

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Wise to leave seat vacant

We agree with the Baker City Council's recent decision to not appoint someone to replace James C. Thomas, who resigned Aug. 22.

The remaining six councilors had other options, but we don't think any was as good as leaving Thomas' seat vacant and letting voters fill it in the Nov. 6 election. Voters will choose four councilors then, and they have 10 candidates to choose from.

The biggest issue was timing.

Thomas' term ends Dec. 31 of this year.

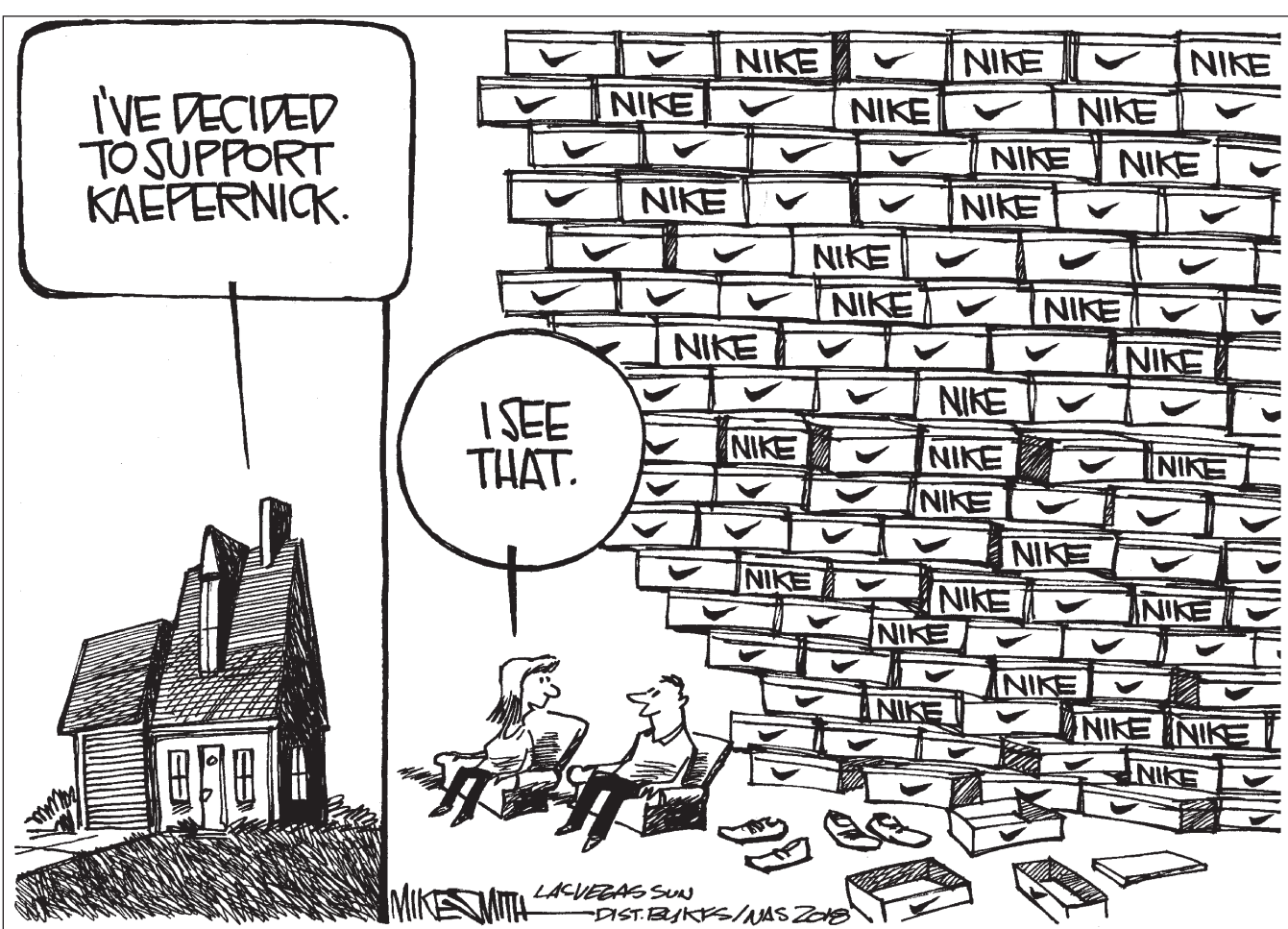
Had councilors sought to replace Thomas, any volunteers for the position would have known they would serve for about 3½ months. Because the deadline to register as a candidate for the Nov. 6 election was Aug. 28 — the Council's first meeting after Thomas' resignation — no one who volunteered to serve the rest of Thomas' term would have been eligible to be elected to a full term.

