

Opinion / Local

— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

Democrats voting for Nichols is a positive thing

To the Editor:

As the upcoming election process unfolds it is interesting to read letters to the editors in our local papers. Usually the authors draw on their own experiences to convey support or opposition of a candidate. Other times the letters are written in ways that display the writer's anger or frustration over the process or what they perceive to be a fight between "us" and "them."

One writer recently suggested that the reason the Democrats did not submit a candidate for Baker County Commissioner is that some Democrats (or former Democrats) are now supporting Bruce Nichols. How wonderful is that? To know that some of our Democratic friends and neighbors can now support a man like Bruce Nichols is great. They recognize that men of his caliber, honesty, integrity, and life experiences make him the man to support that they did not, in this instance, find in their own ranks. It is not that Mr. Nichols has changed in character or beliefs. He is still a very strong supporter of our constitution and will not swerve in his defense of it. He will execute sound judgment in all his dealings whether the circumstances are pleasant or not, whether the outcome is pleasant or not, or whether the establishment wants to hear it or not.

So here is my letter to the editor and when all is said and done my hope is that the "us" and "them" folks become "we." We can vote, we can choose, we can go through this election process without anger and we can unite to elect Bruce Nichols as Baker County Commissioner.

Anita Nelson
Baker City

Nichols has supported the Shriners

To the Editor:

Bruce is a super candidate for the commission. He is familiar with local businesses, Ranchers, Farmers, Schools, budgets and accounting in all types of operations that need his talents. Bruce is locally raised, educated and works as a Certified Accountant.

He graduated from Baker High School and has lived most of his life in Baker County.

He has directed several people to donate some of their large and small funds and time to the East West Shrine Game held in Baker City each year. Which are then passed on to the Shriner Hospital for Children in Portland.

He has been a large supporter of the Baker County Shrine Club and the fundraisers that we do for the benefit of getting kids who need specialized treatment, care and travel; to receive the care they need at no charge to them, yes I mean at no charge. Any of the children who go to our hospital are not charged for any of their care and operations.

Bruce is always cordial and courteous to whoever might ask for his input in everyday problems that might come their way.

Bruce is a Certified Public Accountant and the person we need as a County Commissioner that will keep all of us in Baker County better advised to help us and let us know what is happening with the County budgets and financing.

Vote for Bruce Nichols for Baker County Commissioner, position number 1, for results and confidence.

Dick Kirby
Baker City

Law enforcement consolidation

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Consolidation of County and City law enforcement has been tossed around locally in years past.

Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner said in an interview Tuesday, "This idea comes up every couple of years and shows an ignorance regarding how local law enforcement works. At one point, Vern Hull, a Lieutenant here who left back in 2004, studied the issue on a broad scale and determined that if consolidating the Sheriff's Department and the City Police is solely an effort to save money, it simply doesn't work."

Lohner said typically larger entities in terms of force, such as a county, absorb law enforcement management for smaller entities, such as rural towns without proper funding to maintain a police department. Such is not the case between Baker County and Baker City.

He said, "And consolidating two agencies will save no money when there's no crossover between the two—no duplication. And there isn't here. The only possible area might be the time a Sheriff's deputy spends serving civil subpoenas within the City limits. Past that, there just isn't duplication. That means in order to save money, positions would have to be cut. We can't cut positions and maintain the same level of service to the community."

Quality of service is foremost in Lohner's mind. He said, "Right now we have a City Manager who supervises the Police Chief. The City Council oversees the City Manager. The Council is answerable to the local citizens. This is the only system in which, on a day-to-day basis, the citizens have direct input into the law enforcement services they receive."

But what if the plan was to move the Sheriff's Department under the auspices of the City Police?

"I can't see how that would be done," said Lohner. "There are state statues and a County structure protecting that. What would be the proposition? To reduce the Sheriff just to overseeing the jail and civil?"

Lohner also pointed out, "If we turned over our department's infrastructure, our fleet, etc., we would never get it back. The cost to rebuild after a failed experiment would be phenomenal."

