

EDITORIAL

Farewell

BrainstormNW 1997-2009

In the post-Revolutionary War period, as the nation struggled to define itself and ratify a new constitution, small newspapers sprung up to spread the word across the colonies about the conflicting ideas and critical choices hanging in the balance. The *Aurora* and *Porcupine's Gazette* were both supported by monied interests in the newly united states of America. That these early news pamphlets reported with a particular bias was no more a secret than the *New York Times'* political bias is today.

Agrarian interests in favor of stronger states' rights, led by Thomas Jefferson, waged a war of words with financial/industrial interests in favor of stronger federal authority, led by Alexander Hamilton. In the heat of this fight, the Alien and Sedition Acts were passed by the Congress in 1798, which resulted in one of the newspaper editors being sent back to England and another being jailed and eventually killed. Among other things, the acts made it illegal to "print, utter, or publish ... any false, scandalous, and malicious writing" about the government. Though later repealed, the acts are a cautionary example of the coercive power of government.

It was a wild and wooly time full of intrigue, fierce political battles and bitter rivalries. Those early newspapers, first to operate under the constitution that guaranteed a free press, faced many challenges, from maintaining adequate funding to legal persecution by political adversaries — not for the faint of heart and not so different from the politics and challenges today. Some things never change. Though both Jefferson and Hamilton would be outraged that the conflict today is between business and government, rather than segments of business.

But it appears that the press is in a period of transformation. Print publications across the country now face upheaval in the industry that threatens their survival. Electronic media have crowded out countless print publications as readers turn to television and the Internet for "free" news. At the same time, heavy political bias demonstrated by many newspapers has diminished their credibility and readership, while contributing to their own demise.

For the past 12 years, *BrainstormNW* has published in Oregon and been read by thousands of well-educated, active, thoughtful citizens. We, of course, are a niche magazine, not a newspaper. Did we have a message, a slant, like the *Aurora* of 1798? Yes. For 12 years we have sounded the alarm that Oregon's business climate was rapidly cooling. We have made the case that our planet was just as likely to be cooling and that the global warming fanatics were just that, con artists seeking power and financial gain. For 12 years we warned that ignoring the rich resources of rural Oregon was foolhardy and would lead to poverty and social decay. For 12 years we have sounded the alert that 22 years of one-party rule by Democrats would eventually corrupt, and that the concentrated power, numbers and inflated pensions and benefits of public unions would undermine and finally destroy Oregon's economy.

And now we will be silent. Like the *Aurora* and *Porcupine's Gazette*, our time has ended. This month's issue, February 2009, will be our last. We were the voice of many Oregonians, but we have been stilled by the failing economy we predicted for this past decade. Ironic. Sad. In this

instance it has been less than gratifying to be right. But given that a pro-business publication in Oregon is a bit more of a rare hothouse orchid than an old growth Doug fir, it is not surprising that we could not weather the economic and political firestorm. Still, for our writers, editors and readers, the loss of this 12-year endeavor is painful.

At *BNW* we have always believed that our region needed a stronger private sector. We also have always believed, unlike those in state and local government, including and especially our governor, that business and government are not entrepreneurial partners. Rather, they have separate roles to play. Business creates wealth, and government provides services. In Oregon, business organizations and government leaders often spread what we believe to be a false message: that business and government, working together as equal partners, will grow the economy. We believe, in regard to wealth creation, that the private sector is the engine and the government is the caboose. That is our system, and if we are to recover more quickly from present economic troubles, that should be the federal and state emphasis — getting the private sector healthy again so that it can lead.

Like any small business, publishing a magazine for 12 years has been work, but it also has been a lot of fun. We like to think that we've had our share of editorial successes during that period. In 2001, Willamette Industries Chairman of the Board Bill Swindells used the pages of *BNW* to open the bidding with Weyerhaeuser during the hostile takeover. In another issue we called for the resignation of University of Oregon President Dave Frohnmayer because he allowed Phil Knight's money for the expansion of Autzen Stadium to be blocked. We also helped State Sen. Vicki Walker begin to unmask Neil Goldschmidt by exposing the intimidation she suffered when she questioned his confirmation as chair of Oregon's Higher Ed Board. We chronicled the sometimes contentious, contrasting visions between Vera Katz and Gert and Tim Boyle over Portland's economic future. We provided a forum where then-chairman of the Governor's Council of Economic Advisors Ralph Shaw, Schnitzer Steel Industries Chairman Ken Novack, and Sen. Mark Hatfield could voice their concerns over OHSU's reckless use of public money to create a bio-tech neighborhood in Portland's South Waterfront. We called out a poorly-researched study published in *Science* magazine by an OSU graduate student using U.S. Forest Service funds to argue that salvage logging the Biscuit Fire would actually inhibit forest recovery. No one else in Oregon would have printed those stories. *No one.*

Of course, when you make a career arguing against the prevailing orthodox — in other words an unapologetic pro-business position — there will be harassment from the establishment. And there was. The editor and the publisher of *BNW* both suffered a few good licks from Gov. John Kitzhaber's Department of Justice who reported them for investigation to the IRS and from Oregon Secretary of State Bill Bradbury over a possible election violation during the 2006 gubernatorial race between Gov. Kulongoski and Republican Ron Saxton. And like the editors of the *Aurora* and the *Porcupine*, we knew better than to rely on the law to protect us, especially in the highly partisan political environment of blue Oregon.

Editorial victories and troubles aside, as we prepare to exit Oregon's civic stage, the condition of Oregon's economy deeply concerns us. It's sad, even painful, to see the state hurting so badly in ways that easily could have been avoided. There's a ski resort in rural southern Oregon that might have brought 1,000 jobs that was never built because only 32 of 34 endangered species

could be satisfactorily monitored and protected. There's a 36-hole golf resort in Rickreall that was never built because it didn't coincide with some urbanite's planning and growth agenda. Today, there are small towns in Oregon whose number one industry is meth distribution. The litany of wasted opportunity in this beautiful state is endless and shameful.

For the last decade, Oregonians have refused to use their land and their renewable natural resources to maintain a healthy middle class. Oregonians have been led to believe that new economies, the high-tech economy or the green economy, would evolve the state beyond relying on its land and resources. This is a false promise — and as long as we believe it, we will suffer poverty and malaise.

BNW has fought mightily to shake Oregonians out of their provincial stupor that “things look different here,” that we could rewrite the rules of the global economy, rewrite fundamental business practices. Even as we exit the stage, we stand our ground on these ongoing disputes. And we thank our readers, contributors, advertisers, and owners, and yes, even you, our adversaries, for making our voice possible these last 12 years.

We are not among the believers that print is dying. Transforming, yes; dying, no. The public will always have an appetite for print, for news, for the truth. Perhaps as the editor of the *Aurora* lay in the muddy ditch where he died an ignoble death, he thought that his life work had been for naught because his publication was gone, his printing press was silent, his voice was extinguished. But of course history proved otherwise. He didn't live to see it, but he had left his mark. His tiny publication deeply influenced the course of history and the direction of our nation. Words matter, individual voices matter. The news, the truth, will always find a voice, and when there is a new way to tell it, you will hear from us again.