Councilors could have avoided that issue by trying to appoint one of the 10 candidates on the Nov. 6 ballot. In that case the appointed councilor would have a chance to be elected and continue to serve beyond 2018.

We wonder, though, whether any of the 10 would have accepted an appointment had it been offered. The reason is the term limits clause in the city charter. The charter limits councilors to serving no more than two consecutive terms (there is no lifetime limit). Here's the rub — there is no minimum length for what defines one term. A person who serves for only a single meeting would have served one term and thus be eligible to serve only one more term consecutively.

Had one of the 10 candidates agreed to fill Thomas' seat, that person, even if elected Nov. 6, would have been able to serve only that one additional term. The Council's decision was sensible, and ensures Thomas' replacement will have a chance to become an experienced councilor.

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



Your views

Passing school bond will benefit Baker students

I am writing in support of Measure 1-88. I've had the opportunity to volunteer in my son's classroom the past two years at Brooklyn and have seen firsthand the overcrowding. I've helped during stations in the modular classrooms and led groups shoved in a corner of a crowded hallway trying to work with the students barraged with constant distractions. No location at Brooklyn is even large enough to hold an assembly where parents can come and witness their children being recognized for their accomplishments due to fire code restrictions. Our kids deserve

a building that meets their needs, and this bond measure will do that.

I taught eighth grade for three years in rural Iowa and during that time I had a gifted younger student take my class. Unfortunately, this meant that when he was in eighth grade he had to be bused to the high school to continue his math education. This student missed out on other classes because of the time he spent riding a bus. It would have been much less disruptive and highly beneficial for this child and many others to have greater access to classes offered at the high school. Our middle school students here in Baker City would also benefit

from greater access to advanced courses and vocational opportunities at BTI. Moving the seventh- and eighth-grade students to the high school makes these possibilities a reality without losing out on other classwork. At the same time, the proposal outlines an excellent plan to keep these younger students separate and safe — with their own cafeteria and gymnasium completely separate from the high school proper.

On Nov. 6, I'm voting YES for our kids. I urge you to join me and vote YES on Measure 1-88.

Amanda Carroll
Baker City

GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, the Democrat who's running for re-election this year against Republican Knute Buehler, has a clear strategy for her campaign. She'll hunker down and keep her mouth shut as much as possible.

That's the best way to explain her decision to take part in only three debates this fall, two in Brown-friendly Portland and a third in Medford. If former Gov. Neil Goldschmidt thought Eastern Oregon was the middle of nowhere, Brown clearly believes it's part of Idaho.

But Eastern Oregon, including the

four counties that extend to the Cascades, is a far different world from Western Oregon. It's dry, sparsely populated, largely Republican and the federal government is the major landholder.

Her chances of carrying most counties in this part of the state are slim, and she knows it. And, perhaps she believes that even in Bend, with a far bigger Democratic registration than elsewhere, Buehler's status as the hometown candidate puts her at a disadvantage.

Whether or not she's right, she misses the point. Eastern Oregonians are as interested in the two gubernatorial can-

didates as those west of the mountains. They have as big a stake in the election as does anyone else. Their problems are different than those in Western Oregon: Great chunks of land are owned by the federal government, and doing business with and next door to Uncle Sam can be difficult at best.

We here in nowhere land plan to vote this fall, and before we do, we'd like at least one opportunity to see major candidates for governor side by side, debating the issues important to us. Buehler is willing to do that. Brown, unfortunately, is not.

Beauty and tragedy: The Mt. St. Helens story

Turns out that big trees, which rarely explode, attract considerably more tourists than a volcano that has in the not terribly distant past made a nuclear bomb seem like a firecracker.

I find this preference passing strange.

Although, as the saying goes, there is no accounting for taste. How else to explain a world in which a formulaic and saccharine film such as "Armageddon" earns \$554 million at the box office while a work of revolutionary genius — "Airplane!" — brings in a paltry \$130 million?

In the matter of trees versus volcanoes I have, I'll admit, oversimplified the matter, as writers, or at least writers who eschew complications, are wont to do.

My comparison involves two places of great and dramatic beauty in Washington state — Olympic National Park and Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument.

