

Hermiston HERALD OPINION & READER'S FORUM

Founded in 1906

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A4

OUR VIEW

Workers should not be left crying at food banks

Two hundred and thirty-one employees were laid off following the Shearer's fire.

Those workers are our neighbors, friends and family members. They are important members of our community and our local economy, and they deserve better than what they are suffering now.

On Feb. 22, a boiler exploded at the Shearer's plant in Hermiston. The resulting fire engulfed and destroyed the plant.

Looking at the wreckage, a mess of twisted metal, it is amazing that people were not seriously injured. We can thank brave firefighters for

their work. Also, we extend gratitude to Shearer's for its help in the evacuation.

According to Umatilla County Fire District No. 1, Shearer's provided firefighters with an account of their employees. And since everyone was out and accounted for, firefighters did not have to enter the burning building.

The company, which had been such an important employer in our area, should be thanked, too, for providing names to a Hermiston food bank as well as the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce so it could arrange a job fair and invite displaced workers.

More, however, is needed, and we expect more from Shearer's.

We assume the 231 workers put forth their blood and sweat for the company, as many have worked there for years. Tears have been shed, according to the manager of Agape House, whose food bank distributed food to them.

Workers were crying at a food bank.

These were workers who were at risk of being hurt or killed in an explosion for which we do not yet have full explanation. The rubble is so great, investigators still have not hashed out the cause of this disaster.

And now, many of them are suffering the uncertainty of joblessness.

Whatever they have been offered to date, the 231 former Shearer's workers have not been given enough. They should not have been reduced to tears.

Also, our community deserves better. Given the past labor of much of our workers, we should have received an immediate promise of rebuild. To date, Shearer's has not committed to rebuilding.

We think it should.

Our community has value, as do our workers. Shearer's has benefited from us, and now it should act likewise.

COLUMN

Ag overtime bill is a win, not a victory

Before even the first gavel dropped on the 2022 legislative session, I knew that one of the most consequential bills of my legislative career would be considered.

HB 4002, or the agriculture overtime bill, was a divisive bill from the start and presented the Oregon Legislature with two options. One that would favor one side to the detriment of the rest of Oregon, especially the agricultural economy. This is what I called a win — a win for a select few at the cost of the rest of us. The other path included compromise, good-faith negotiation and a bill that would generate support from both parties. This is what I called a victory — a victory for all of Oregon.

I worked hard to get a victory,



BILL HANSELL
ANOTHER VIEW

not just a win on agriculture overtime. But the final result was a win — a win for Willamette Valley liberal special interests who donate money to the majority Democrat's campaign funds.

It will make these groups feel good about themselves, but it won't make Oregonians better off. HB 4002 will result in higher prices at the grocery store for working families, hours and pay capped for agricultural workers and ultimately the shuttering of small family farms that fill my district.

Agriculture is a unique industry. During harvest seasons, it requires long hours to reap all the crops before frost or rains come. In ranching, there is even more nuance.

The bottom line is that farmers and rancher don't set their own prices, they have to take whatever price the markets are offering. The Democrats advanced an argument about ag overtime that essentially stated that a bushel of wheat harvested in the 41st hour is worth 50% more than one harvested at the fifth hour. Anyone who has grown up around farms knows that that is not true. And requiring farmers to pay their workers as such will soon result in a dwindling number of family farms to even employ these workers.

HB 4002 leveled all these unique distinctions in agriculture and mandated a one-size-fits-all "solution" that is really no solution at all. The "olive-branches" that Democrats extended, the agricultural community never asked for. One example: Under this new overtime pay mandate, family farms will now be able to apply for tax credits to ease the burden of the new overtime pay mandate. Now taxpayers will be subsidizing this new program. Farmers and ranchers never asked for that, but the majority decided that is what would be best for them.

I worked hard to come to a compromise. Simple adjustments for seasonality, flexible scheduling and recognizing the difference between the kinds of agricul-

ture would have helped. But the majority party rejected all these and charged ahead with what seemed to be a predetermined outcome, driven by their special interest groups.

I know how much Oregon's farmers and ranchers care about their employees and their families. HB 4002 will now force those farmers and ranchers to make difficult decisions about how much they can afford their employees to work. I grew up on these kinds of farms and I am afraid that under this policy, less and less of those farms will be around in the future.

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, is in his 10th year representing the seven counties that make up Senate District 29.

