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Valentine humbug

Ah, the holidays are upon us. Of course, the holidays are always upon us, as it seems there’s always something just in the rear view mirror or coming up on the road ahead. Just past is Groundhog Day. There’s something indescribably amazing about living in the only industrialized nation with a holiday dedicated to a large ground-dwelling rodent. Makes us kind of special, it does.

Ahead is the ever popular Valentine’s Day. A holiday like many others, where the spiritual side has long since vanished into the commercial. Originally — and still celebrated as — SAINT Valentine’s Day in some churches, most Americans (other than maybe those churchgoers who celebrate it) couldn’t tell you who St. Valentine was, what he did or why he was a saint. Sainly traditions of sacrifice and service have passed away, turned into cards, flowers and chocolate. However, the commercialization has not yet risen to the point of sales of hollow chocolate St. Valentines, which is a good thing since biting the ears off those would be difficult.

Urban legend to the contrary — that Valentine’s Day is a made up holiday foisted on an unwary public by the card, flower and chocolate industries, the celebration of Valentine’s Day as a festival of love dates back to the 15th century, long before chocolate had been discovered or greeting cards invented. There were wars about roses, though. Though l’amour was part of the holiday through the centuries, the modern heavy involvement of the chocolate, flower and card industries began around the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries. That slippery commercial slope is then where we are today, with aisles and aisles of love waiting to happen, with everything from dollar cards to gadjillion-dollar diamonds waiting to help you express your love and affection to your sweetheart. Or your would-be sweetheart. Or the person who’d be your sweetheart if the restraining order ever



THOMAS CREASING
OFF THE BENCH
Herald columnist

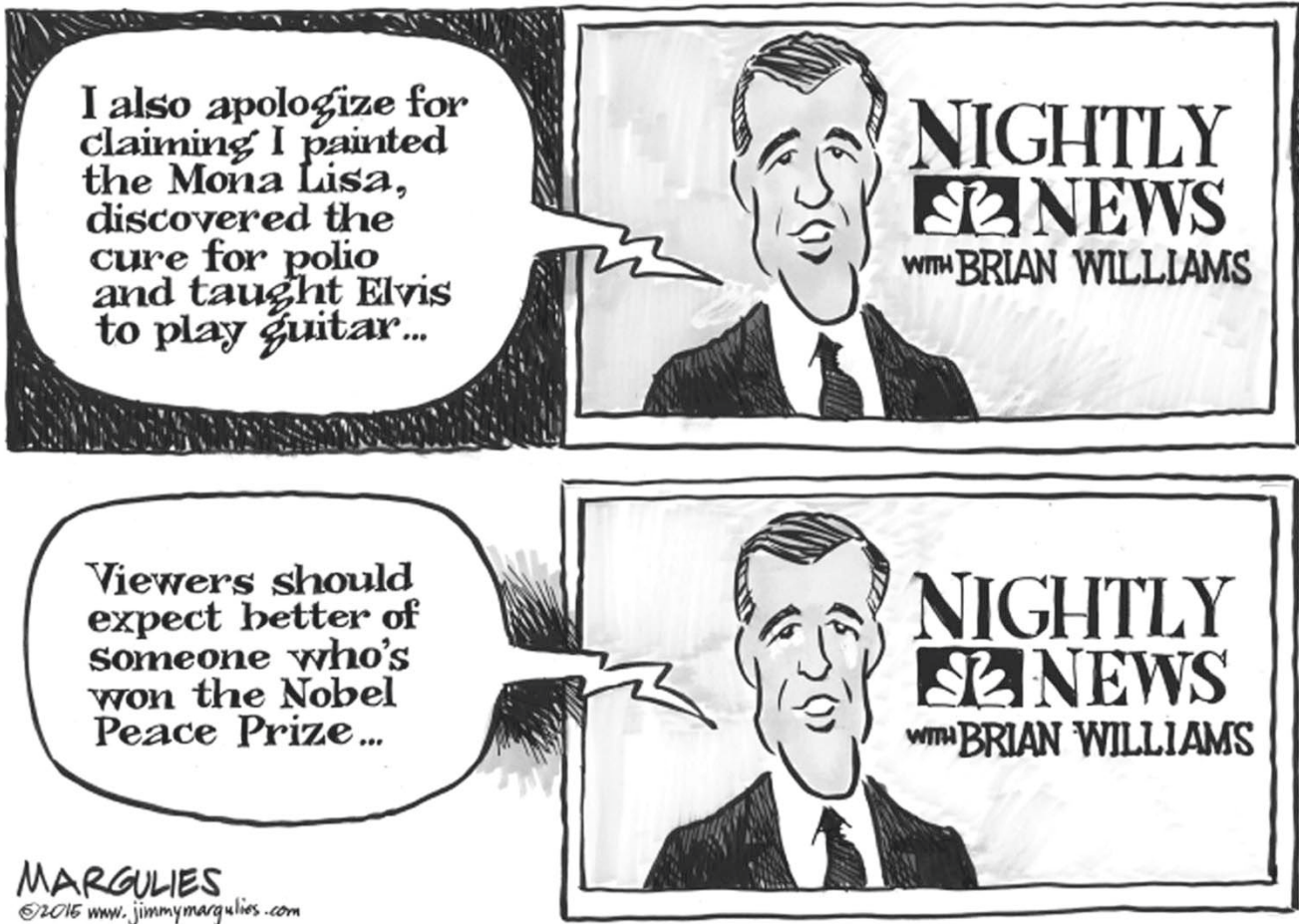
expires.

