

# Opinion

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## Your views

### Kirby well-prepared to take over as Baker County Clerk

We are writing this letter in support of Stefanie Kirby for Baker County Clerk. Stefanie is currently a deputy clerk for Baker County and has worked in this position since January 2015. She understands the duties and the responsibilities of this office and is very approachable and willing to go that extra step when helping people with their questions and concerns.

Stefanie has over 14 years working in the public and private sector. We came to know her while she was a Baker County 911 dispatcher. She was always professional, knowledgeable and caring while working in this sometimes stressful environment.

She has attended many professional trainings while employed with Baker County. Stefanie already has the working knowledge of the Clerk's office and would be able to provide a seamless transition.

Please join us in voting for Stefanie Kirby. She will continue to work and be an important advocate for the people of Baker County.

**Paula Southwick**  
**Mitch Southwick**  
*Baker City*

### Bond repayment isn't the only potential cost to Measure 1-88

I think a lot of people see things they'd like to have — a new car, or kitchen, or home — but after saying “wouldn't that be nice,” they realize they can't afford it and make do with what they have. I think the same is true for communities thinking about new schools, especially when there are solutions available if the current space is managed properly. Apparently the people who proposed Measure 1-88 don't realize that most are living paycheck to paycheck and that their dream of a new school puts our economic security at risk. In a world awash in debt, where economic instability is increasingly the norm, an expensive 30-year bond is a risky bet indeed.

Representative Smith, whose economic development company earns hundreds of thousands of dollars from contracts with cities like ours, wrote another letter to the editor recently promoting the idea that the school bond would bring growth to Baker City. That is in part what this bond issue is about — growth. The powers that be think they will benefit from growth that the new school can facilitate. Those familiar with Bend, Oregon, realize that growth isn't necessarily a good thing. What bond proponents don't tell you is that, besides destroying a quiet and peaceful little town with a great environment, growth will cost current residents enormous amounts of money to pay for infrastructure required for that growth to occur. So in addition to the cost for educational infrastructure this bond would provide, there will need to be expansion of sewage treatment facilities and water supplies. With dwindling snowpacks, our current water supplies are barely adequate to get us through summer now. Additional expensive wells will have to be drilled to bring up bad tasting water to mix with our great water from mountain springs and streams. Those problems and more, so if you think your sewer and water bills are high now . . . Oh, and sorry, studies have shown that most of the jobs won't go to current residents.

If this bond passes, there will be more to your future than expensive new school facilities.

**Christopher Christie**  
*Baker City*

### County needs Nichols in charge to get audit on track

Somebody needs to get a hold of the county budget audit situation. Every other county in the state has managed to comply while Baker County has apparently been late every year during Bill Harvey's tenure, plus two more years.

Bruce Nichols, CPA, is the man to do it. Not only does he have the professional background and skills to correct the problems, but can effectively manage the staff. He will either provide the needed training or make necessary staffing changes to ensure Baker County will

be in compliance.

Commissioner Harvey is the official budget officer and the commissioner to whom staff reports. He has failed miserably.

Managing the county's budget is your biggest responsibility, Mr. Harvey, not four-wheelers and harassing the Forest Service and other federal agencies.

**Darcy and Ed Green**  
*Baker City*

### People with limited income should vote no on school bond

If it doesn't bother you that those who are on limited income who can't afford higher taxes will have to pay higher taxes for the school bond, then vote yes.

If on the other hand those that can't afford higher taxes and realize that this school bond is totally unnecessary and not affordable, then vote no.

**Ron Johnson**  
*Baker City*

### Baker's buildings are beautiful, but our schools are left behind

Baker City has so many beautiful amenities in which we have invested. This includes our library, museum, the new playground equipment and pavilion in Geiser-Pollman Park, the Leo Adler walkway, Leo Adler House, and improvements to the fairgrounds and event center, just to name a few. Our downtown is also picturesque.

The exception, unfortunately, are our schools. More than one professional has left the area because of the physical state of the buildings. The economic development director is absolutely right about schools being a huge factor in attracting new business.

Citizens in 1948 were wise enough to make an investment in schools. It's our turn once again to step up to the plate.

**Jim and Sue Martell**  
*Baker City*

### Nichols is competent, with impeccable character, ethics

Bill Harvey makes me laugh. Kind of. In a recent ad he boasts, “Thousands of you have followed my Facebook page to stay informed.” In fact, the official Bill Harvey Baker County Commission Chair Facebook page, which he started before he won the first general election by the way, has exactly 631 followers the last time I checked. . .

