

Opinion

BAKER CITY
Herald
Serving Baker County since 1870

Write a letter
news@bakercityherald.com

GUEST EDITORIAL

What 1-party rule means

Editorial from **The (Bend) Bulletin**:

Oregon’s House and Senate are dominated by Democrats. There’s nothing particularly wrong with that so long as those in power don’t use their advantage to ride roughshod over those with whom they disagree.

But that’s exactly what could happen with Senate Bill 761, and an amendment to the measure would only make matters worse.

As initially written, the bill would make it far more difficult to gather signatures for petitions. It would change the rules for what are called e-sheets, electronically generated petition signature sheets, when gathering signatures to put an initiative, referendum or recall petition on the ballot. The bill would undo action by former Secretary of State Jeanne Atkins that allowed the e-sheets to be distributed in newsletters. The Oregon Education Association did that effectively in 2016, according to testimony on the bill.

If the original bill were to become law e-sheets would still be allowed, but each voter hoping to sign one would have to print it out for his or her use alone. Worse, if a single volunteer violated the you-print, you-sign law, the Secretary of State’s Office could accept no more e-sheets from anyone after that date. That, supporters say, would prevent fraud.

But the facts don’t support the notion that e-sheets increase the chances of fraud. According to testimony from the Secretary of State’s Office Monday, there’s actually less fraud among e-sheet signers than elsewhere. Well over 90 percent of e-sheet signatures are valid, office officials reported, compared with less than 90 percent validity on old-fashioned petitions.

The bill’s original form was bad enough. A proposed amendment would bar the secretary of state from issuing templates for e-sheets at all, at least until 2023. Moreover, the amendment carries an emergency clause, meaning it would become effective as soon as the governor signed it, derailing any attempt to have it overturned.

It is, in other words, a naked attempt to bar challenges to tax measures adopted by this Legislature that Democratic lawmakers fear might be overturned by voters.

It would make it far more difficult for opponents of the Legislature’s hidden sales tax bill — approved earlier this month and already signed into law — to attempt to challenge the measure at the ballot box. It would have the same effect on any other bill an unhappy group sought to have overturned. In other words, it’s a direct attempt to undermine the power of voters and hand it to Democratic lawmakers. It’s a thoroughly undemocratic idea.



GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from **Newsday**:

When President Donald Trump goes after other nations with harsh tweets or statements blistering with bravado, there is often a sense that he’s just showing off his favorite diplomatic dance moves. Trump lambastes China and its leader, then praises them. He threatens that a deal will never be done and huge tariffs will be imposed, then relents and suggests another meeting. He brandishes a carrot in one hand and a stick in the other, and if it hasn’t always worked perfectly, it no longer inspires frantic fear in most Americans.

The same is true when Trump hurls bombast at Mexico over immigration and trade, or threatens Canada over timber imports, or belittles NATO allies over defense and trade and environmental issues. The tactics usually aren’t terrifying, partly because on these issues Trump surrounds himself with cooler heads to smooth the feathers he ruffles.

But Iran is different. The most powerful voice counseling Trump, National Security Adviser John Bolton, has recently proclaimed that bombing is the only way to contain Iran’s desire to accumulate nuclear weapons, which is nothing new. To Bolton, the threat of Iranian nuclear weapons is always imminent, and can only be addressed via war. Whether writing “The inconvenient truth is that only military action like Israel’s 1981 attack on Saddam Hussein’s Osirak reactor in Iraq or its 2007 destruction of a Syrian reactor, designed and built by North Korea, can accomplish what is required,” in The New York Times in 2015, or arguing on Fox News in 2007 that we ought to bomb Iran because it “is interfering in Iraq and is posing a direct threat to our troops,” Bolton’s

stance has been consistent, and consistently wrong, just as he was wrong about the need to invade Iraq in 2003.

Now Bolton is once again claiming that Iran has ratcheted up its threats to American troops and interests, even as well-versed and trusted American and allied leaders say that is not the case. The New York Times has reported the Trump administration is drawing up a battle plan that includes 120,000 troops but the British general who is the deputy commander of the American-led coalition fighting the Islamic State says “there has been no increased threat from Iranian-backed forces in Iraq or Syria.” Even Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, no stranger to saber-rattling, is speaking less aggressively than Bolton.

The waters are further muddled by our two closest allies in the region, Israel and Saudi Arabia, who constantly pressure Trump to hammer Iran to further their own designs. The only voices saying Iran is an imminent threat now are ones, like Bolton and Benjamin Netanyahu and the Saudi royal family, who say that no matter what the circumstances, and no matter how often later events prove them incorrect.

Sunday, Trump tweeted, “If Iran wants to fight, that will be the official end of Iran. Never threaten the United States again!” But Iran threatens the United States constantly and the last tweet by its foreign minister was no different. He wrote “Goaded by #B_Team” as he boasted that Iran defeated Alexander the Great and Genghis Khan.

