

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Highest standards for youth coaches

With the benefit of hindsight, the Baker School District's decision to retain Warren Wilson as a coach in 2015, after a district investigation found that Wilson's conduct with girls JV basketball players in 2014 was inappropriate, can be deemed a mistake.

That's because other complaints, made by parents of players on the 2018 BHS volleyball team, prompted Superintendent Mark Witty to fire Wilson from future coaching jobs on Feb. 25 of this year. The Baker School Board upheld Witty's decision on March 19.

But the issue isn't limited to whether district officials erred in expecting that sanctions against Wilson in 2015 — issuing him a written directive and mandating that he complete Safe Schools training, which coaches are required to finish in any case — would correct the coach's behavior.

Witty and other district officials also need to consider, if they receive similar complaints in the future, whether the findings in the 2015 investigation — which Wilson didn't contest either then or in 2017 when the Oregon Teachers Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC) suspended Wilson's teaching license for 60 days based on the district's investigation — justified Witty terminating Wilson in 2015 rather than giving him a second chance.

Those findings included ample reason for the district to dismiss Wilson as a coach in 2015.

Although the district's 2015 investigation described Wilson's actions as "misguided attempts to positively reinforce and/or to build positive relationships with athletes," the report also concluded that the coach's conduct could be deemed harassment under the district's policies.

Moreover, as the TSPC concluded in its 2017 order and as the district could have confirmed in 2015, Wilson's conduct also constitutes "gross neglect of duty in violation" of Oregon laws dealing with "professional judgment" and "honoring appropriate adult boundaries with students."

School coaches have an immense responsibility as they work with children. Coaches should be expected to adhere to the highest standards in their conduct with student-athletes. That's why district policies and state laws regarding coaches' conduct exist.

In 2017 the TSPC concluded that Wilson's conduct, as outlined in the district's 2015 investigation, warranted a 60-day suspension of his privilege to teach in a classroom.

Yet district officials, though they had the same information two years earlier, decided not to infringe on Wilson's coaching privileges.

When school officials verify that a coach has violated district policy and state law, dismissal, not ordering the coach to repeat required training, is the appropriate sanction.

—Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Letters to the editor

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- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
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- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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Your views

Concerned school district acted hastily with coach

Mr. Witty:

I find it interesting that most of the article in the Baker City Herald on April 3 regarding Warren Wilson referred to a completely different charge than the one of 2019. The Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission, I would assume, operates on the information that the Baker School District provides to them. I would also assume that their action in 2019 would also be based on the information provided to them. This is my concern. These are very serious charges against any coach and any investigation on a complaint against a coach of this nature should be very carefully investigated before harming a reputation for life. You do a disser-

vice to your school district and community by not having an investigation all can respect.

I find it also interesting that the headline on the front page that 5J "acted quickly" on the accusation. A thorough investigation would not be done "quickly." The public, and your board who acted on your report, should know whether the investigation was a fair one. i.e.,...

- How many players who played on Warren's volleyball team last fall, other than the accusers, were interviewed by your investigator(s)?
- How many fellow coaches were interviewed by your investigator(s)?
- How many immediate supervisors of Warren were interviewed by your investigator(s)?
- How many parents of Warren's

players, other than the accusers, were interviewed by your investigator(s)?

• How many people were interviewed at other places Warren has coached, including Wallowa where he spent his entire career, by your investigator(s)?

I believe I know the answers to most of these questions and I also believe your board did not have all the information they needed for a fair verdict. Using information from TSPC from 2015, which also had extenuating circumstances, would bias anyone, including your board. It doesn't take a genius to figure out what TSPC will do with the information you provided by "acting quickly"

An even more concerned ex-coach.

Chuck Peterson
Baker City

Green New Deal: Be serious

By David Winston

In the awkward aftermath of the Green New Deal's rollout, perhaps the most appropriate question for its supporters, especially the Democratic presidential field, is one often posed by tennis bad boy John McEnroe: "You cannot be serious!"

