Dear Readers,

Last May, I visited with HCN founder Tom Bell in his hometown of Lander, Wyoming, for what we both expected would be the final time. As we hugged goodbye, Tom, who founded HCN on a shoestring back in 1970, told me: “I’m just so proud of you young people who keep picking up the torch and carrying it forward. Tell everyone to keep up the fight, and that I love them.”

Tom passed away in August at the age of 92, but his words continue to inspire me. The team at High Country News is determined to “keep up the fight,” and we’re turning to the next generation to help us carry the torch. In fact, we needed all our staffers, both the young and the not-so-young, on board in early January, when a small group of armed “patriots” left a protest in Burns, Oregon, to go occupy the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Fortunately, we were prepared: For the past two years, we had been monitoring the increasingly noisy anti-federal movement in the West, and we were just weeks away from publishing a special issue on the new “sagebrush insurgency.”

Brooke Warren, our associate designer, happened to be vacationing in Oregon, and so HCN Online Editor Tay Wiles asked her to stop by Burns on the day of the protest. Brooke ended up being the first journalist on the scene at the refuge, and when one of the occupiers questioned whether she should be allowed to take photographs, she calmly replied: “It’s my constitutional right.” The pocket-Constitution-carrying occupiers had to agree. Brooke’s photos were posted on hcn.org the next morning, along with an explanatory story, an opinion piece, and links to dozens of past stories HCN has done on the Sagebrush Rebellion.

Traffic on the website ballooned, driven by links to our coverage from national news outlets, including The New York Times, Washington Post, Slate and NPR. Over the following weeks, as the occupation dragged on, our team produced a steady stream of sharp-eyed stories and thoughtful opinion pieces, including articles on the challenges facing federal land-agency law enforcement, and the on-the-ground conditions that helped spark the current wave of anti-federal activities. Meanwhile, our marketing team quickly assembled email and web-based campaigns to convert first-time readers into e-newsletter subscribers and trial magazine subscribers. Hundreds signed up, excited about the upcoming special issue on the subject.

In early February, we published our special Sagebrush Rebellion issue. It provided a deeper and broader look at the network of right-wing organizations opposing federal authority and land management around the country. Finally, the following week, we published a remarkable firsthand essay by Montana writer Hal Herring, a longtime HCN contributor, who managed to place the occupation in the context of the much larger forces at work in our country’s economic and political landscape. Hal’s essay, which initially appeared online, attracted more than 125,000 readers in a week, and was so good that we decided to run it in the magazine, too.

The sagebrush insurgency confirmed that HCN can and should be involved when nationally significant news breaks in the region, because we have the experience and acumen to provide the balance and context often missing in the national media. Long-term investigations are also essential, because through them we advance the understanding of critical issues and help lay the groundwork for resolving, or at least understanding, future conflicts.
We covered other important stories, too, including the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. Instead of focusing on the scenic glories of the West’s iconic parks, we visited places most Americans have never heard of, including some, like the Anza Trail in southern Arizona, that highlight our nation’s complex history and cultural heritage. We also pointed out the serious challenges facing the underfunded agency, from ecosystem-altering climate change, to the lack of racial diversity and a “good-ol’-boy” culture that has prompted sexual harassment allegations in places like the Grand Canyon. Many reporters contributed, including Washington, D.C., correspondent Elizabeth Shogren, writer Glenn Nelson of trailposse.com, and editorial fellow Lyndsey Gilpin.

We also tried to provide insight into this year’s tumultuous national political climate. In September, we examined the impact Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy is having on Latino and Mormon voters in Western states that have traditionally been Republican strongholds. And earlier, we took an in-depth look at a vibrant but troubled region with our special “Big Ideas” issue on the U.S./Mexico Borderlands. “Frontera Incognita” was overseen by guest editor and author Rubén Martinez, who brought together a half-dozen gifted writers to provide a wide range of perspectives on a part of the West that has always been in flux.

In between the larger feature stories, we produced a steady stream of stories and opinion on our website — an average of one a day — that responded to a wide range of issues, including the West’s robust wildfire season, protests over pipelines and ports, new national monuments, predator control and changing energy markets.

The editorial mix attracted an ever-larger audience. Paid circulation (print and digital) topped 30,000 for the first time ever in January and has stayed at that level — some 9 percent ahead of last year — for the rest of the year. The growth is driven by solid renewal rates and a remarkable growth in online readership; this year, we averaged more than 200,000 unique visits a month to hcn.org, 40 percent higher than the previous year.

It is also driven in part by our HCN University classroom subscription program. More than 200 professors and teachers serving more than 8,000 students used HCN in their classrooms this year. Academic institutions involved ranged from Vermont to California, with particularly large numbers in the inland West.

All of this work and progress are made possible because of the amazing reader community that feeds us ideas, constructive feedback and dollars. Many things have changed since 1973, when a youthful HCN teetered on the brink of extinction and was rescued by the generosity of its readers, but Tom Bell’s words about the HCN community still hold true: “Each day the letters come pouring in and, as you read them, you alternate between humbly crying and joyfully cheering. People whom we have never met except through the pages of a little paper write us as they would a long-lost friend. Somehow we have created another bond between people across a far-flung land.”

Amen.

Paul Larmer · Publisher and Executive Director
2016 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

HIGH COUNTRY NEWS PROFIT AND LOSS
OCTOBER 1, 2015 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2016

ANNUAL SUPPORT AND REVENUE

- Donations $1,000,414
- Subscriptions $827,869
- Grants and Other Contributions $620,326
- Advertising/Sponsorships/Events $250,452
- Miscellaneous (single issue sales, syndication sales, royalties, investment income, etc.) $56,081

TOTAL $2,755,142

EXPENSES

- Production & Fulfillment $900,114
- Editorial Content $873,912
- Subscription Sales & Outreach $322,268
- Administration & IT $301,885
- Development & Fundraising $246,896
- Overhead $162,405
- Advertising/Sponsor Sales $134,844

TOTAL $2,942,324

NET INCOME $ (187,182)

Note: These numbers are unaudited estimates.
High Country News is a 501(c)3 nonprofit media organization that covers the important issues and stories that define the American West. Its mission is to inform and inspire people — through in-depth journalism — to act on behalf of the West’s diverse natural and human communities.

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