Another statement that caught my eye was the creation of “60” jobs with the opening of Grocery Outlet. Always one to trust but verify, I contacted others who had been close to the project and learned that “maybe 25 jobs” were created. That's great, but why the need to once again stretch the truth? It makes me question whether to believe any of Harvey's other assertions.

As stated, I observe Mr. Harvey's Facebook page nearly every day and was dismayed, but not surprised, when he posted a statement about whether or not Bruce Nichols was participating in the most recent forum as Nichols was a guest speaker at a meeting hosted by the Democrats earlier that same evening. Harvey appeared to be inferring this was in some way “funny” or unacceptable and apparently forgot that he too represents and answers to all Baker County citizens. By the way, like Harvey and Nichols, I am a Republican.

It's time for a big change in Baker County leadership. Time for the rest of the “patriots” to go. We kept Kody Justus and then John Hoopes, who ran against Sheriff Travis Ash, from taking over this county and now it's time for their fearless leader to go.

Join me in voting for Bruce Nichols for Baker County Commission Chairman. He may not get as many laughs as Commissioner Harvey, but Nichols is a competent man whose character and ethics are impeccable.

**Mike House**  
*Baker City*

### Harvey wasn't straight with audience; I'm voting for Nichols

I don't like being lied to. I believe Mr. Harvey told at least three big whoppers at the recent Cattleman's forum regarding the late audit.

First, Harvey said that the changing of the auditor was the reason the audit was late. He further said that Guyer and Associates told

him they did not have enough staff to continue doing the audit. False. The county kept getting the material to Guyer's later and later each year interfering with the busy tax season and clients. The new audit firm is large and did not have the time to hold the county's hand, expecting the information to be completed and to them in a timely fashion. Even though the audit happens every year at the same time, requiring the same information, this did not happen. Who is doing the audit is a non-issue. The county was not prepared.

Second, Harvey said the audit firm “was not waiting on them, but the county was waiting on the audit firm.” In fact, the county has been scrambling to complete the work.

Lastly, Harvey stated that the audit has never been late before under his leadership. According to the article in the Baker City Herald, the county has in fact been late the past six years.

Commissioner Harvey is the one who oversees the budget and manages staff. Clearly, he is doing a poor job of doing both. This falls squarely on his shoulders.

Harvey stated the most important thing he is faced with is road closures. Mr. Nichols stated that while this is one important factor, the main focus is the daily operation of the county. Nichols is correct.

This county has been controlled by the same mob that elected Harvey. They care about one thing only and that is driving their four-wheelers and jeeps wherever they want to.

Thankfully, Commissioners Bennett and Nichols have kept Harvey in check which needs to continue should Harvey be re-elected, God forbid.

For the record, I didn't vote for Harvey last time, nor did I this time. Vote for Bruce Nichols for Commission Chair. It's time for real, grown up leadership.

**Lori Raley**  
*Baker City*

### It's our turn to step up for schools and the community

Let's get real. This school bond needs a Yes vote from our citizens. This is not just for kids. It is for the health and economic viability of our community. Our school buildings are crowded and just plain worn out. I've toured them. They lack decent spaces to accommodate the educational opportunities and mandates added to our system over the last 60 years. The only modern structure is the one rebuilt with insurance after the fire in 1989, which now is only half full and waiting for middle schoolers. In the elementary schools we don't need to read to kids in halls or closets, have music class next to time-out spaces carved out of the long-gone cafeteria/auditorium stage, a library cut in half to make a new classroom. We don't need trains passing South Baker shaking lessons from the electronic boards used by teachers.

But poor schools don't just affect kids and teachers. I've been told by colleagues that when professionals are recruited to a promising job in the health field, accounting, teaching, management, and when new businesses want an educated workforce where they settle, a tragically large number do not accept because of the poor schools. People want good schools for their children and it will drive where they choose to live, because they can choose. When we don't respect the value of education as our basic responsibility we lose the very people who will settle here and contribute to our economic and cultural vitality. It is incredibly shortsighted to say one can't afford the cost of the common good. It wasn't easy for our parents either. The equivalent of two months of a cellphone bill, or adding a satellite TV bill if you have a fine home, would pay the yearly tax to rebuild our schools and make Baker a quality place to live because we care. Or do we just care about our cellphones and entertainment? Please step up to that wonderful moment when we do something for the common good. Make that choice as our parents and grandparents did. Please don't opt out of your turn.