Lohner added, "We work well with the Sheriff and share resources when we can anyway."

Baker County Commissioner Bill Harvey indicated that he'd heard Nichols' idea of law enforcement consolidation expressed previously by the candidate.

Harvey said, "I don't see how that's going to fly. The City has a hired police chief and the County has an elected Sheriff. These are two different types of government to put together, and I'd think that would be extremely difficult. To me it's a non-issue."

Harvey questioned the economics of the idea in terms of wondering where the consolidated staff would be housed, etc. "Would we have to build a new facility? Where would the money come from? It would just be very difficult," Harvey said. "I can't see the County wanting to go that way. A joint County and City entity would be very difficult. I would think you'd see one segment of the population questioning whether they were getting the same service as another segment."

Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash said that without seeing the facts of a concrete proposal or seeing a concept written out on paper, he really couldn't comment on how a consolidation would work.

"I deal in facts," he said. Ash said he could see possible negatives and possible benefits. "It wouldn't be a little task," he said.

Ash said he had heard the idea of the concept tossed around in years past, but not recently.

Baker County Sheriff's Deputy John Hoopes spoke in his capacity as a candidate for Sheriff.

"As with any idea, I could see points that are good and points that are bad. Overall, I don't think this would be a good idea for many reasons," said Hoopes.

Hoopes believes a consolidated local law enforcement department could

jeopardize the authority given to sheriffs under the Oregon State Constitution. "The sheriff or police chief would be acting more in a chief enforcement officer role—the sheriff would no longer have the power to deputize people because he would no longer be an elected official," he said.

Hoopes continued, "This would take a committee to sort through this issue, and again, we'd be looking at if that's worth the money to study. The idea would be to save money, but I don't see that saving money."

Hoopes' thoughts mirrored Lohner's. "When we look at anything that's been consolidated between the City and County from 911 to Planning to Economic Development, if the City reached the point it wanted to pay less or have more control (as in the current situation with economic development), if the City Police had given up all its equipment, we could never go back. The cost to set up that department again would be incredibly high—we'd never be able to do it."

Hoopes also posed a question similar to Harvey's: "Would we need a new office building for the sheriff? How would that work?"

County Commissioner Mark Bennett also said the idea isn't new. "The last time I actively was a part of talking about a consolidation was back when Sheriff Speelman was in office. It just wouldn't have saved any money back then."

Bennett stated that the only two reasons he could think of to consolidate law enforcement would be if it was proven to save money and provide improved services. "Doing something just to do something isn't a reason," he said.

"Right now we have two excellent law enforcement agencies," Bennett said.

He said in the case of the 911 Consolidated Dispatch effort, the combination "made fiscal sense." He believed the same of combining City and County Planning where he saw the previous situation as "two struggling small departments."

But the Sheriff and City Police? "You'd have to look at it is saving money.

And we would have to have a community discussion about this."

What might be the benefits of consolidation? Studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s indicated that multi-agency consolidations might serve to promote benefits such as standardized weaponry and approaches, improved employee retention, and decreased confusion over jurisdiction.

David Walsh, Chief of Police, Appleton, Wisconsin, Police Department cautioned in *The Police Chief Magazine* that six items in his own area "quickly derailed merger success: 1. Disagreeing on goals, 2. Failing to involve all players, 3. Ignoring community history, 4. Incautiously using consultants, 5. Reckless naming, and 6. Forgetting it's about people."

Walsh added that under the first point alone, disagreeing on goals, "Elected officials on both sides of the municipal line agreed to three elements as indicators of 'success.' They stated the merger must: increase the quality of police service, offer long-term financial gains for both entities, and obtain buy-in from community stakeholders."

"These indicators were developed with the hope of providing realistic expectations. They were repeatedly part of presentations to the governing bodies, the community, and the employees. Yet as soon as they were stated aloud, they were often discarded in favor of more tangible and immediate goals."

