

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Support the 'free' concerts

We understand that some people will complain about the price of tickets to any sort of entertainment event.

But complaining about a weekly concert series where the suggested, but not required, admission is by a donation, in whatever amount you think appropriate, is quite a different matter.

Lynette Perry, former longtime advertising director at the Herald who is one of three volunteers who coordinate the Powder River Music Review on summer Sundays at Geiser-Pollman Park, said some people have objected to the organizers even asking for donations.

"I don't understand why people think it is so awful that we ask to have some support to bring this weekly concert to Baker City," Perry wrote in a Facebook post.

Nor do we.

As Perry pointed out in her post, the concert organizers don't try to drive off concertgoers who choose to not donate or to pay \$5 for a door prize raffle ticket. Geiser-Pollman is a public park, after all.

But the musicians who entertain hundreds of people don't perform for free, naturally.

And liability insurance, which is required for such events, isn't given away, either.

We encourage people who attend the concerts to make a donation if they're able, or to buy raffle tickets to help support the Music Review.

And those who feel they can't afford to do either can still enjoy the fine music. We just hope they won't feel compelled to complain about a polite request for a modest contribution to make such events possible.

From the Baker City Herald editorial board. The board consists of editor Jayson Jacoby and reporter Chris Collins.

GUEST EDITORIAL

New PERS not just a 401(k) plan

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

You may have heard the talk: The state's Public Employees Retirement System's benefits for its newest members are not much more than a 401(k), the defined-contribution plan that's become common in private business.

It isn't. Yes, new PERS members have a 401(k), but that isn't all. Not only will public employees in the newest tier, Tier 3, receive a defined-contribution plan akin to a 401(k), but they also will receive a defined-benefit retirement plan.

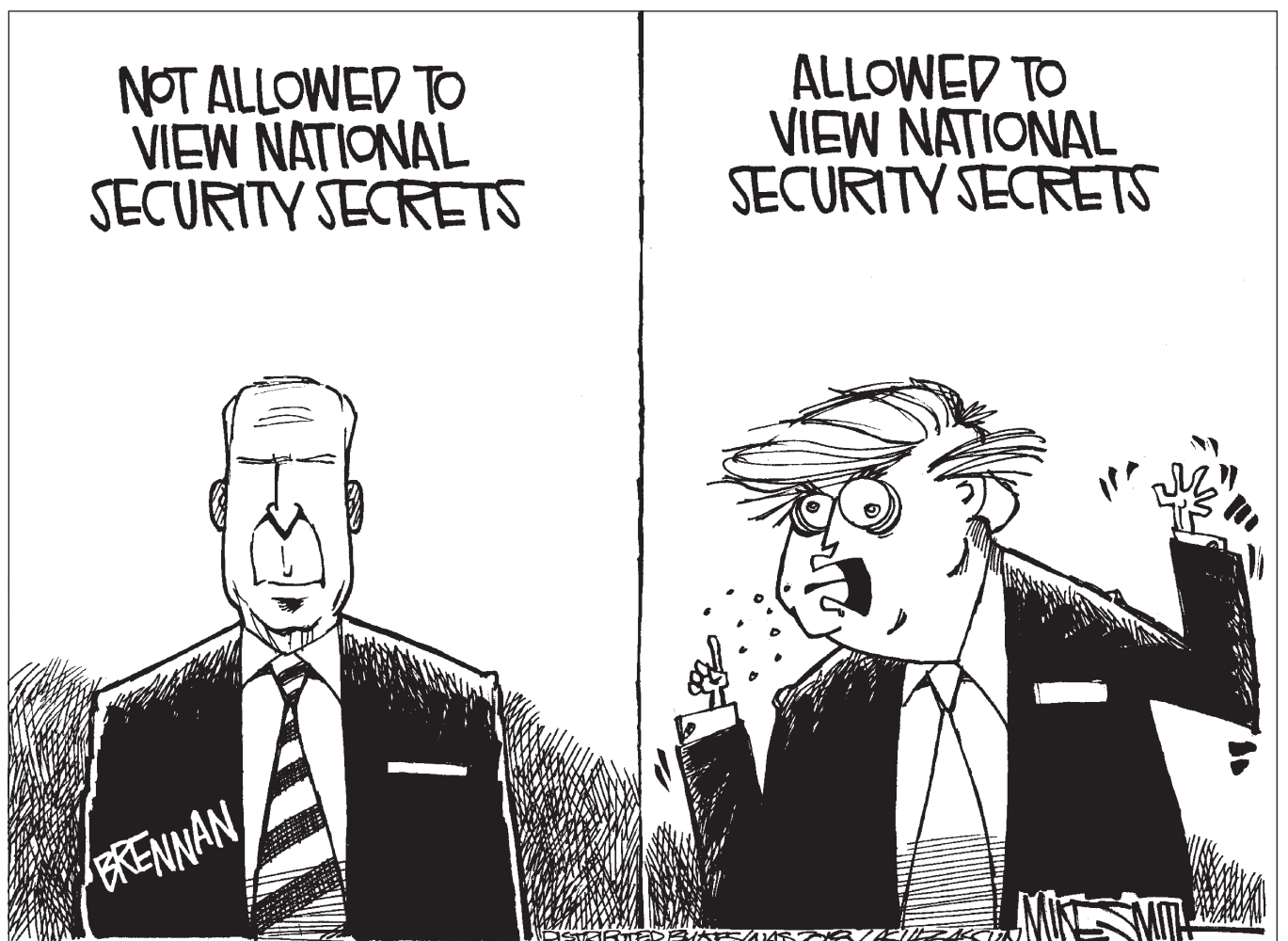
The defined-contribution component is funded by a mandatory contribution amounting to 6 percent of an employee's earnings. This money, as in a 401(k), is invested and grows during an employee's working life and is paid out in retirement.

