

EDITOR'S DESK

# Ending childhood hunger should be a priority

During the 2010 Super Bowl, Snickers aired the first of its iconic “You’re not you when you’re hungry” advertisements, featuring Betty White standing in as a football player who simply needed a snack to start playing like a young man instead of an old lady again.

The ad campaign, which has gone on for more than a decade, plays to a relatable truth: Being hungry can make us grouchy and unable to focus.



Jade McDowell  
NEWS EDITOR

What the ad doesn’t delve into is the even more insidious effects of hunger that is chronic and long-lasting — the kind that comes from consistently empty cupboards rather than simply going too long without a snack. For children, in particular, the effects can stunt growth and interfere with brain development. According to Feeding America, children who live in food insecure households are more likely to repeat a grade in elementary school, experience developmental delays, struggle with behavioral problems and develop health conditions, such as asthma.

It’s appalling, then, that the United States Department of Agriculture estimates that 16 million children in the United States — about 1 in every 5 — live in “food insecure” households that are unable to consistently access adequate nutritious food to feed everyone in the home. That estimate came out before the pandemic, and experts agree the number has



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald, File

**Bags of food await distribution at Highland Hills Elementary School in Hermiston in 2019. The Agape House is still distributing the bags to students in need on weekends.**

almost certainly grown.

This epidemic of childhood hunger is not because there is not enough food in the United States to feed everyone. There is no drought or plague of locusts that has wiped out most of the country’s food supply. We don’t lack the food. We don’t lack the money. We don’t lack the ability to ship food to anywhere in the country. We simply haven’t made ending childhood hunger a high enough priority yet.

Organizations working to end childhood hunger, such as No Kid Hungry, say government programs are an important key to decreasing hunger. According to the federal government, in a typical month before the pandemic, about 20 million children received food through the

SNAP food stamp program. Children are also served by WIC (short for Women, Infants and Children) and through free school meal and summer meal programs.

These benefits sometimes work better than charitable organizations. For example, grocery stores are usually open far more hours and offer more fresh food than food banks, making food stamps a better option for people who are at work during the hours the food bank is open. And making sure children can get free breakfast and lunch at school provides a steady, easily accessible source of food.

On the other hand, private charitable efforts can sometimes be superior, or fill in gaps left behind by government programs. Such pro-

grams can require a long and confusing process to apply for, and as we saw with the unemployment benefit debacle during the pandemic, the money doesn’t always come when it’s supposed to. But a local church leader may be immediately aware of a parishioner’s needs after a job loss and able to provide a bag of groceries the very same day it’s needed.

School lunch programs may feed children during the weekday, but the Agape House’s backpack program, which sends a bag full of easy-to-eat food home with the local school districts’ neediest children on weekends, helps prevent students from going to bed hungry on a Saturday or Sunday.

While there are a number of wonderful national organizations doing good work, if you want to help I would suggest donating to one of the equally wonderful local efforts that tend to spend far less money on overhead and advertising.

Local food banks, including Agape House in Hermiston and the Boardman Food Pantry, are good places to start. Food donations are great, but monetary donations usually provide more impact because they allow the organizations to purchase in bulk, and sometimes at a discounted rate.

Farmers Ending Hunger, started by Hermiston’s own Fred Ziari, is another good option. By sponsoring an acre or even just a row of crops, you can help provide fresh produce to area food banks.

Let’s not let any kids in our community go to bed hungry.

COLUMN

## Dialing for dollars with the state employment division is a trial

Four hours, 3 minutes and 39 seconds — that’s how long I was on the phone recently with the State of Oregon Employment Department.

I totally understand they are overwhelmed with the number of claims because of the global pandemic. However, after more than a year, a system should be in place to eliminate long hold times.

Last year, between May 22 and July 24, I attempted to call the employment division on five different occasions. And when I say that, I don’t mean I dialed the number five times. I tried to connect numerous times for anywhere from 30 minutes to 3 hours — exasperated each time, I finally opted to fill out a form and mail it.

However, when I recently received a letter directing me to call, I wasn’t given the option to fill out a form. As I prepared myself for a dialing marathon, my husband sensed the tension and jumped into action — topping off my Pepsi and providing a bottle of water.

I was pleasantly surprised that only 11 minutes passed when the busy signal stopped. Although, (note sarcasm) there’s nothing more sincere than a

droning recorded voice apologizing in advance for an extended wait time.

After 5 minutes of robo-voice suggesting possible ways to resolve issues online, I was faced with my first choice: Which option do I choose? After listening again, I whittled it down and had a 50-50 chance of picking the right one — unfortunately, Lady Luck wasn’t on my side.

Thus, “Nightmare on 11th Street” began with an estimated wait time of 3 hours and 52 minutes. And if that wasn’t enough, I was thrust into a holding pattern accompanied by sounds that in good conscience cannot truly be called music.

According to a study in the Journal of Applied Social Psychology, playing pop music instead of instrumental “elevator music,” aka Muzak, may reduce a caller’s level of anger when someone finally answers. The Employment Department might want to consider its own Pandora playlist. Of course, they would want to omit such tunes as Johnny Paycheck’s “Take This Job and Shove It,” Donna Summer’s “She Works Hard for the Money” and Dolly Parton’s “9 to 5.”

A few minutes shy of 2 hours, I was finally greeted by a human voice. After hitting a roadblock, the representative said she needed to transfer me to a claims specialist. And just

like that, I was catapulted back into hold hell — but not before hearing the robotic rigmarole about the call volume with an expected wait of 5 hours and 5 minutes.

If it hadn’t been for John, who provided a Pepsi refill and a turkey pot pie, I might have cracked at that point. After nearly 2 more hours on hold, I spoke to a human again.

I’m happy to report things didn’t play out like “Nightmare on 11th Street, Tammy’s Revenge.” I recognize that the two employment department representatives that I spoke to aren’t responsible for their understaffed situation and have no control over the flood of calls.

Rather than just airing my complaints, I offer some potential solutions for the employment department woes:

- Hire more employees. I hear many Oregonians are still out of work.
- When sending a letter telling people to call, include the option number they should choose so it’s not a guessing game.
- At the very least, eliminate the audio assault by changing the Muzak.

*Tammy Malgesini, the former Hermiston Herald community editor, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.*



Tammy Malgesini

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Fire district deserves community support

This letter is to support Measure 30-148, the bond to increase funding for our fire district, Umatilla County Fire District #1. As a proud Hermistonian, I gladly point out a few reasons why our community should approve this bond measure.

- Our firefighters/EMTs risk their lives for our community. It’s critical they have suitable equipment and training to keep them safe and effective. Budget shortfalls directly impact their safety. This bond will support those needs.

- Our 24/7 emergency personnel need updated and adequate housing accommodations, especially now that we’re represented by outstanding female crew members!

- Our community needs up-to-date and reliable equipment. Our current emergency fleet is aging and rapidly accruing miles as our first responders meet our record call volumes. Current budget shortfalls mean our district leaders must choose vehicle readiness over training and equipment. This bond will ensure our emergency vehicles and emergency crews are ready when our community needs them.

- Our district wrote this bond in a way that asks our community members to serve as a steering committee to oversee the use of our funds. Our fire district leaders have been and will continue to be accountable to our support.

I’ve toured all of our fire district buildings. I’ve seen the critical needs and cannot adequately describe them in this short letter. I urge you to support Measure 30-148 at the ballot in May; our community depends on UCFD1 daily, and we should be there when our district needs support from us.

Josh Burns  
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.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.