

## Editor's notes

## Packers or 49ers? According to roadside ball ...

If you've driven from Chico to Orland (or vice versa) at any point the past nine years, you've seen it.



Mike Wolcott

It sits just to the south of Highway 32, barely east of Meridian Road, in an otherwise empty field. It's a good-sized round object that, to the untrained

eye, looks like some sort of water tank.

It's impossible to miss, because it's always Green Bay Packers green and gold.

Or, sometimes, it's half 49ers red and gold, the colors split right down the middle.

It's become a fascinating every-day part of life for thousands of people who travel that road. I know it draws a glance from me every time — usually, twice in the same day. It just flat-out looks like it belongs in that field and, by now, it does.

The brightly painted object and its origins have even become the stuff of urban legend.

Among the wildest explanations I've heard:

— "It's a white irrigation tank. One day somebody decided to paint it Packers colors, and some 49ers fan drove by and got mad and re-painted it."

— "It was a married couple that argued about football and got divorced. She ended up with the place and had it painted all Packers."

— "I heard it belongs to one of Aaron Rodgers' relatives."

— "It's a wrecking ball. Probably belongs to Miley Cyrus."

In any case, with the 49ers and Packers meeting today in the NFC Championship Game, I decided it was finally time to learn the truth.

First, I drove through the area and zeroed in on a couple of homes most likely to be attached to that field.

The first house I approached had a big sign in its driveway: "No trespassing. I own firearms and a backhoe."

I immediately decided that probably wasn't the right house. I continued up the road. I

found the "mailbox most likely" nearby and left a note with my business card, begging for a call or email with info on the ball.

Imagine my thrill when, just a couple hours later, I got a phone call from Elsie Hightower. The "ball" indeed belongs to her and her husband of 66 years, Dean Hightower, and they invited me out for a visit.

As expected, they had quite a story to tell.

First, the big one: Yes, the Hightowers are a split family when it comes to football. Dean, and his oldest son Jerry of Orland, like the 49ers. Son Lloyd Hightower of Chico, and their grandson Ben, like the Packers.

As for Elsie? "I have to be neutral," she said.

The "ball" is actually a buoy. When the Hightowers purchased the property in 1979, the buoy was being used as a water tank. Eventually, it cracked.

Instead of throwing it away, they put it to use.

First, it was painted as a volleyball. ("We're a volleyball family," Elsie said, adding they're

regular attendees at Chico games.) Then, one year at Halloween, it was painted as a pumpkin.

And then came the Packers and that Super Bowl championship of Feb. 6, 2011. Even though they probably felt slight qualms about the whole Rodgers-Pleasant Valley connection — the Hightowers are Chico High all the way — the Packer half of the family decided they needed to do something special with the ball.

Ben, who was 13 at the time, did the painting. They moved the ball into the middle of the field, where it has been ever since.

"We had lights rigged up around it" at the time of the Packers' Super Bowl championship, Ben recalled, adding it generally takes him only 30 or 40 minutes for a complete paint job.

Later, in an effort to appease everyone in the family, they turned the ball sideways. This time, Ben painted half of it 49ers colors and the other half Packers.

By now, the ball had become famous. People were stopping along the road and running out to pose for photos. Local TV stations came out for stories.

And then, as Elsie recalled, "Somebody graffitied it."

So, Ben went back to work. This time, there was no hiding his allegiance. He spray-painted it all Packers colors again.

Today, with the buoy standing as brightly as ever, all of the Packers fans in the Hightower family will watch the game at one home, and the 49ers fans at another.

Half the family is predicting a Packers victory. The other half is predicting a 49ers win.

As for Elsie?

"I'm neutral," she reminded me. "That way, I win either way."

Have a ball, folks. And thanks so much for sharing yours with the world.

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## Cartoonist's take



## Other views

## Time is on Taiwan's side

WASHINGTON » With the totalitarians' talent for invective and the Leninist faith that "history" has a Marxist mind of its own, a Beijing-run "news" agency dismissed Taiwan's presidential election results as "a temporary fluke" and "bubbles left behind by the tides of history."



George Will

Actually, this election, just 48 days after Hong Kong's resounding repudiation of Beijing in November voting, is another boulder in a growing avalanche of evidence, from the islands of Hong Kong and Taiwan to Central Europe, that China need not be accommodated.

The landslide reelection of President Tsai Ing-wen happened despite Beijing's strenuously expressed objections, economic pressures (e.g., refusing visas to tourists wanting to visit Taiwan, where tourism produces more than 4% of GDP), military intimidation (last year, Beijing's fighter jets crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait for the first time in two decades) and surreptitious but flagrant electoral interference.

In a January 2019 speech, China's President Xi Jinping declared that Taiwan (the Republic of China) "must and will be" reunited with the People's Republic of China because this is "the great trend in history." Last September a Twitter account believed to be controlled by Beijing said "once we have dealt with Hong Kong, we will settle the scores with Taiwan, military unification is unavoidable."

Actually, Hong Kong has dealt with Beijing. Taiwanese voters saw many months of massive Hong Kong protests against Beijing's attempts to slowly suffocate the city's freedom. These at-

tempts have revealed the nonsensical nature of the "one country, two systems" fudge by which China disguises the despotic future it envisions for both Hong Kong and Taiwan. They will not go gently into the totalitarian night that Evan Osnos describes in *The New Yorker*:

"Xi believes that orthodox commitment to Communism is paramount as his country fends off Western influences. ... In a modern twist, 90 million party members have been given an app loaded with Xi's speeches, quizzes about his life story, and videos on history. (The app keeps track of what they finish.)"

There is the essence of totalitarianism: Not that you cannot participate in politics, but that you must participate.

