

Walden leaves a lasting legacy

In today's pop culture climate, politicians rarely receive much thanks, but the work of U.S. Rep. Greg Walden stands out as a classic example of what an elected leader should do once he or she reaches Congress.

Walden will close the door on a long career in January 2021. His successor, Ontario attorney Cliff Bentz, will step into Walden's position with big shoes to fill.

Walden did not always get it right, but his best efforts far overshadowed any miscues. While in office, Walden was a champion of property rights, water rights, farmers and ranchers and those who serve our nation.

His long political record — which began as a state lawmaker — paid off often in Congress, which means those he served in the sprawling 2nd Congressional District reaped the benefits.

Occasionally — or frequently, depending from the individual perspective — our federal politicians fail and forget they represent the people. They ignore the will of those who elected them. By and large, that was never a trap that Walden fell into.

Walden made it a priority to visit his district as much as possible. He held town hall meetings in out-of-the-way places across rural Eastern Oregon,

but, maybe most importantly, he listened.

Walden listened to the voters. He paid attention. He delved deep into local problems and sought answers. That type of commitment from a politician is refreshing, and Walden did it year after year.

Oregon is going to miss Walden on several levels, especially regarding his seniority and the know-how he collected over years as a congressman. When Walden departs, he will take with him all the key relationships he had with other lawmakers that help get things done. The various coalitions he made with other politicians that are often critical for a bill to pass will also be gone. That won't help Oregon in the short term.

However, Bentz, while not a Walden protégé, is very much like the Hood River politician in his outlook and his concern for rural values. On water issues especially, Bentz is well versed. That will pay off for Oregon down the road.

Meanwhile, the state will watch one of its longest serving federal lawmakers exit the stage. He can depart with the knowledge that, for the most part, he consistently served the voters of his district and made sure their priorities were his priorities.



THE BACKROADS

Here's to 2021!

What a year. I think most of us would agree 2020 will be hard to forget, though it's a year most of us won't want to remember.

Not long after we changed our calendars, we were greeted by the ugly mascot that took over almost every aspect of our daily lives: the new coronavirus that would spread across the globe, infecting millions, leaving many in the grip of a new malady, coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19.

Most of us have heard stories about the Spanish flu and the devastation it caused in 1918, but a century removed, none of us can remember firsthand what our ancestors endured during those trying times — with far less medical knowledge, amid World War I.

But those times are not entirely forgotten, memorialized in the pages of the Blue Mountain Eagle. The 1918 flu hit Grant County as the war was winding down. Schools were closed. Meetings were canceled. Even the call for



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men to register for the draft was rescinded.

Nationwide, the debate raged over personal freedoms versus public health amid calls to wear

masks to reduce the spread. Many died. More were infected. The pandemic impacted everyone.

Fortunately, the death toll from the current pandemic won't be as bad as the Spanish flu, but many parallels exist, even 100 years later. And as the arrival of vaccines provides hope that 2021 won't be entirely consumed by the pandemic, perhaps the most important lesson to learn from the tragic losses of the 1918 flu is that we overcame it — in the county, as a country and across the globe.

Despite the difficulties, humanity persevered. The United States weathered the storm, emerged from it and continued

to grow. Grant County pulled together and remained strong.

The fact we are here today is a testament to our ability to overcome obstacles — not letting ourselves be defined by the difficulties we face, but defining ourselves by how we face the difficulties.

Like our ancestors before us, we will bear this pandemic. We will soon be able to look back on these trials and tribulations knowing they only made us stronger. We will persevere.

In 100 years, when someone is flipping through the pages of the Eagle archives, they will read the stories of our resilience.

Thank you for reading the Blue Mountain Eagle and for your efforts to help us all move beyond this pandemic and into a better future.

Let's make 2021 a year worth remembering.

Sean Hart is the editor and general manager of the Blue Mountain Eagle.

FARMER'S FATE

Stand for the flag, kneel for the cross

On my mantle sits a glassed case holding a flag last touched by a gloved soldier and a grieving mother. A flag that was folded carefully and respectfully, honoring the life of a young paratrooper that was killed in action in Normandy, France, June 28, 1944. That life belonged to a great-uncle that died three decades before I was born — and who lived only half the years I have. I was honored when my grandmother gave me the funeral flag and some of the personal effects of her younger brother.

While studying World War II history with my son for school, I took the opportunity to explain about the flag over our mantle and the soldier who had lain under it. I pulled out a small brown box from the War Department addressed to my great-grandparents, and gently laid its contents on the desk between us. A worn, white New Testament, a parachutist badge, a cigarette case, some foreign currency, a few medals and badges and a smaller box with a Purple Heart in it. I watched my son reverently touch the objects owned by a person he'd never known, from a war that just minutes before had been ancient dates in a history book. As he ran his fingers over the discolored badges, I said a prayer of thanks that those medals can't talk — or imagine the ugliness they could share? Ugliness that I have been sheltered from because men and women, like my great-uncle, experienced it for me — for us — for America.

When I was younger, the school days began by facing Old Glory and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. I took pride in repeating



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an oath that great men for generations before me have stood tall and vowed. Watching the stars and stripes fly, it made me feel pride in knowing I was a part of this nation — related

to the great people who have sacrificed so I could enjoy it's liberties.

During Reagan's presidency he said the flag "signifies the qualities of the human spirit we Americans cherish. Red for courage and readiness to sacrifice; white for pure intentions and high ideals; and blue for vigilance and justice."

The flag means different things to different people, and while it seems to be an unpopular opinion, I am so proud of our grand old flag. Whether it is flying high in the breeze, or folded tightly on someone's mantel, the emotions that it evokes from me are patriotism and pride. Our country's past is not pristine — which country's is? It's striped — just like our flag. But also like our flag, there are stars on the horizon that we keep reaching for — striving for. Because we are Americans. Because we are the home of the free and the brave — a nation united under God.

Not everyone believes that, though, and that is their right — a right given to them by soldiers who were buried under flags just like the one sitting on my mantle. But being able to disagree with people while still supporting their right to a different opinion is one of the many things that makes America great.

Growing up in a big, boisterous family meant that there were often loud, intense disagreements. There

were discussions about Fords versus Chevys, and John Deeres versus Masseys. There were also members on both sides of political parties, which always kept things riveting, especially around elections — but the adults in our family showed us cousins how to disagree (often vehemently) without being disrespectful.

So when it comes to taking a knee during our National Anthem, I can't help wondering how many folded flags rest sad and proud on mantles across the United States? I'll defend your right to disagree with me to the death — disagree, but not disrespect. This is a country that my family, along with many, many others, have died for, and those fallen soldiers and their families have sacrificed enough without having the pride of serving this great country taken from them as well.

In today's world, conservative values are often scorned as being redneck. And maybe they are. Because at the end of the day, when my family comes home, dirty after a long day of farming in the sun, our necks often have a touch of red — and it's not entirely skin deep. My husband and I both grew up knowing what the sound of a belt being pulled through denim sounded like. We learned the Ten Commandments, called our elders "mister" or "missus" and learned the proper respect for guns. We celebrate the Fourth of July, we remember 9/11 and we believe that Christmas is more than Santa. If that makes us redneck, then I guess I'm OK with that, because my family will always stand for the flag — and save our kneeling for the cross.

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.



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