

# Opinion / Politics

## Notice to Readers

THERE WILL BE NO JANUARY 5, 2018 ISSUE OF THE BAKER COUNTY PRESS SO THAT WE CAN TAKE A LITTLE BREAK FOR OUR FAMILY DURING WHAT IS TYPICALLY ONE OF THE SLOWEST NEWS WEEKS OF THE YEAR. WE'LL BE BACK JANUARY 12 AS USUAL WITH A DOUBLE ISSUE. THANK YOU.

— EDITORIAL —

## It's time to free the Hammonds

We were thinking about resolutions and such during this, the end of yet another year. What we'd like to see is President Trump resolve to pardon the Hammonds and right a miscarriage of justice.

Right now we have a couple of Harney County ranchers sitting in prison essentially as domestic terrorists for burning of few acres of publicly-managed land while acting as stewards for their own.

Their sentences are more severe than those we often see for the perpetrators of violent crimes—rape, manslaughter, assault and battery ... and sometimes, yes, even murder.

Since the Hammonds submitted to custody, we have watched as the USFS (United States Forest Service) and the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) let their own burn projects get out of control, or failed to correctly get the jump on wildfires, allowing them to accidentally cross onto private lands. No compensation to the landowners—ever. Certainly no criminal charges pursued.

We have watched other landowners right here in Baker County let slashpile burning cross onto federally managed lands, resulting in an expensive firefighting effort that involved helicopter suppression ef-

forts. Not so much as a fine issued there. Again, no criminal charges.

Theories abound as to why the Hammonds were treated differently, but the fact remains—they were. We believe it comes back to that old adage about the nail that sticks up highest gets hammered down first.

And now we have a federal whistleblower within the BLM who released in his internal investigation report documenting gross misconduct by that agency, including targeting of the Bundy family, a mistrial there, and corroboration of the testimony of witnesses who spoke out in favor of the Bundys and/or the Hammonds.

We understand that the man heading up the Bundy raid, and several other raids like them, went so far as to keep a kill list of U.S. citizens he was proud of tormenting and even pushing to suicide in at least one incident. He has since been relieved of his position.

Allegations of corruption within these land-management agencies is not part of some conspiracy theory; they're proven facts.

We were told by our congressman's staff that clemency paperwork has already been handed to the Executive Branch of our Federal government, and in the hands of the President and Vice President. We hope the President signs it and puts an end to this ugly chapter.

These men have wives and children at home without their husbands and fathers, trying to continue their family ranch operations on their own. They could use a blessing.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

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— GUEST OPINION —

## Tax reform for Oregon

By Congressman Greg Walden

Pro-growth tax reform is on its way to hardworking, middle-class Americans. And it's about time.

The biggest percentage of tax reductions next year will go to those earning between \$20,000 and \$50,000 a year. That's according to the Joint Committee on Taxation. An eastern Oregon family earning the median income of approximately \$50,000 a year will pay about \$1,300 less next year. Over the next eight years that's a savings of \$10,400 for that family.

What does that mean across the country? A typical American family of four earning \$73,000 a year, will see a 58% reduction in their federal taxes. That's real relief.

Moreover, by nearly doubling the standard deduction, even fewer Oregonians will have to hire an accountant to search the 73,954 pages of the federal tax code only to discover darn few of the special interest loopholes apply to them. We're closing the loopholes and making filing your taxes as easy as filling out a postcard.

For those who choose to itemize their taxes, I worked with my colleagues to maintain provisions important to Oregonians such as preserving the ability to deduct medical expenses, and a combination of both property and state income taxes up to \$10,000—helpful in our high-tax state. For students and teachers, I also successfully fought to maintain the deductions for student loans and teaching expenses.

The IRS should have new tax withholding tables in employers' hands before February. Once that happens, taxpayers will begin to see more going into their pockets, and less going to the Washington, D.C. bureaucracy.

In addition to providing historic and meaningful individual tax relief to Oregon families, this measure is also designed to rekindle job growth. Few in Congress were job creators. My wife and I spent more than 20 years as small business owners in the Columbia Gorge. I can tell you from first-hand experience of growing a business and meeting a payroll, passage of this Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will help small businesses, family farms and ranches, and those contractors with a truck and backhoe expand and grow.

Oregon's breweries and wineries get substantial relief from the beer and wine excise taxes thanks to Republican Senate provisions I fought to include in the final bill. These savings will let our craft brewers and



Submitted Photo

Rep. Greg Walden (R-Hood River) represents Oregon's 2nd Congressional District, which includes 20 counties in central, southern and eastern Oregon.

winemakers reinvest more money locally in their businesses and our communities.