In 2003 the International Association of Chiefs of Police issued a statement outlining the complications of law enforcement consolidation, which can range from creating a combined "metro" unit to mere cross-deputization.

In regard to the subject of law enforcement consolidation as discussed at the Halfway meeting, Nichols declined a phone interview citing a busy work schedule, and asked for written questions instead.

Responses to those questions were not submitted in time for print.

Robot



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Chris Boyd demonstrates how to flip over and then right the Avatar III.

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The Baker County Sheriff's Department, Union County Sheriff's Department, Baker City Police Department, and La Grande Police Department comprise the regional SWAT team—so the benefits of the robot would be regional rather than for just one county or city.

SWAT team commander Sergeant Gary Bell of the La Grande Police Department was on hand for both demonstrations. Said Bell, "It's the piece of equipment that our regional team is missing right now that would enable us to accomplish the mission and do it as safe as we possibly can."

Dusty Perry, also a sergeant with the La Grande Police Department, pointed out that one major high-risk incident can consume the same financial amount as the cost of the robot, as could one incident in which an injured officer might need LifeFlighted out of the area due to an injury that utilizing the robot may have prevented. The robot when used in other areas has cut down the time dedicated to high-risk incidents by up to half, in some cases.

The robot, said Boyd, is the same tactical model utilized by the FBI. In the case of an armed standoff, the robot "helps formulate the safest decision-making involved." With a built-in, protected camera and two-way communication, the robot could be deployed into a standoff to communicate and view suspects and victims, helping determine whether a suspect for example, has decided to comply, not to comply, is armed or not, or even committed suicide. Thus, law enforcement can more safely calculate a response to the situation. The robot has also been utilized to examine suspicious packages.

The robot's key selling points? Extreme durability and a bargain price compared to many other models. "It's rugged," said Boyd.

The robot has a lifespan of six to seven years, with two rechargeable batteries included. Since batteries generally don't need replaced, the cost to operate is minimal. In addition with RoboteX fronting the training, meaning that Boyd only needed to bill out for a plane ticket, the original \$28,000 cost was reduced to \$25,000.

Several other robots—different models from various companies—were all analyzed and viewed over the weeks before the Avatar III rose to the top of the team's wish list.

According to RoboteX, "The Avatar III enhances capabilities of first responders by allowing them to quickly and safely inspect dangerous situations without putting anyone in harm's way... It saves lives by keeping first responders at a safer standoff distance."

The robot weighs 25 pounds, climbs at a 60-degree incline and has an operating range up to 300 meters.

Jerry Boyd, Baker County Reserve Commander and Chris Boyd's father, said he became involved in the robot project's fundraising efforts approximately two months ago and plans to continue raising funds until the robot is purchased. The elder Boyd said he first looked for grants, and quickly found, "There aren't any."

The Northeast Regional SWAT Team has taken note of the success the Baker City Police Department found in raising funds from the community for Capa, the new drug dog that replaced retired Turbo.

Tax deductible donations may be made in care of the Baker City Police Department—SWAT Fund, 1768 Auburn Avenue, Baker City, OR 97814.

The Robot will be maintained by the Baker City Police Department for immediate use by law enforcement agencies (and the SWAT Team) in the region.

Woman shoots self in leg

After concluding its initial investigation, the Baker County Major Crime Team has determined that Amanda Marie Murray, 19, accidentally shot herself in the leg on April 10, 2016.

The gun was discharged during the disassembly process. Murray indicated she was unaware that the gun, a semi-automatic hand gun, had a bullet in the chamber during the disassembly process. She is currently in stable condition. The Baker County District Attorney's Office is reviewing the case for potential charges.

The incident occurred around 9 p.m., when the 19-year-old received a life-threatening injury when a single bullet fired from a .40 caliber handgun struck her in the left thigh.

There were multiple people inside the apartment at the time the weapon went off. The incident occurred at 2920 Elm Street, apartment #20.