But, apparently, when New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Massachusetts Sen. Edward Markey introduced their proposal in February, they were deadly serious, and breathless progressives couldn't wait to hop aboard the climate change express. First in line, the Democratic presidential candidates in the Senate who were eager to offer up their enthusiastic support.

There was just one snag. The Green New Deal, in reality, wasn't serious. These weren't well-thought-out ideas or vetted policies. They were far left talking points that couldn't possibly survive any real scrutiny. And they didn't.

The blowback was epic. Critics pounced on the resolution's absurd provisions. America would have to retool every structure in the country to maximize energy efficiency. No cars. No planes. Trains to everywhere. Well, except from L.A. to San Francisco, where fiscal reality has already ended that green dream.

But there's more. The Green New Deal goes far beyond a "chicken in every pot." It would turn meat-eating America into a vegan "utopia" with "universal access to healthy food and high-quality health care" for every American, what most of us call socialized medicine.

And last but certainly not least, the Green New Deal would guarantee a job "with a family-sustaining wage, adequate family and medical leave, paid vacations and retirement security" for all.

This is clearly a ridiculous proposal and perhaps Ms. Ocasio-Cortez can learn a lesson from her Green New Deal launch. There is more to legislating than naive ideas and a lot of wishful thinking, even with a big megaphone.

One person in Washington understands that better than most.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell sat back and let the Democrats and their presidential candidates climb one by one out on a politically perilous limb called the Green New Deal. He's been around long enough to know the difference between serious policy-makers on both sides who want to get something done and politicians who are more comfortable on the campaign trail than in a committee markup.

He also knows the difference between a catchy sound bite and solid policy.

So he decided to call the Democrats' bluff and scheduled a vote on the Green New Deal they had all been touting. For weeks, Democratic presidential candidates had been talking up the climate change issue from Iowa to New Hampshire, as support for the deal was becoming a kind of "litmus test" for many progressive Democratic primary voters. And now there was to be a vote, an actual vote.

Thanks to McConnell, Kamala Harris and Elizabeth Warren would have the opportunity to actually deliver on what had been only pie-in-the-sky promises on climate change. Bernie Sanders and Cory Booker would have a chance to stand tall for bold action and save the planet from climate change. And Amy Klobuchar and Kirsten Gillibrand could now earn their bona fides as relentless climate change warriors.

On March 26, Mitch McConnell gave Democrats the opportunity to stand on principle and vote for the Green New Deal policies they claimed to support. To do their job and legislate.

They whiffed. All but three Democratic senators voted present, and the Green New Deal went down by a 57-0 vote. It didn't take long for Democrats to realize they'd been had.

They rushed to the microphones to label the lopsided vote a "sham" and

with great indignation, defended their non-votes by claiming McConnell had rushed the bill to the floor, outside proper procedure. No hearings, no expert testimony, they complained. No consensus and not enough time. In other words, not enough process, never a very effective argument.

The candidates, still out on that limb, quickly opted for radio silence on the Green New Deal, and turned their focus to crucial issues like packing the Supreme Court, abolishing the Electoral College and giving 16-year-olds the vote. Given the contenders' near unanimity of thought on these and most issues, it's not surprising the primary campaign has since begun to devolve into more of a personality contest than a policy debate.

Their response wasn't to look inward and ponder over the fact that the stumble was theirs. That, perhaps, particularly as presidential candidates, more serious thought should have gone into considering the substance of the Green New Deal rather than rushing to officially embrace a completely unrealistic proposal.

No, their reaction was to blame McConnell for forcing them into an embarrassing position. What they couldn't admit is that the Republican majority leader understood the Green New Deal better than they did.

He understood that, at its essence, the debate about the Green New Deal isn't really between Republicans and Democrats. It's represents a bigger question, whether socialism or capitalism will create a better future for America. Whether this nation wants more government control or values individual freedom. It's a crucial debate that the 2020 election will help settle.

Time to get serious.

David Winston is the president of The Winston Group and a longtime adviser to congressional Republicans. He previously served as the director of planning for Speaker Newt Gingrich.