**Aletha Bonebrake**  
*Baker City*

### School bond measure could tax people out of their homes

I have spent most of my adult life teaching in the public schools of Oregon. During that

time I worked with teenagers on the high school level. The building I taught in was built in 1935. The school district maintained its buildings, keeping them in good repair and in the early 1980s, our building was renovated. The result was wonderful, and it looked like a new school. As it was being worked on, classes continued with little discomfort.

The scholastic and athletic performance was outstanding and it didn't depend on new buildings. Great student achievement does not depend on buildings; it is the result of great teachers and hard work. The Baker School District has such teachers!

The need is in the proper tools of instruction. Computers, lab equipment, up to date texts, etc. There is no correlation between new buildings and academic achievement.

The proposed school bond would be economically crushing to patrons who are having difficulty paying the present real property assessment. According to the Baker City Herald's edition of Aug. 15, 2018, the population of Baker City has “stalled” and as a result the tax base is very narrow. Remember, this new assessment is in addition to what people pay now.

The average cost of an average home today is about \$350,000. According to the Herald on Feb. 16, 2018, the present tax bill for the Baker School District is \$4,605.1 per \$1,000 of assessed value. A \$350,000 home's tax bill would be about \$1,611.79. If we add the new assessment of \$1.97 per \$1,000 of valuation, the new total for our example would be \$2,301, for 30 years. Then there are always more bond issues in the future. I ask you, what average homeowner can afford that? Over time you could be taxed out of your home.

I don't care what other communities pay in taxes; I am concerned about our economic situation! I strongly urge a No vote.

**Ralph Brazofsky**  
*Haines*

### Schools need to produce before they get more money

If Measure 1-88 passes it will add approximately \$850 to my taxes to the District, in just the first year. This bond will not be paid off for 30 years. Do the math. It will cost me a minimum \$25,500. As a small business owner, I can't afford that kind of increased tax burden and continue my sponsorships to FFA and other school-related activities. Fair warning to customers — the cost for your rent or housing, services and commodities, will increase in price substantially, and be passed on to you should this measure pass.

What will Measure 1-88 give you for all your money? Improved educational outcomes? Not a chance. It provides comfort and convenience, not better education. Sad facts about our public education:

- According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), U.S. students rank 38th in science, 24th in math and 23rd in reading, and it's getting worse annually. Countries of Estonia, Macao, Vietnam, Slovenia and Poland, to name a few, are producing better outcomes. Many of these countries suffer with abysmal poverty, and the ravages of war. Yet their educational systems always outperform ours.

- Oregon has one of the shortest school years in the nation, and one of the worst graduation rates, ranking 47th with only a 67 percent high school graduation rate.

As evidenced above, it is not economics, class size, comfortable spaces or money that will stop this pathetic spiral. One has to be in class to learn and succeed. In Oregon there are diminishing days that the doors of our schools are open for our children to learn. Our governor avoids this union-driven debacle like a scalded dog, and the Board of Education quivers at the thought of the lobby they must confront to salvage our public education system. Yet it needs to occur. Nothing will change until educators accept the facts, or someone in the halls of the Capitol develops the fortitude to say enough.

Keep your money. Demand outcomes before expenditures. Please vote No on Measure 1-88.

**Darin Van Dyken**  
*Baker City*

More Letters On Page 5A

# Crammed onto the page, and happy about it

The columns containing letters to the editor for today's issue crept steadily down the page, compressing everything below and eventually spilling onto an adjacent space.

Some letters arrived in my email box, but a goodly number showed up in the old-fashioned way, tucked inside an envelope. A few were even handwritten.



**JAYSON JACOBY**

I was happy to see each of them. The biggest word on this page is “Opinion,” after all, and it pleases

me greatly when the page bursts at the seams with opinions expressed by local residents.

We have much to opine about as the Nov. 6 election looms, to be sure, with candidates to choose and decisions to make about measures.

I believe the Opinion page — not just the Herald's, but the place that almost every newspaper reserves for

the same purpose — fulfills a vital role not only for the publications but for the communities they serve.

There is no shortage of opinions available for public consumption these days, and many are accessible, like so much else, via our phones.

But newspapers are portable, too — and even lighter, I daresay, than the slimmest smartphone.

Better still, this page remains a forum where people express themselves under their own names rather than indulging in the online cloak of anonymity which, so far as I can tell, has done nothing to enlighten public discourse and much to degrade it.

*Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.*