

QUESTION FOR THE EDITOR?: Contact Ann Turner at aturner@gillette newsrecord.net

EDITORIAL

## No more happy trails?

There's an easy fix to keep group building new rec trails

There's a fine line between pinching pennies and being a greedy miser.

The first is a fiscally responsible approach to always keeping a handle on the bottom line of one's finances. The second is being overly cheap, money-grubbing and Scrooge-ish.

The Campbell County Commission seems to have crossed that line this week when it failed to stick up for sorely needed outdoor recreation options close to Gillette.

Over the past two years, Energy Addicts has worked tirelessly to build up 12 miles of recreational use trails at the Centennial Section, a 640-acre parcel of land just over the northern border of the city limits. Seeing a need for more recreation options close to town, David Bauer approached the commissioners and formed Energy Addicts in what appeared to be great partnership. The terms were simple: The county would give permission to develop the trails — now known as Red Rock Trails — on previously unused land and the group of mountain bike enthusiasts would build them.

But when Energy Addicts approached commissioners this week with news that the group may need to and its agreement with the county, which also would kill any future development of the Red Rock Trails system, the commission missed a perfect opportunity to salvage the partnership for the benefit of all county residents.

Like many issues these days with most local governments, the hangup is financial. A couple of years into their partnership with the county, Energy Addicts is concerned about the insurance clauses in the agreement, which the group believes makes Energy Addicts responsible for anything that could potentially happen at the Centennial Section. Also, the bootstrapped group can't afford the \$3,000 bill that comes with paying for that insurance.

"Here we are after COVID, with no events, no funding, no funds raised and to start off we need a ton of money to cover just the insurance," Bauer said. "It's where it's at right now. I don't know if we can continue this right now."

Instead of stepping up to help and offer some of the county's extensive resources and expertise to work out a deal that would keep Energy Addicts happy and improving the property, the commissioners seem OK with watching the group put in two years of sweat and heart into a much-needed and valued option for local recreation, then let it walk.

If the major hangup is insurance, that can easily be solved. Renegotiate the liability part of the deal and give Energy Addicts the money to pay for it. At \$3,000, it's less than a drop in the bucket for even a cash-strapped county government.

Although it's been around for two years, Energy Addicts hasn't formally approached the county to be included in its Optional 1% Sales Tax disbursement for nonprofit organizations. The commission recently approved its Optional 1% requests, but they're not set in stone until the budget for the next fiscal year is approved in June.

Part of that process last year and this has been a debate over, and ultimate rejection of, a \$25,000 request from Gillette Reproductive Health. Not giving GRH the money has been a political and policy-driven decision, not financial. That money is there for another use in the commission were inclined to.

Offer the \$25,000 to Energy Addicts instead and, along with a renegotiation of the original agreement, let Bauer and the group's other volunteers continue what they started.

*Greg Johnson*

### In our past

**\* FROM THE MAY 16, 1974 NEWS RECORD:**

Construction of the Wyodak Steam-Electric Air-Cooled power plant got underway Monday as dirt movers began to prepare the site for the foundation work at the plant. The site, just east of the present generating plant, had several feet of fill and that had to be removed so a firm base could be used for the footings of the plant. The construction contract, the first awarded, was awarded to Jelco Inc., of Salt Lake City, Utah May 10. Jelco's crews will be responsible for grading of the plant site, excavations for foundations, construction of an access road from U.S. 14-16 to the site, construction of a rail spur from Burlington Northern's tracks to the site and the site preparation for a construction camp and recreational vehicle park to be built adjacent to the site.

**\* FROM THE MAY 28, 1997 NEWS RECORD:**

Campbell County coal mines are still drying out from the weekend rain storm. Problems with water-filled coal pits have been reported at Thunder Basin's Black Thunder mine and Kerr-McGee's Jacobs Ranch. "We were hit pretty good," said Thunder Basin spokesman Greg Schaefer. One of the mine's smaller pits still has about 20 feet of water in it. A shovel in the pit has water above its tracks and up to the body, he said. The mine hasn't shipped coal since Saturday, but Schaefer said they expect to partially resume shipments Thursday.



### Other opinions

## Things to learn from a 91-year-old



Ann Turner

There comes a time that you think that you have learned all that you can from your mother.

I no longer believe that is true.

My mother is 91. I thought I had gleaned every bit of knowledge from her that I could, especially given the state of her dementia. I lamented the things I hadn't paid close enough attention to, like the oral family histories, the memorable stories in which key elements were missing or the tips on how to make a perfect pie crust. Those are gone forever.

But I told myself that there were so many other things that my mother had taught me that I could fill in the blanks on those other things that I had missed.

Then my mother came to live with us. We were lucky for the past two years to have her company and, I realized, to still take away a few lessons from a woman who has 91 years of experience.

\* **"It's yummy."** I don't think there were many dinners over the past two years that those words didn't come from her mouth. Part of me would say, "But of course. We like to cook." Or, "I learned it from my mother."

I wondered about her choice of words. Yummy. Not, "this tastes good" or "I really

like this," but "yummy." It's a word you'd say to a child to try to get them to eat their pureed carrots.

It took awhile for me to realize that it was absolute politeness born of habit when someone prepared you a meal. If you didn't have to cook it yourself, it was always better than if you had had to spend the time in the kitchen.

We too often forget that meals are what we give to those we like and love. Food is necessary. Sitting around a meal at a table is a gift, even if it's just pizza.