Globally, we'll finally see American-based companies bring money home and invest it here, rather than look for ways to shelter earnings overseas. America had one of the highest corporate tax rates in the industrialized world, resulting in lost jobs and American companies moving abroad. That all changes under this legislation.

Our plan makes the American economy more competitive, which will lead to more job growth and economic expansion. We're finally giving American companies a better place to do business.

A spokesman for Intel, one of Oregon's biggest employers, told the Oregonian newspaper that these changes "can help level the playing field for U.S. manufacturers and make us more competitive in today's global economy. The bill should also spur further investment in American manufacturing and (research and development)."

These tax reforms are boosting confidence in our economy. Last month, the National Federation of Independent Business confidence index hit an all-time high. Meanwhile, in the fourth quarter, optimism among manufacturers also reached a new high. While the stock market will ebb and flow, a 5,000-point gain in the last year is both historic and welcome news to those with savings and retirement accounts, especially after the last eight years of slow growth.

Many factors affect the strength of the economy, including an available and trained workforce, international incidents and more. Congress and the President need to focus on rebuilding America's infrastructure next. But after waiting 31 years for real tax reform, finally we have a law that brings tax savings to hard working Americans and makes us competitive again overseas.

## Age to purchase tobacco raised to 21

Oregon will soon start enforcing a new law that raised the required minimum age to legally buy or obtain tobacco products from 18 to 21.

SB 754, known as Tobacco 21, has been in effect since Gov. Kate Brown signed it into law Aug. 9, 2017, with enforcement and fines beginning Jan. 1, 2018.

Oregon is the fifth state to increase the age to purchase tobacco, after California, Hawaii, Maine and New Jersey.

Under the new law, retailers can no longer sell tobacco products or inhalant delivery systems, such as a pipe or vaporizing device, to people younger than 21. Violations of the law are punishable by a fine of \$50 for employees, \$250 for store managers

and \$500 for store owners; for managers and owners, the fines double by the third offense.

OHA's Public Health Division is authorized to enforce the minimum age of tobacco sales law and coordinates with the Oregon State Policy to conduct state-sponsored compliance inspections.

Katrina Hedberg, MD, Oregon's state health officer and epidemiologist based at the Oregon Health Authority Public Health Division, said raising the minimum age for buying tobacco products and inhalant delivery systems is proven to reduce youth initiation of tobacco use. She noted nine of 10 adults report they started smoking before they were 19, and nearly 100 percent start before age 26.

"The earlier kids start using tobacco, the more at risk they are for becoming addicted to tobacco and developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, asthma and cancer," Hedberg said.

Help is available for anyone in Oregon ready to quit tobacco. Call Oregon's toll-free Quit Line at 800-QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669) or visit [www.quitnow.net](http://www.quitnow.net).

People who see a retailer selling tobacco products or inhalant delivery systems to someone younger than 21 can report the violation with the business name, address and other information to [Tobacco.Inspections@state.or.us](mailto:Tobacco.Inspections@state.or.us).

Learn more about Tobacco 21 at [www.HealthOregon.org/tobaccoretailsales](http://www.HealthOregon.org/tobaccoretailsales).

— CONTACT US —

### The Baker County Press

PO Box 567  
Baker City, Ore. 97814

Open Monday-Thursday for calls  
9 AM - 4 PM

Open 24/7 for emails

Phone: 541.519.0572

[TheBakerCountyPress.com](http://TheBakerCountyPress.com)

**Kerry McQuisten, Publisher**  
[Editor@TheBakerCountyPress.com](mailto:Editor@TheBakerCountyPress.com)

**Esa Murrell, Advertising and Sales**  
[Esa@TheBakerCountyPress.com](mailto:Esa@TheBakerCountyPress.com)

**David Conn, Advertising and Sales**  
[David@TheBakerCountyPress.com](mailto:David@TheBakerCountyPress.com)

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### YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

#### President Donald Trump

202.456.1414

202.456.2461 fax

[Whitehouse.gov/contact](http://Whitehouse.gov/contact)

#### US Sen. Jeff Merkley

503.326.3386

503.326.2900 fax

[Merkley.Senate.gov](http://Merkley.Senate.gov)

#### US Sen. Ron Wyden

541.962.7691

[Wyden.Senate.gov](http://Wyden.Senate.gov)

#### US Rep. Greg Walden

541.624.2400

541.624.2402 fax

[Walden.House.gov](http://Walden.House.gov)

#### Oregon Gov. Kate Brown

503.378.3111

[Governor.Oregon.gov](http://Governor.Oregon.gov)

#### State Rep. Cliff Bentz

503.986.1460

#### State Sen. Ted Ferrioli

541.490.6528

#### Baker County Commissioners Bill Harvey; Mark Bennett; Bruce Nichols

541.523.8200

541.523.8201