-sufficient.

We have a small population in a large county with the right climate, the headwaters of the John Day, ranches, local business, a forest, Malheur Lumber, banks, churches, schools, hospital, orchards and now a few greenhouses that are storing water every time it rains.

Whether we like it or not,

We cannot do this if we are divided. We cannot lose our local businesses, like the dollar store, Naturally Yours or Boyd Britton Welding.

I have been criticized for getting too many grants: a small one for bird houses, a \$90,000 OWEB grant for underground drip irrigation on 18 acres that can save about 1 million gallons of water in the six-month irrigation season and a BPA grant to replace a 100-horse power pump with a variable speed pump and a 75-horse power booster pump that can save up to 77,000 kilowatt-hours of operating costs and reducing mosquitoes.

I know there is criticism of Gordon Larson's irrigation project to combine his different irrigation diversions on his land on Canyon Creek to a single, more efficient location.

I feel that soil and water are the foundation of our economy, and protecting our water and soils, especially after the Canyon Creek fire, is essential.

Soil and water conservation districts, the National Resources Conservation Service, the tribe and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board are a vital part of our local agriculture.

None of us are perfect. I make dozens of mistakes every day, and as frustrating as it is, I keep learning.

My hope is for Grant County, our communities and for the quality of life we have here, for each one of us to work toward being a self-sufficient county, setting our differences aside to work together and not be part of the national news.

Jim Bahrenburg is with the North Fork Ranch in Kimberly.

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we're all in this together. None of us need to go hungry in the best or worst of times or be out of work.

To try to have an outside business come to Grant County to improve the local economy would be great, but a Grant Union High School graduate started a company he was passionate about called Winners Choice that became a success and hired at least eight or 10 people.

Paula Berry was one of five graduating students in Dayville and went to the Olympics in Barcelona. Our students, our children, are the future of this county, and we need to leave them a county with the same quality of life or better.

We need a new library with books and technology where a child, a high school student, graduate or single parent can get a college degree or start a business. This library can be the first solar-powered library in the state, even if we have to build it ourselves.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Commissioner race still open

To the Editor:

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley's town hall meeting was held in the John Day Senior Center on Friday, July

6. Sam Palmer introduced himself and said that he had won the primary election for county commissioner. That is incorrect.

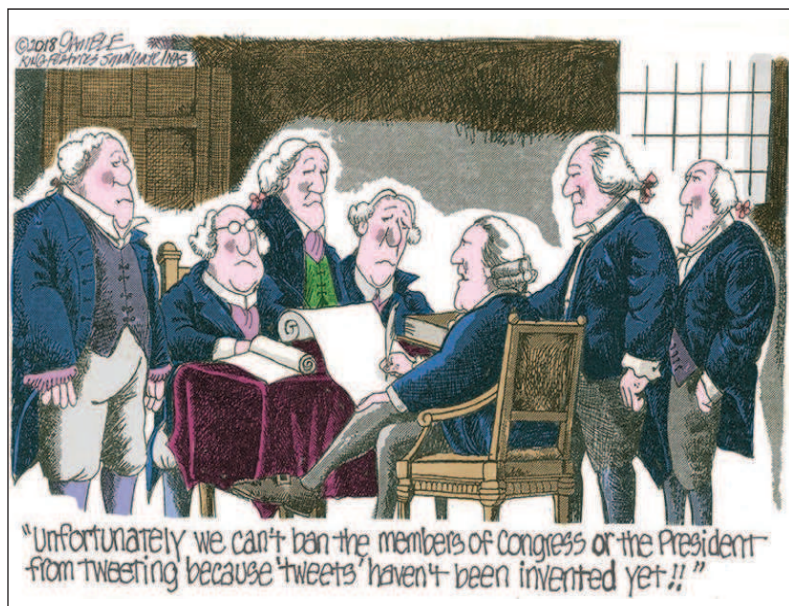
If no candidate gets at least 50 percent of the votes plus one more, then the two top contenders go to

the general election in November. The race is still open.

Gordon Larson and Sam Palmer were the two top contenders and will be on the ballot in November.

Eva Harris
Canyon City

Letters policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for Blue Mountain Eagle readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters will be asked to be contained to 350 words. No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. No thank-you letters. Submissions to this page become property of the Eagle. The Eagle reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content. Letters must be original and signed by the writer. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. We must limit all contributors to one letter per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters to editor@bmeagle.com, or Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or fax to 541-575-1244.



WHERE TO WRITE

GRANT COUNTY

- **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
- **Canyon City** — P.O. Box 276, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0509. Fax: 541-575-0515. Email: tocc1862@centurylink.net.
- **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net
- **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.
- **Long Creek** — P.O. Box 489, Long Creek 97856. Phone: 541-421-3601. Fax: 541-421-3075. Email: info@cityoflongcreek.com.
- **Monument** — P.O. Box 426, Monument 97864. Phone and fax: 541-932-2025. Email: cityofmonument@centurytel.net.
- **Mt. Vernon** — P.O. Box 647, Mt. Vernon 97865. Phone: 541-932-4688. Fax: 541-932-4222. Email: cmtv@ortelco.net.
- **Prairie City** — P.O. Box 370, Prairie City 97869. Phone: 541-820-3605. Fax: 820-3566. Email: pchall@ortelco.net.

• **Seneca** — P.O. Box 208, Seneca 97873. Phone and fax: 541-542-2161. Email: senecaoregon@gmail.com.

SALEM

- **Gov. Kate Brown, D** — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827. Website: www.governor.state.or.us/governor.html.
- **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).
- **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.
- **Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario** — 900 Court St. NE, S-301, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1730. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/Bentz. Email: Sen.CliffBentz@oregonlegislature.gov.
- **Rep. Lynn Findley, R-Vale** — 900 Court St. NE, H-475, Salem 97301. Phone: 503-986-1460. Website: www.oregonlegislature.gov/Findley. Email: Rep.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov.



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PUBLISHER.....CHRIS RUSH, CRUSH@EOMEDIAGROUP.COM
 EDITOR & GENERAL MANAGER...SEAN HART, EDITOR@BMEAGLE.COM
 REPORTER.....RICHARD HANNERS, RICK@BMEAGLE.COM
 COMMUNITY NEWS.....ANGEL CARPENTER, ANGEL@BMEAGLE.COM
 SPORTS.....ANGEL CARPENTER, ANGEL@BMEAGLE.COM
 MARKETING REP.....KIM KELL, ADS@BMEAGLE.COM
 OFFICE MANAGER.....LINDSAY BULLOCK, OFFICE@BMEAGLE.COM
 OFFICE ASSISTANT.....ALIXANDRA HAND, OFFICE@BMEAGLE.COM

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