

# Opinion / Politics

— EDITORIAL —

## No sacrificing Police for Fire

Earlier this year, Baker City found itself in a giant budgeting mess due to what we saw as a combination of poor planning and unforeseen circumstances.

As a result, the Budget Committee, City Manager, and City Council scrambled to come up with a way to make up for that huge shortfall in the General Fund. That section of the overall budget just so happens to contain the budgets for the local Police and Fire Departments, among other things. The Police Department's budget is tight as it is, with patrol scheduling a juggling act many weeks, where actually adding one more position would be beneficial. Beneficial, but definitely not affordable. At that time, the City looked toward cutting an officer position anyway to make up for mistakes made elsewhere. Did that seem fair at the time? Nope.

In order to keep that position in place for the public, City Council passed a new and controversial \$3 per household / \$6 per business per month Public Safety Fee, which was added to the already soaring water and sewer bill. The public was assured this fee would mean that the Police Department's officers were secure in their positions.

Flash forward just a handful of months, and City Manager Warner is suggesting taking away a police position again. The City has been offered a SAFER grant (\$462K) from FEMA, which would partially fund three new firefighter positions—but on the terms that the City comes up with rest (\$265K).

Last week, one of the patrol officers resigned and the recruitment process had begun for his replacement. Warner, however, recommended at the last City Council meeting that this position remain

unfilled, frozen to help make up the funds for the Fire Department's grant.

Flawed projected ambulance revenue within the Fire Department's budget was a large reason behind the City's budgetary woes to begin with. Having the ability to add another firefighter or two would be super. However, the funds simply are not there.

As Council Member Rosemary Abell pointed out, the amount of overtime that could be accumulated by having officers who have already completed their full workweeks fill in the gaps, may (and we believe *will*) be considerable. In a few short months, any cost benefit from not hiring that replacement officer will be eaten up paying overtime to other officers. This makes no fiscal sense whatsoever.

From a management point of view, it makes no sense either, wearing existing patrol officers into exhaustion.

We've also heard, once again, the idea tossed around to simply eliminate City law enforcement's night shift or cut it from one officer to two. A) Having an officer on duty with no partner poses a huge safety risk for the officer left on duty, and B) Cutting night shift creates an enormous safety risk for Baker City residents. Most citizens are unaware that aside from the Baker City Police, there is zero law enforcement available anywhere in the County for several hours during that shift. Oregon State Police and the Baker County Sheriff's Office do not have troopers and deputies on the clock. Those two BCPD officers are all that stand between you and whatever you've just dialed 911 for.

We hope this ludicrous idea drops dead before any discussion about it becomes "official."

In addition, the Public Safety Fee came with a promise to Baker City residents as to its use—and that use was not to fund a federal grant. That promise needs kept.

We do agree with Warner that the situation has brought with it a positive in setting up an arrangement with the County to take financial responsibility for ambulance services outside the City Limits.

Bottom line: If the City can't sustain the SAFER grant, which it so far can't, it shouldn't accept it. If the City can find a way to pay its share without gutting the Police or implementing another tax, then great.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

— SPECIAL COLUMN —

*So I was thinking ...*

## All Hallow's Eve

By Jimmy Ingram  
Special to The Baker County Press

Halloween is coming soon. A chance for kids to dress up like their favorite super hero and fill their bags with goodies and for adults to do one of two things: Sit at home and distribute said candy or take your kids around town enjoying the joy in your kids faces while freezing your butt off.

It's also a holiday that has puzzled me with several unanswered questions.

**Age limits on trick-or-treating.** In recent years I've watched my small children standing at doorways ringing doorbells along with six-foot-tall teenagers on Halloween.

Keep in mind, I don't begrudge anyone the deliciousness of a bite-sized Snickers bar.

However, it does seem odd to me that someone with a driver's license is postponing their algebra homework to knock on doors to ask strangers for candy. Thinking back, I don't recall the exact age where I gave it up, but I'm fairly certain it was before I started shaving.

So if you're a teenager and gassing up the Toyota Tercel for a night of trick or treating I have some advice for you: go to the dollar store for your candy and leave the trick or treating for kids.

The friendly neighborhood folks shouldn't have to hear "trick or treat" it a low, gruff voice.