The Taiwan question, Xi says, "should not be passed down generation after generation." What question? Taiwan has been effectively a sovereign nation for generations. Taiwan is independent — it has its own legislature, currency, travel documents, diplomats, etc. — and only a major war (America is committed to defending Taiwan against attempts to change its status by force) can alter this. A bilateral U.S.-Taiwan trade agreement should be the next acknowledgement of Taiwan's sovereignty.

Time is on Taiwan's side. There is a steady increase in the majority of Taiwan's 23.5 million people who self-identify as Taiwanese rather than Chinese. In last Saturday's legislative elections, the average age of candidates from Tsai's party (38) was almost 25 years younger than those of the principal opposition party.

Youth will be served. In a Washington Post column last month, Zdenek Hrib, the 38-year-old mayor of Prague, noted that in 2019 China can-

celed its invitation to four Czech musical ensembles because Tibet's flag flies over Prague's city hall. China is attempting to extinguish Tibet's national identity. Hrib also wrote, "Being a doctor, I have also publicly condemned the forced extraction of organs from members of the Muslim Uighur minority and other prisoners of the regime." Furthermore, Prague balked when Beijing insisted on — Hrib's predecessor as mayor had agreed to — a clause in a "sister-city" agreement that renounced the independence of Tibet and Taiwan. China canceled the agreement. So, on Monday Prague signed a sister-city agreement with Taipei, Taiwan's capital where Hrib spent two months as a medical student, and where he has been made an honorary citizen. "I vowed during the campaign," Hrib says, "that I would return to our hallowed post-communist traditions of honoring democracy and human rights."

The Financial Times reports that when, at a reception welcoming diplomats to Prague, China's ambassador demanded that Taiwan's representative be expelled from the reception, Hrib replied that he does not throw out invited guests. "So he repeated his request multiple times, and blocked the queue of other ambassadors waiting for my welcome. They were tapping his shoulder and saying: 'Maybe you could do this somewhere else.'"

Bad manners and execrable behavior can both be reflections of a disrespect for civilized norms by a bully invoking "history" as his alibi. China is learning, contrary to its ideology, that people make history, not the other way around.

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## Other views

## Warren, Castro are kindred spirits — and quite the ticket

SAN DIEGO » Julian Castro is finally getting the media attention he deserves. All he had to do was drop his bid for the Democratic nomination for president and stump for Elizabeth Warren.



Ruben Navarrette

These days, you can find the former secretary of housing and urban development telling crowds in Iowa how his former opponent would make a great commander in chief, singing Warren's praises as he schmoozes with reporters in the spin room after this week's debate, and enthusiastically tweeting that he's "ready for President Elizabeth Warren."

Warren and Castro make a good team. And — if Warren survives the boy's club of presidential politics and secures the nomination — they'd look good together on the same presidential ticket.

For one thing, Warren needs a boost with Latinos. It's no wonder why. The Massachusetts senator appears to have scarcely given that ethnic group a thought since entering politics to run for the Senate in 2012. Her constituency is highly educated, white, Northeastern liberals — and not much beyond that. And while Castro didn't corner the market with support from fellow Latinos during the year he spent on the trail, don't be shocked if they react more fondly to him now that he's gone, and they're stuck with a field of Democratic front-runners that is as white as a snowy day in Iowa or New Hampshire.

If Warren-Castro becomes a thing, it would be the third time that Democrats went with the Massachusetts-Texas combination in a White House bid. There was John Kennedy-Lyndon Johnson in 1960, and Michael Dukakis-Lloyd Bentsen in 1988.

Sure, there are differences between the candidates. Like age; Warren is 70, Castro is 45. And then we have their relationship to the Fourth Estate; Warren is the media's preferred candidate for the White House, while Castro disappeared when he fell into the media "brown hole" (where Latinos go to vanish because they're neither black nor white). Finally, there is geography; Massachusetts and Texas seem to be on different planets.

But, these two Democrats also have a few things in common. Like Harvard Law School; Warren taught there, and Castro studied there. And strong communication skills; both have done a good job of exciting the base of voters that supports them, even while keeping their cool when attacked.

The diversity duo also has one more thing in common: They've both learned the hard

way that, if you're not a white male, running for president is no walk in the park.

Tension comes with the territory when you're trying to be the first of anything. No one likes change, and it's not always easy to adjust to a new order of things. White men have it easy. Everyone else, not so much.

Castro was not so lucky. When he suggested decriminalizing unauthorized border crossings and treating them as civil violations, white pundits wondered aloud if the Mexican American wanted "an open border."

But women who run for president have it just as hard as people of color, if not harder. For years, I've had women friends who were Latino or African American tell me that they faced more challenges because they were women than because they were minorities.

I believe it. Women got the right to vote a half century after those African Americans who were freed slaves were allowed to cast ballots. And Americans have elected, and reelected, an African American president. But — looking just at the major political parties — voters have twice taken a pass on electing a female vice president (Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, Sarah Palin in 2008) and once refused to elect a woman president by denying Hillary Clinton the number of electoral college votes needed to claim victory.

Now Warren is getting a taste of ignorance. In her recent kerfuffle with Bernie Sanders over a discussion they had on whether a woman could be elected president, I believe Warren. Given that Sanders has long had a burr under his saddle about so-called identity politics, I find it easy to imagine that he said that a woman would have a tough time defeating Donald Trump in 2020. Of course, that's different from what the media is reporting, that Sanders said a woman could never be elected president. Word games aside, Warren is catching a lot of flak from everyone from conservative radio hosts who hate it when someone plays the "woman card" to Sanders supporters who think their guy got played.

There we go again. Americans are always blaming the victim, and making it seem like it's the pioneer who has the problem.

Castro has been there and done that. So he's in a great position to defend Warren against what is yet another unfair attack.

Warren-Castro? Yeah, that's the ticket.

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