

EDITOR'S DESK

A nation's turmoil comes to Hermiston

I'm not usually someone who is at a loss for words, but it took me more time to decide what the first sentence of this column should be than it takes me to write an entire column some weeks.

What do you say in the face of so much anguish on such public display? What can I add to the all-consuming discourse that has gripped our nation in the past week? As a white person, I feel unqualified to speak on the topic of racism, and yet as I was trying to decide what to write about this week it felt wrong to squander the opportunity to use the privilege I have been afforded by both my race and my profession.

I covered three public demonstrations in three days — the Hermiston Freedom Rally against COVID-19 restrictions, the Essential not Sacrificial protest in support of restrictions protecting essential workers, and the unofficial Black Lives Matter protest held Monday, June 1, at the corner of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue.

Each of Hermiston's gatherings was different, but during each one I saw unexpected displays of civility. At the Hermiston Freedom Rally, a counterprotester bearing an anti-Trump sign showed up and rallygoers bearing flags stood in front of him to block the sign from view, but I didn't see any pushing or shoving, just people with very different points of view each standing resolutely for what they believed was right.

At the protest on June 1 against racism and police brutality, two



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan
Members of the Hermiston Police Department hand out water bottles to protesters on the corner of Highway 395 and Elm Avenue in Hermiston on Monday, June 1, 2020. Protesters carried signs in protest of racism and police violence.

Hermiston Police Department officers showed up, not with tear gas but with water bottles for the protesters, a few of whom were bearing explicitly anti-police slogans on their signs. As I watched them make the rounds to the groups spread across the four corners of the intersection, protesters appeared to be treating them with respect.

There were also some ugly moments on Monday, however, including one I witnessed shortly after the protest began.

I was waiting to cross the street after interviewing a cluster of young protesters of various races holding "Black Lives Matter" signs when a man drove by and screamed an unprintable three-word phrase at them that began with the F word and ended with the N word.

That shameful, ignorant moment of hate was a disgrace to Hermiston. It doesn't represent the vast majority of people I have come to know and love during my seven years here. In fact, I'm pretty sure it's the first time I've heard that particular racial slur hurled at a person of color here.

But that in itself is part of the problem — most racism isn't flaunted in such a public, in-your-face style, and that makes it easier to deny it exists, or to comfort themselves that it's a problem for big cities or the South.

Here, it manifests itself in epithets whispered out of earshot of white people who would be shocked by it. It appears when people email the newspaper to ask why we didn't state in an article whether a person with

a Hispanic-sounding name is a citizen, or call to complain that all of the community's problems are caused by the "illegals," by which they seem to mean all of Hermiston's Latino population.

Sometimes it comes through ignorant, thoughtless comments and questions from strangers who ask, "What are you?" or state with an air of surprise that a person of color is so "articulate."

Often it manifests itself silently, through a job offer never extended or a playdate never scheduled for no apparent reason.

For white people, we can catch glimpses of that seedy underbelly of bigotry and feel righteously indignant before turning our attention to other things. But for some members of our community, the microaggressions and slurs and unequal treatment are their cross to bear every single day for their entire lives.

If you're white, I hope you'll take some time to really stop and listen to the experiences and opinions of your friends who are not white, whose views on racism come from a far more experienced place than yours. If you don't have many friends of color — it can be difficult to make black friends if you've spent your whole life living in a community where less than 1% of the population is black — seek out articles and other nonfiction by writers of diverse backgrounds.

And if you are a person of color in our community, I hope you will be patient with those of us who are trying, but probably still have some more learning to do.

COLUMN

Dams are essential to communities

The federal agencies that operate 14 dams in the Columbia River Basin just spent more than three years and a lot of money to look at dam breaching as a possible solution to salmon recovery. Their findings after all this work? It might help salmon a little but would hurt the rest of us a lot.

While a vocal minority continues pushing for removal of the four lower Snake River dams, multiple science- and data-driven studies have shown that dam breaching does little for fish while harming our farmers, workers, and communities.

There are many factors that contribute to the survival of fish, and not all are dependent on the Snake River. Ninety-five to 98% of juvenile fish already successfully pass each of the eight federal dams on the lower Snake and Columbia, but salmon populations around the world are struggling due to climate change caused in part by rising car-

bon emissions. The Columbia-Snake River System provides 90% of the Pacific Northwest's renewable power. Removing dams on this system would add more carbon to the environment and more environmental stress on our already declining fish populations.

It may be hard for some people west of the Cascades to understand how critical these dams are for our region, but for us, it's obvious: Our region depends on the current waterway system for power, food, commerce, and jobs.

Access to that same renewable power that fights climate change has also attracted the data centers and energy businesses that contribute so much to our region's economy.

The navigation locks of the lower Snake and Columbia dams also allow barging of our food that's sold in communities across the Pacific Northwest and exported to feed hungry populations around the world.

Without that navigation system, those products would shift to trucking and rail systems — if our governments and businesses have the ability to build and maintain the nec-

essary road and rail capacity in the first place. This would increase road and rail congestion, greenhouse gas pollution, and costs to farmers.

Speaking of costs to farmers, without irrigation provided by the Columbia and Snake River reservoirs, the Northwest loses much of the rich farmland that has supported our communities and states for generations. Dam breaching puts at risk 1,100 family farms, whose owners have been working and conserving their land for generations but could go bankrupt from the loss of water and transportation.

We can balance environment and economic health without sacrificing the backbone of our economy.

We don't have to crowd our roads and pollute our air with costly transportation alternatives. The federal agencies' draft environmental impact statement provides many alternatives to breaching and recommends other improvements backed by science that support fish populations and the environment.

Ryan Neal is the executive director of the Port of Morrow.



Ryan Neal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bring picnic tables back

To the editor:

I really feel that it is about time that the city of Hermiston starts to put the picnic tables back in the city parks. I see people taking their own chairs or just sitting on the grass just to enjoy a lunch meal. People will take their own cleaning cloths, etc. to clean and sanitize the tables before using them.

Dan Kalal
Hermiston

Thank you to the helpers

To the editor:

Nature has a way of making life interesting. This weekend we got a double dose of thunderstorms that blew through Hermiston, knocking down trees, fences, and power lines and damaging property.

But as we've seen time and time again, this community responded quickly to clean up the damage and make sure their neighbors were safe. Chain saws and pickup trucks came out to clear away the debris and get our lives back to normal.

City departments had their hands full taking care of fallen trees on roadways and in the parks. The police and fire departments worked together to make sure people were out of harm's way. Hermiston Energy Services worked around the clock to restore power and our utilities monitored the damage to make sure water and sewer systems continued to function properly.

That work was made much easier thanks to all of the community members who immediately got to work.

A big thank you to Hermiston residents for continuing to look out for one another as we weathered yet another storm. We're a resilient community because everyone pitches in.

Byron Smith
Hermiston

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

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