There's a catch, however. For some 60 to 65 percent of Oregon's public employees, that 6 percent contribution actually is paid by their employers — taxpayers. While some private employers do, in fact, contribute to workers' 401(k) plans, few actually bear the full cost of the program. That means that more than half of public employees in Oregon do not have any of their own hard-earned money directly tied to their retirement income.

Public employees who are covered by older, Tier 1 and Tier 2, plans get even more. Tier 1 employees, those hired before 1996, get a guaranteed rate of return equal to the assumed earnings rate, no matter how the market actually performs. They may retire at 58. Tier 2 members get the market rate of return and may retire at age 60. Retirement for Tier 3 employees is age 65.

Public employees generally have generous health benefits while on the job, as well. The state's Supreme Court has said clearly that public employees must be paid what they've been promised upon retirement, and we agree. A promise is, after all, a promise.

But that must not keep lawmakers from continuing to find other ways to make public retirement something that's not destined to cost school districts too many teachers and too many cops and firefighters. So far the Legislature has been reluctant to do that.



Your views

Population stability actually a desirable trait in Baker

The Baker City Herald article "Population stalled" (Wednesday, August 15) prompts me to make some observations about the gist of the article: Baker City is suffering from population stagnation.

Stagnation is a negative and inaccurate term in my opinion. I would use the term "stability." How many other towns can you name that have been able to maintain, as opposed to losing or gaining population over 100 years? I find such stability remarkable and very desirable.

Baker City Mayor Mike Downing is quoted as saying, "We are constantly trying to attract ... new residents," meaning, I suppose, that he and others would like to see an increase in the city's population. But who are the others? Is Mayor Downing speaking on behalf of City Council or also on behalf of the residents of Baker City? But how do "we" know that our residents want growth?

I believe the last time City Council did an opinion poll on the question of growth was about 15 years ago. The response to that poll was that the majority of citizens, by several percentage points, were against growth.

At that time what I frequently heard was, "I don't want Baker City to become Bend." Today the response might be, "I don't want Baker City to become Bend, or Redmond, or Prineville." All of those communities used to be much smaller than Baker City. I wonder if the average resident of those towns is happy about all the growth their towns have experienced over the last couple of decades.

People look at a few empty storefronts on Main Street and predict the demise of Baker City. They've been wrong for over 100 years.

Finally, I ask the reader to look at what population growth is doing to the U.S. and the rest of the world.

I rest my case.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

McLeod-Skinner will help protect net neutrality

Like many of my Baker City friends and neighbors, I own my own business. I rely on an open internet so my customers can easily access and navigate my website. I am disgusted that Greg Walden voted to end net neutrality.