**Decor.** Most people enjoy Halloween imagery—ghosts, spooky lights, carved pumpkins, etc.

It also helps fill the decorating gaps between the 4th of July and the inevitability of premature Christmas decoration. But some may enjoy it just a little too much.

In their defense, it *is* the only holiday where displaying a gory, headless vampire covered in fake blood in your yard is socially acceptable.

The same yard, mind you, may or may not have a nativity scene in the exact location less than a month later.

Just remember not to drag your feet taking down those Halloween decorations in your yard.



Submitted Photo

Jimmy Ingram is a local farmer and father of two who enjoys people watching within our wonderful community and beyond.

A headless vampire in your yard on October 31 makes people want to knock on your door. On November 15, it makes them cross the street to avoid your house.

**Pumpkin spice.** I may get some hate mail for this but I have to ask: What is the obsession with pumpkin spice?

Every fall people go crazy for everything pumpkin spice—lattes, pancake mix, candles, even pumpkin beer. It's as though the limited-time obsessive madness of the McDonalds "McRib" or the latest iPhone release just wasn't causing enough "Gotta get it before its gone!" chaos. Eventually Starbucks and McDonalds will team up for the "pumpkin spice McRib" just to test the limits of our civilized society.

**Candy surplus.** Like most parents, we try to ration the amount of sweets in our home.

This is an impossible task after Halloween. The predictable after-dinner request of our six-year-old asking, "Can I have a treat?" turns into him trying to convince me that three Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and a Snickers Bar is a suitable breakfast.

"Reese's makes cereal, I saw it in the store," he says. By the way, thanks for that one, General Mills.

Suddenly I'm forced to wrestle with the idea of responsible parenting, because:

1. Kind strangers gave this to him.
2. He walked four miles in the cold to get it.
3. I said the same thing to my parents at his age.

So I do what most parents do—bend but don't break. "No you can't have candy for breakfast but maybe after dinner we'll talk. Also, you have to share those Peanut M&Ms with me."

I hope all of you have a happy, safe Halloween.  
Trick or Treat!

## Walden details opioid meeting

House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Greg Walden (R-Hood River) formally announced a hearing for Wednesday, October 25, 2017, at 10 a.m. EST on the opioid crisis. The hearing is entitled, "Federal Efforts to Combat the Opioid Crisis: A Status Update on CARA and Other Initiatives."

Chairman Walden announced last month that the committee would hold a rare full committee hearing, the first of this Congress, on the epidemic. The hearing will provide a status update on the implementation of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) and highlight other federal efforts to combat the opi-

oid crisis.

"The opioid crisis has been at the forefront of this committee's work for several years and multiple Congresses. And while substantial work has been done to stem the tide of this epidemic, namely through CARA and grants available through the 21st Century Cures Act, much more work remains," said Chairman Walden. "Families in every community are hurting, and this hearing will be a much-needed opportunity to learn more about ongoing efforts and what more can be done to put a stop to this horrific crisis."

Confirmed witnesses include:

Scott Gottlieb, MD, Commissioner, Food

and Drug Administration (FDA);

Elinore McCance-Katz, MD, PhD, Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA);

Anne Schuchat, MD (RADM, USPHS), Principal Deputy Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Nora Volkow, MD, Director, National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), National Institutes of Health (NIH); and,

Neil Doherty, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Diversion Control, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

## Wyden wants to research gun violence

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., joined 26 of his Senate colleagues in urging the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to renew a recently lapsed funding opportunity for firearm violence research.

Following the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, President Obama directed the Department of Health and Human Services to research the causes of gun violence, resulting in the creation of a new funding opportunity to support research at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse

and Alcoholism and the National Institute of Mental Health, among other parts of NIH. From 2014 to 2017, NIH provided \$18 million to 22 projects to study gun violence."

Wyden says gun violence, is a leading cause of death in the United States, has been understudied.

The letter was signed by Senators Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., Chris Murphy, D-Conn., Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., Patty Murray, D-Wash., Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., Bob Casey, D-Pa., Al Franken, D-Minn., Sheldon White-

house, D-R.I., Tim Kaine, D-Va., Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., Dick Durbin, D-Ill., Tom Carper, D-Del., Bob Menendez, D-N.J., Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., Chris Coons, D-Del., Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., Cory Booker, D-N.J., Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., Kamala Harris, D-Calif., Jack Reed, D-R.I., and Maria Cantwell, D-Wash.

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