My family visited both sites in mid-August, and our experiences were so different in one respect that I felt compelled to have a look at the available numbers and see if our anecdotes reflected statistical reality.

The difference was people.

More specifically, there were so many people in Olympic National Park that while hiking I felt at times as though I were in line for an exciting ride that probably would leave me nauseous.



JAYSON JACOBY

I also had an abnormal hankering for cotton candy and some of those French fries which contain a much higher proportion of oil than potato.

At Mount St. Helens, by contrast, the only place that could reasonably be called crowded was the gift shop at the Johnston Ridge Observatory, and that had more to do with its middling size than with the number of people searching for just the right Bigfoot-themed item.

(Bigfoot, or so it seems based on the hirsute beast's ubiquity among the makers of trinkets, is as popular as the volcano itself, which suggests that physical reality, when it comes to tourist attractions, is less important than I had supposed it to be.)

Out on the trail, though, there were many points at which we couldn't see another hiker.

What we could see, despite the bluish haze of wildfire smoke that has been the scourge of the Northwest for so much of this summer, was the mountain itself.

And what a thing it is to see.

I don't mean to malign the magnificent trees that inhabit Olympic National Park, to be sure.

The Sitka spruces along the Pacific Coast near Forks impressed me

with their sheer girth. So did the Douglas-firs and western hemlocks and moss-encrusted bigleaf maples at the Hoh rainforest.

Yet as we rubbed shoulders — literally, in some cases — with the hordes of hikers at both sites in the Olympics, I was reminded that there are quite a number of places across the Northwest where you can also walk among gigantic trees. But there is only one Mount St. Helens.

More to the point, there is only one volcano in the Cascades that has, within the memory of most people older than about 40, blown off 1,300 feet of its elevation, spewed ash all over the globe and rearranged the topography of much of Washington's southwest corner.

The mountain is such a singular geologic feature — and its May 18, 1980, eruption such a unique event in post-World War II America — that I find it surprising the national monument isn't more popular.

Yet according to the latest figures from the federal government, which manages both Olympic National Park and Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, the former, if I might belabor my earlier film comparison, is the "Armageddon" to the latter's "Airplane!"

In 2017 Olympic National Park attracted 3.4 million visitors.

That same year, Johnson Ridge Observatory lured 220,000, which, if I've done the math correctly, is rather less than 10 percent as

many.

The comparison, as I conceded earlier, is imperfect.

Olympic National Park is not only much larger — 922,560 acres compared with the volcanic monument's 110,000 — but it has several popular attractions besides the Hoh rainforest, including Hurricane Ridge near Port Angeles, which has a panoramic view of the Olympic Mountains.

Most of the visitors to Mount St. Helens, by contrast, drive the Spirit Lake Memorial Highway to its end at the Johnston Ridge Observatory about five miles north of the volcano. Another 60,000 or so people annually visit Ape Cave, south of the mountain.

Also, the Johnson Ridge Observatory is closed during the winter and well into spring most years, whereas most of the favorite sites in the Olympics are accessible year-round.

I find Mount St. Helens more compelling, though. And not only, or even mainly, because I think an active volcano is more interesting than huge trees that just stand there unless urged into motion by an especially powerful wind.

The human story of the mountain fascinates me even more than its geologic one.

None of the dramatic photographs that document the May 18, 1980, eruption affected me the way that five words did.

The words were spoken by David

Johnston, the volcanologist for whom the Observatory is named.

Johnston, before he was killed by the blast while monitoring the mountain from the ridge that now bears his name, managed to yell this message into his radio, a phrase that could be the epitaph for the mountain that was.

"Vancouver, Vancouver, this is it!" Johnston shrieked.

When I heard that recording, which is part of the fine documentary that airs at the Observatory, goosebumps dotted my forearms, and my eyes felt hot and damp.

I don't mean to suggest that the deaths of Johnston and the 56 others who died because of the eruption ought to make anybody feel guilty because they find the truncated volcano beautiful.

But when I hear those five words, uttered by a man who must have been simultaneously excited and terrified, a man for whom the culmination of his scientific career also meant the end of his life, I am jolted, and with some force, into acknowledging that the story of Mount St. Helens is so much greater, so much more profound, than a story about the natural world and its magnificence.

Moreover, I recognize that my comparison of visitor numbers, and my pitting of old growth trees against a volcano, are trivial matters indeed.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.