\* **You're never too old for a nap.** At 91, her naps were frequent. She would awaken from them with a much clearer perspective than before, almost as if the brain had to reset.

I remembered the advice she had given me when my children were born: "You nap when the babies nap." I doubt I followed the recommendation then because there was always too much to do, and lack of sleep seemed part of the job requirements. But I didn't forget her advice.

Indeed, there were times when I knew that she needed a nap and — great idea, I thought — I'd try to provide the example. I'd fake sleep until I realized that she wouldn't sleep while I was. In her mind, she was still watching after her baby and keeping the noise to a minimum.

Then we both fell asleep and, wonder of wonders, felt 100% better.

\* **"If you say so."** She often spoke those words when it was obvious that she didn't

necessarily believe what we were saying, but decided she would no longer refute it.

"If you say so" effectively ended that part of the conversation.

Given the state of tribalism and division today, wouldn't it be nice if we could mentally say that to those with whom we disagree?

"If you say so" effectively means that I heard you and — more than that — that I listened to you. It says that I understand you believe what you are saying and, while I may or may not agree, I thank you for saying so. Now let's move on.

\* **"And so on."** She'd often end her sentences with those words as her stories trailed on and often in incomprehensible directions. The good part was that it let us fill in the blanks because we knew what she was getting at anyway.

"And so on" became as predictable as "they'd live happily ever after." And that, of course, was our intent all along for her. We hoped her time with us was — as much as it could be — part of the happily ever after that comes with old age and changing circumstances.

It wasn't a one-way street. It gave me time to contemplate, to remember and to continue lessons of life taught by a child's most important person.

Here's to all mothers and the lessons they teach.

*Ann K. Turner is editor of the News Record. Contact her at aturner@gillette newsrecord.net.*

## Biden is pushing for a train travel revolution that isn't



Megan McArdle

WASHINGTON — Before he was president, Joe Biden spent decades as the Senate's patron saint of Amtrak. He fought Republicans who wanted to cut its budget while riding the trains back to Delaware every night. Biden's infrastructure plan contains, not surprisingly, generous funding for rail; and during a speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of Amtrak, he invited Americans to dream about the possibilities:

"Imagine a two-hour train ride between Atlanta and Charlotte going at speeds of 220 miles an hour. And [a] two-and-a-half-hour trip between Chicago and Detroit. Or faster and more regular trips between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, a route that I imagine could be pretty popular on Fridays."

It's not hard to imagine; passengers take 17.1 million similar trips every year on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor between Boston and D.C. On the other hand, I can also imagine taking the same journey by plane in roughly an hour — two if you allow time to check luggage and clear security. Why would we invest billions in putting those passengers on high-speed trains instead?

The standard answer is: for the environment. But building high-speed rail systems isn't as obvious an environmental good as some think.

People tend to conceive of rail as "green" because hopping on a regional train from Washington to New York is indisputably better for the environment, in terms of emissions, than driving your own car solo or taking a short-haul flight. But making trains go very fast consumes quite a bit more energy than conventional rail, even

if it makes them more competitive with air travel. More important, high-speed rail requires a lot more infrastructure than existing rail or air networks.

For optimal performance, in terms of environment and speed, high-speed rail is best run on reasonably straight tracks, ideally ones that aren't shared with slower trains. This often necessitates an entirely new system or gut-renovating existing ones — preparing rail bed; laying many miles of track; going under, over, through or around obstacles such as mountains; and often, for peak performance, laying an equal length of electric cable so your high-speed train doesn't have to run on dirty diesel fuel.

This costs a lot of money, of course. It also costs a lot of carbon to cast the rails, pour the cement and move the dirt that's in the way. Environmental impact estimates that include construction find that, depending on the source of electricity to power them, high-speed trains might repay that upfront investment slowly, and only if they run relatively full, hopefully by diverting a lot of passengers from air travel.

Rail advocates understand this but hope that "If you build it, they will come"; in other words, solve the political obstacles to rail now, and later we can solve the problem of getting fliers onto trains. But if passenger traffic lags hopes, we could end up committing to a huge environmental expense that might never pay off.

Investments in high-speed rail are a clear solution to several political problems Democrats have: it appeals to the union construction workers who would build it, environmentalists who think of trains as "green," and young, educated progressives

who have fallen in love with high speed rail abroad.

But to actually help the environment, Democrats need to address more than the political problem; they need to solve the very real problem of getting people outside the Northeast onto trains.

Amtrak's Northeast Corridor is so heavily trafficked because trains really are an attractive alternative to air travel there. The cities in this region have retained sizable commuter-rail systems and the urban architecture — oriented around a central business district and close-in residential neighborhoods — that rail demands. So Amtrak is often a preferred alternative to air, even though it's slower than the equivalent flight, because it puts people right where they want to go, without the hassle of clearing security. But most states in other regions

don't have even one such city, much less a bunch of them strung close together like beads on a string. Of course, people are more interested in walkable cities than they used to be, and maybe high-speed rail is part of a denser urban future across these United States. But unless we're pretty sure people will abandon planes for new trains, it might make more sense to look for less capital-intensive ways to decarbonize — better videoconferencing, for example, or longer-range electric cars. These advances might not make for big political ribbon-cutting ceremonies or fire up the political imagination the way futuristic trains and miles of gleaming rail do. But on the other hand, they just might work.

Follow Megan McArdle on Twitter, @asymmetricinfo.

**But to actually help the environment, Democrats need to address more than the political problem; they need to solve the very real problem of getting people outside the Northeast onto trains.**