

EDITOR'S DESK

# You, too, can be a politician

One of the side effects of being a reporter is you get to know a lot of politicians.

I don't say this to brag, but rather to make the opposite point: It's really nothing to brag about.

Sometimes a senator or governor or mayor can seem like some mystical being, a celebrity you read about on the news but would never expect to have a casual conversation with. Talking to one might seem intimidating. But politicians are just people.

Congressman Greg Walden may have the ear of president, but he also went to the same public elementary school in The Dalles as me. Our city councilors and county commissioners might make important decisions for our communities, but they also live in the same towns we do. They drive on the same roads and shop at the same grocery stores.

The upshot of all of this is that no one should feel inadequate about getting involved in politics.

As a taxpayer and a resident of this country you have every right to show up at a town hall or a city council meeting or a legislative committee in the Oregon Capitol and voice your opinion. If your opinions are good enough to share with your friends on Facebook or with your family over the dinner table, they are



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Eighth-grader Hunter Houck asks Rep. Greg Walden about climate change and the Green New Deal during a town hall in Heppner in August 2019. Participation in town halls is one way everyday citizens can be more civically engaged.

HH file photo

good enough to share with the people whose job it is to represent you. If public speaking sounds too intimidating, you can always write a letter.

Just as importantly, we also need people to step up and do the work of being one of those representatives. Each election we see races where candidates are running unopposed. Even if that candidate is a great choice for office, opposition can help candidates flesh out their ideas and push them to do more outreach.

While contests for flashy elected titles like governor get most of the

attention, much of the work of running government also happens in committees where everyday volunteers you've never heard of are also representing you.

The city of Hermiston's public infrastructure committee, for example, worked with city staff to craft the capital improvement plan that set in motion the water, sewer and street projects now underway, and the water rate increase helping to pay for them. The city council was the ultimate authority to approve the plan, but the committee spent hours refin-

ing it first.

Anyone can apply to sit on a city committee, and the long list of committees coupled with relatively low interest means there are almost always seats open somewhere. Anyone can also apply to sit on one of the state of Oregon's boards and advisory councils, where residents advise the state on everything from wine to hearing aids.

While anyone can also run for elected office, regardless of experience, boards and committees are great training grounds for doing so. Serious candidates — the kind who win races — often learn the ropes that way first.

Dan Dorran, for example, who recently advanced to the general election for Umatilla County commissioner, studied the ins and outs of how the county operates while serving on the county's charter review committee. Hermiston's newest city councilor, David McCarthy, hit the ground running by voting to approve a budget that he had already studied as a member of the city's budget committee.

The world is run, as someone once told me, by those who show up. I hope in this time of political strife that more people ponder how they can "show up" on behalf of their own community.

COLUMN

## Lots of reasons that Black Lives Matter

I would like to write my fellow non-Black East Oregonians as to why I feel we must engage in difficult conversations regarding race in America. No longer can small towns be tucked away only engaging in monologue. Now is the time for dialogue.

Why can't "All Lives Matter" suffice? Simply put, because all lives will only truly matter when Black lives matter equally.

It's important to know that, when people say Black Lives Matter, they are illuminating a painful reality that many non-black Americans ignore. African Americans experience severe health care disparities compared to white Americans. They experience poverty and homelessness at far greater rates than their non-Black counterparts. Our Black brothers and sisters are exponentially overrepresented in our prison system and experience racial profiling from police officers in ways that white Americans have never experienced.

If we can establish that, yes, it is true, that African Americans have been historically disadvantaged and these social inequalities remain as prevalent as ever, one must come to the conclusion that white Americans have then been historically advantaged.

One analogy that is helpful understanding why "All Lives Matter" is an insufficient and reactionary response: If I were to mention that breast cancer research matters, your first reaction wouldn't be to say, "No it does not, because skin cancer also matters." Now what if breast cancer was killing exponentially more Americans while its research for a cure was woefully underfunded? Wouldn't it be important to raise a level of awareness around the crisis?

We have Breast Cancer Awareness Month because it's a public health crisis and we need to address it. We don't wear pink in October in spite of skin cancer, but because we know this is a means to bringing awareness to a cause that needs our collective support to save lives. Black Lives Matter is simply doing the same thing. Trying to save lives.

This brings me to my next point: protest. Protests aren't intended to make us feel comfortable, they are made to shock those who systematic ills do not impact into consciousness and action. It comes from a deep place of privilege to think that there is not a crisis occurring simply because it doesn't directly impact you personally. This is why we need protests, to call us into action.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed."

Did women just get the right to vote? Did our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters just get the right to marry? Did Black school children just get the right to learn in a classroom with white students?

No. It was demanded. Now you might say, we are fine with protest, but not violence. I have heard, "It's terrible that Black man died, but the burning, looting and destruction of property needs to stop." I would counter that, "It's horrible that property is being destroyed, but the killing of unarmed Black Americans needs to stop." As white Americans, we must prioritize Black American life over property. Humans are more important than things. Period.

We as a society should not approve of riots and therefore we must not approve of the circumstances that lead to such desperation that people feel rioting is their only voice. Collectively, we must think critically about the centuries of failed social and economic systems that have disproportionately impacted Black Americans. We must ask ourselves uncomfortable questions about our past and how the intersectionality of racial,

social and economic inequalities have contributed to the situation we are in today.

Now for my white brothers and sisters who feel they are already allies. It's important to remember whose space we are in. One of the most important things is to understand that we do not speak on behalf of the African American community. We need to listen, support and follow directions. We cannot ever understand what it feels like to be Black in America, trust them. It's OK to start small, every bit counts.

When we see injustice, don't sit back, become engaged. Subscribe to podcasts, support bail funds, read books, watch documentaries that challenge our biases. Most importantly, join local organizations and vote for politicians who are serious about ending white supremacy and fixing a system that maintains institutional racism. This includes having a serious conversation about the militarization of our police force and the amount of funding they receive.

As a white American, I ask my fellow non-Black Americans to join the struggle of racial equity.

Black Lives Matter.  
*Mitch Thompson comes from Hermiston, has previously worked as a community organizer and now works in basketball.*



Mitch Thompson

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Disappointed in commissioners

In response to comments made at a Umatilla County Board of Commissioners meeting last week, Mr. Bill Elfering, thank you for not passing judgment on all protesters. Thank you for wanting to learn more and then coming to a conclusion of whats happening in Umatilla County and across America today.

Commissioners George Murdock and John Shafer, I am very disappointed in the two of you for broadly painting a brush across all protesters. Here in Hermiston and across the country, the majority (at least 99%) of the protestors were/are peaceful. Yes, there were some looters and violent people who were trying to distract from the thousands that are against police brutality and murder. Four hundred thirty-two unarmed black men, women, and children were murdered by bad cops across the country (the ones we know about).

We are not against 800,000 police officers. And saying that you are for 800,000 police officers means you support the bad cops too.

What we want as a country is for cops that are murdering and brutalizing Blacks at the highest rate and other people of color to be brought to justice just like any other civilian would be. George Floyd was the straw that broke the camel's back. To watch this man die as he was complying with the four cops was despicable!

We as African Americans have been fighting to be treated like citizens of this country with full rights since 1866. And we are still fighting in 2020.

I am thankful for the whites, Asians, and Latinos as well as all African Americans and the world for joining in the fight to set us free from brutality and murder.

We want people in office that are concerned about all of its citizens, no matter their color.

*Jackie Linton  
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.

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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.