COLUMN

Embrace science and comprehension

Spring is fast approaching, and most everyone loves the newness of what comes with spring. Leaves on trees start appearing. New plants start popping up and growing. Spring is a great time to allow your children to enjoy science.

With the weather changing and getting warmer, kids enjoy charting and tracking the weather. It can be as simple as making a folded book and writing or drawing what the weather was like today — sunny, cloudy, or rainy. The learning and understanding take place when you take the time to discuss how the weather has been over the last week, such as the number of days it was sunny. Going deeper, have them predict what the weather will be like tomorrow. Ask what makes them think this. This provides the opportunity to take their learning to a higher level of thinking. In addition, it provides skills they will use for the rest of their school years.

Spring brings a time of newness to the world. Planting seeds, caring for them, and watching them grow is another wonderful activity kids love. Planting seeds doesn't require much — some seeds, dirt and a simple container/can and you're ready to experience some great science. You can expand this activity by planting different types of seeds and collecting simple data on a sheet of paper on what is happening. Once again, real learning occurs when you talk about what is happening with their seeds. Then look back at their paper to see how many days it took to see a sprout. Did it take the same number of days for all the seeds? This process builds pathways in their brains to process information, draw conclusions and make predictions. Oh, and what happens if they are not watered? Just a bonus lesson.

Science can be made as simple as taking the



SCOTT SMITH
EDUCATION CORNER

time to take a walk around the neighborhood. During your walk, take time to point out different plants and observe the environment. If you wander upon a creek or some water there is another great opportunity for discussion. Stopping and asking simple questions activates kids' curiosity and their ability to process information, and evaluate along with the ability to make predictions. These are elementary skills but skills we all use every day as part of our meta-cognition, but something our children still need to develop through simple activities. Once you return home, take the time to discuss what they saw and liked on the walk. Having them retell their walk is an essential part of the walk, forcing them to recall what they saw. If they have trouble, ask a couple of questions but don't let them off. Make them discuss what they saw. You are helping them develop their ability to comprehend information.

These activities help children develop an understanding that they can use during the day. They help the child comprehend what is happening around them. Developing these skills can transfer their understanding to their reading comprehension. They help children learn what is happening around them and be able to understand the world around them.

Scott Smith, doctor of education, is a 40-plus year Umatilla County educator and serves on the Decoding Dyslexia Oregon board as its parent/teacher liaison.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Concerned about Highland Manor Apartments

In regards to a recent front page story ("Hermiston apartment complex offers buyouts to tenants willing to vacate," Feb. 9, 2022), are there any citizens in Hermiston besides the tenants in The Highland Manor Apartments that are upset about the evictions taking place? Clover Housing Group/Atkinson Staffing is a supplier of migrant workers.

We need migrant workers for the food we put on our tables. There is no problem with migrant workers, but Atkinson Staffing is going to turn Highland Manor into migrant housing, which owner Mike Atkinson will get government subsidies for.

Atkinson has made a lot of money off hard-working migrant workers over the years. My question is: why hasn't he built housing for workers over the years instead of evicting people who have lived in Highland Manor for many years, now they have nowhere to go? He calls this an "inconvenience" and he "sympathizes," those two words I don't think fit the situation this man is putting on these tenants.

Highland Manor is one of the older apartment complexes in Hermiston, but it has been one of the best maintained places. They have been updated. There is very little if anything Atkinson will have to do to this complex. All it is, is a smokescreen to hide what he is really going to do.

The reporter should dig a little deeper and find out what this Atkinson is really doing. And how many other complexes in this town will this happen to? This should be against the law.

Nancy Patrick
Hermiston

Possible drought solutions

Now that we again have a drought in south-central Oregon and the southwest United States, it seems like it is time to seriously think of long-term solutions. One of these could be pumping water out of the Columbian River to that area.

The ocean does not need that water. Power companies could be compensated for the loss of the electricity that would be generated by that water at the Bonneville Dam and The Dalles Dam. A good place to take the water out of the Columbia River would be somewhere between The Dalles and Biggs, using two large pipes along Highway 97, dropping off the necessary amount at Klamath Falls and pumping the rest to Lake Shasta near Redding, California. Two pipes would be better than one, in case something happens to one, the other one still would work. California has the canals, etc., to take it from Lake Shasta. This would not help immediately, but could be part of a long-term solution.

This drought problem is not going to go away. The sooner we start working toward a long term solution, the sooner it can be done.

Bob Mattila
Brush Prairie, Washington

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