Other nations are not immune to the romance of Valentine’s Day, though Asian countries have a unique spin on the process. In Korea, it was traditional on Valentine’s Day for women to give chocolates or other candies to men. March 14 was then “White Day,” where men would then give chocolates or other candies to the women in their lives. Finally, April 14 was Black Day (appropriately close to Tax Day here) where, in theory, everyone who had not received any chocolates on Valentine’s Day or White Day gathered at their favorite restaurants and ordered jajangmyeon, a tasty Korean noodle dish made with black bean sauce. Presumably this would allow those suffering from a romance-free lifestyle to notice each other and plan the exchange of chocolates the next year.

On the other hand, according to that font of all knowledge and wisdom in the modern world — Wikipedia — Valentine’s Day is illegal in Saudi Arabia. I don’t know whether their February calendar goes straight from 13 to 15, or if there’s simply a booming black market trade in hollow chocolate St. Valentines there. Given the medieval methods of punishment in that part of the world, visitors should avoid having a rose in their possession on or about the 14th, just to be on the safe side.

So where’s the opinion in all this? Nothing particular, though maybe it’d be worth trying to market hollow chocolate St. Valentines for the romantic holiday, even if biting off the ears would be a nightmare. Share your romantic opinions in response with letters to the editor or by email to hermistonherald offthebench@gmail.com. Names of the terminally shy will be withheld on request.

— Thomas Creasing is a Hermiston resident and Herald columnist



Mayor: Judge appointment well thought out

BY DAVE DROTZMANN
SPECIAL TO THE
HERMISTON HERALD

Editor,
The City Council’s proposal for a new charter has been well covered by the local news media. I would like to offer my thoughts and perspective to this issue.

The City Council recognized that the city charter had been in place for almost 60 years. They found many provisions needed to be removed or modified as they no longer served the needs of our community and/or were contradictory to state and federal law. Just by way of example, our current charter requires that any person who seeks to run for council must be a “freeholder upon property located within the city of Hermiston,” which is no longer a valid requirement under state and federal law.

The council took on the project of a thorough review of this important document to update the language and to provide a document that will last many years into the future. Our charter is our city’s constitution, and it shouldn’t need frequent adjustments in order to function properly.

Because of the council’s recognition of this project’s importance, the city hired the law firm of Beery, Elsner and Hammond to guide them. The firm worked closely with the League of Oregon Cities to develop the Model Charter for Oregon Cities. Chad Jacobs, the specific attorney the council worked with, has extensive local government experience. The Model Charter for Oregon Cities was used as a guide due to its use by many cities and its provision of a solid legal framework for municipal organizations in Oregon.

With these factors

forming the background of the charter review process, the council drafted an updated charter that is more concise, easier to use and understand and is consistent with state and federal law. In short, the council worked diligently to craft a new charter that will better meet the present and future needs of the city.

One particular issue in the draft charter has risen to the forefront of discussion. As your readers are likely well aware, the council has discussed changing the municipal judge from an elected position to an appointed position. There is at least a segment of our community that has caught hold of this issue. I want to offer my perspective on the reason for proposing this change.

At the outset, it is important we are all clear that this discussion was not about the current judge or about controlling the rulings that come from the court or taking away anyone’s right to vote. The current judge may very well be the appointee under the newly proposed scenario, and, under the new proposed scenario, neither the council nor the city manager would have any control over the judge’s rulings. Rather, the proposal is an attempt to align Hermiston with the overwhelming majority of other cities in Oregon (according to data compiled by the League of Oregon Cities only approximately four of Oregon’s 133 municipal court judges are elected) and provide a mechanism for the council and city manager to control the administrative affairs of the court such as budgeting and personnel.

The proposed change also reflects a desire to make sure the community has an opportunity to fully discuss the qualifications of the municipal



Drotzmann

held off-cycle of statewide and national elections. This lack of participation in the electoral process gives many people concern. Selecting a judge with an appointment process will allow a more thorough and deliberate discussion of the qualifications, skills and abilities of those interested in the job. Having a thorough and transparent hiring process will allow the community, through the council, to select the most qualified candidate.

In reality, the position of municipal court judge is that of a department head of a very specialized department of the city. It is not typically a political position, and it shouldn’t be treated as one. The proposal to appoint a judge provides the option for a process much more similar to the selection of other department heads within the city. This process provides an opportunity to select a judge based on demonstrated knowledge, skills and abilities. Having an appointed judge relieves the judge of the need to worry about re-election and the need to seek votes from those whom he or she must rule in favor of or against on a daily basis. Taking the politics out of the process will hopefully create the perception, if not reality, of a more neutral tribunal.

An elected judge can also cause a lot of problems from a management perspective. Elected judges can get cities into trouble through mismanagement of city funds and not following applicable labor laws. Because removal of an

elected judge relies almost entirely on the recall process, there is very little ability to control an elected judge who creates liability for a city by violating these laws. It is widely acknowledged in cities across Oregon that an elected judge is much more difficult to discipline. It is also recognized that there really is not any mechanism available to provide a means to correct problems of this nature with an elected judge. The proposal to move to an appointed judge seeks to remedy this problem.

Finally, it is the mayor and council’s most important task to oversee the funds of the city. For them and the city manager to keep a separately elected department head within established budgetary requirements can be a difficult job. Depending on the personality of the separately elected official, this can become a contentious task at best. As I stated earlier, there has never been intent to manage or control the way the judge rules but simply the way the operation of the department is managed.

The issue of an elected or appointed judge should not take away from the need for a new and modern city charter. To that end, the council has proposed two separate ballot measures. One will be for the community to decide if they approve of the changes to the charter as suggested with our current elected judge position. The second measure, if the community agrees with the council, is an immediate amendment to appoint the judge. By having two separate measures, the voters can decide the issue of an elected or appointed municipal court judge on its own merits, separate and apart from the adoption of a new charter.

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