Net neutrality creates a level playing field by requiring Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to transmit all data at equal speeds. Without net neutrality ISPs could adjust website delivery speeds to favor large companies who can pay more for service.

Walden's vote against continuing net neutrality will allow large cable and phone companies to make big profits by dividing content into so-called "fast lanes" and "slow lanes," and charging either

consumers or content providers extra fees to break out of the slow lanes. It's not surprising that Walden gets huge donations from telecommunications companies. Walden's vote for Wall Street over Main Street is a vote against me and you.

Like many of you I have kids in my life. In my case it's curious young grandkids who use the internet for research and learning. The very best thing about the internet has been equal access to information and knowledge. Walden's vote against net neutrality means that online research, streaming educational videos, and distance learning will be more difficult and expensive.

Like many of you I support a level playing field for all businesses and seekers of knowledge and information. Come November my vote for District 2 Representative will go to Jamie McLeod-Skinner.

McLeod-Skinner knows that a free and open internet will promote innovation, protect free speech, enable equitable access to information, and help prevent unfair pricing practices.

I hope that you will be like me and vote for Jamie McLeod-Skinner.

Jeanie Zebrak
Baker City

Forest plan revision affects all users of public land

The comment period is ending very soon on the Blue Mountain Forest Plan Revision. Tom Montoya's response in the Aug. 13 paper was almost as poor as the plan itself. Everyone should have the opportunity to view the maps that show proposed wilderness areas, possible wild and scenic rivers, non-motorized use areas, etc. If you enjoy or benefit from any activity in our beautiful Blue Mountains, you will be affected by this flawed plan. Everyone should reach out to our commissioners as well as our representatives and beyond.

This is a plan that oppresses our local communities, strips us of our rights as citizens and locks us out of our forests. This plan calls for less logging and grazing which creates more fuel for devastating fires and more days of smoke-filled skies and poor air quality. The USFS is using the excuse of low funds for not maintaining the forest and forest roads, but if logging, grazing and mining was increased the funds would be there for maintenance as well as local schools, police officers, etc.

They want to make criminals out of us by deeming this forest closed unless it is signed "open." If found on the closed areas we face a possible fine of \$5,000 and a federal offense. It is proposed that if you own land that has to be accessed via USFS roads, a permit will be required for the landowner only — visitors to your land will have to acquire a permit of their own. This is craziness and our historical and cultural rights as well

as many other rights we are afforded through NEPA are being violated.

The state of the roads at this time is so poor that they are using it as an excuse to illegally close them before any new plan is in place and making this plan a precursor to the upcoming Travel Management Plan to reduce access. Reduction in access will lead to increased fires, increased deaths, increased poverty and increased tension in our local community.

Stand up and make your voices heard now, before it is too late.

Christina Witham
Baker City

Stand up for the right to report, speak the truth

As individuals we depend on truth and our country depends on us. With the current hostility toward verifiable reality, fiction (lies) and truth become hard to separate. When name-calling is added and repeatedly used in public, we slip into a lower level of communication. This is underlined by banning reporters and saying that the media is unbelievably dishonest. So what is really happening?

Well, we have heard grandiose promises like rebuilding our infrastructure and eliminating the national debt, but tax cuts, especially for the wealthy, add \$666 billion to the national debt, equaling \$1 trillion over the next decade, resulting in the greatest inequality we have seen. Inequality causes unrest and promotes the rise of hate groups like the white supremacists. Ordinarily this would be clearly exposed by the media, but we are told that news sources are the enemy of the people. The scorn of everyday facts and the construction of alternate realities results in "doublethink" or post-truths — a pre-fascist condition that we now face with our flawed leader.

To help guard against fascism, we need to support journalists by subscribing to magazines and other news sources. We need to tell our friends how we see the political situation. After all, having old friends is politics of the last resort, and making new friends is the first step toward change. So, be courageous and march, write, look people in the eye and point out the lies and slanted political actions.

Try to be private. Remember that even email is not protected. Scrub your computer of malware on a regular basis. The violation of electronic privacy as happened in the 2016 election attacks our civil rights, which are subject to governmental actions under the cloak of extremism, emergency actions, and other actions described as exceptions. Guard the right to vote, guard the freedom of expression, guard the right to a fair trial. Be as courageous as you can.

Bruce Raffety
Baker City

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.

- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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