Trump, a master of such bluster, must see Iran’s puffed-up chest for what it is, and see Bolton’s unrelenting beating of the drums of war for what it is, too.

Smoke defies the season, and a family to admire

Smoke is quite an insubstantial thing, having little more substance than a cloud, yet it can dramatically alter how a familiar place looks and feels.

And, of course, smells. Just recently a thin pall of woodsmoke propelled me, as if by some magical force, from mid spring straight into late summer. The effect was so convincing as to be a trifle unsettling.

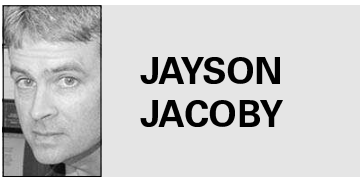
It was late in the afternoon of May 10 and I was walking on a forest road in the pine woods between Elk Creek and Washington Gulch, several miles southwest of Baker City.

The day was rather warm for early May — the temperature topped out at 76 at the Baker City Airport — and I was relishing the sense of lightness, peculiar to spring, that comes from ambling outdoors without being encumbered by multiple layers of fabric and heavy insulated boots.

Yet as I crested a ridge I noticed that the sunlight wasn’t so brilliant as it had been when I started walking, and the green of the forests was slightly smudged.

Smoke from the Forest Service’s prescribed burn, a couple miles to the north, had drifted in. Suddenly — or perhaps the change was gradual and I only remember it as otherwise — what had seemed like a typical spring hike was something else altogether.

The diffused quality of the light is a characteristic I associate solely with a day in late summer when wildfire smoke has settled in, a



JAYSON JACOBY

heat haze that makes me crave a nap and an ice-choked glass of lemonade.

The warmth of the day, and the film of sweat on my forehead and the small of my back, heightened the illusion.

So did the hard dirt of the roads on which I walked, baked by the previous three weeks of dry and warm and frequently blustery weather.

And the tang of burning pine. I had the queer feeling that I had somehow misplaced the greater part of summer, that I ought to start preparing for football season and the refreshing chill of autumn mornings.

As I continued on my way, though, I recognized that this artifice was but a veneer, the fiction betrayed by the grainy snowdrift sheltering in a thicket, by the blooms of avalanche lilies and grass widows, wildflowers that at this modest elevation will fade long before Independence Day.

Before I got back to my rig a scattering of cumulus briefly blocked the sun. The temperature dipped in a pleasant way that it would never do in August, and the vestiges of the subterfuge fizzled.

The scent of the smoke lingered, though, clinging to the cotton of my shirt and becoming stronger once

I climbed into the driver’s seat and put the window up.

It’s a pleasant smell, mainly. And I appreciated that its source was not a destructive wildfire, one that was siphoning millions of dollars from the federal Treasury even as it blackened swathes of public forest, but rather a controlled blaze intended to keep summer skies blue and bright.

As I stood in the hay barn and listened to a May rain shower pound its percussive rhythm on the metal roof, I realized that I was sharing this agreeably dry shelter with four generations of a remarkable Baker County family.

The setting was the historic Defrees Ranch in Sumpter Valley. I was there to write about a group of officials from the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service who were touring parts of the ranch to learn about the Defrees family’s techniques to protect their land — and in particular the soil — while growing both beef cattle and ponderosa pines.

The Defrees Ranch has become a popular destination for this sort of group. The family’s reputation for creative and sustainable management is of long standing, burnished most recently in 2016 when they, among 74,000 other tree-farming families, were named America’s Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year.

They deserved the honor. When the Defrees family bought

its 1,227 acres of forested ground in the 1930s what they acquired was a swath of stumps rather than a sturdy stand of trees.

The acreage had been heavily logged during the first decade and a half of the 20th century, supplying millions of board-feet of prime ponderosa hauled to a Baker City mill by the famous Stump Dodger — the Sumpter Valley Railroad.

The loggers, as was the common practice in those days, sawed down the biggest and best, and thus most valuable, trees.

“It was basically clearcut,” Dean Defrees told me in 2016 when I interviewed him about the family’s tree farmer honor.

Moreover, the trees that remained to supply seeds for a new forest were of the poorest genetics. It was a challenge on the order of trying to field a modern NBA team with players of modest stature and the vertical leap of a corpulent tortoise.

But over the decades the Defrees persevered. They employed sound forestry — another way of saying they invested quite a lot more time and money in the woods than they reaped in profits — to create a forest that began to resemble, albeit in adolescent form, the stand of broad-bellied, widely spaced ponderosas that rolled down the Stump Dodger’s long-since-removed narrow gauge tracks more than a century ago.

The family has run its cattle herd with the same dedication to ensuring that their land will not only consistently yield valuable

products but also serve as a refuge for wildlife.

And the Defreeses have done all this with the kind of humble grace that I’ve noticed in many farmers and ranchers.

All of which goes to saying that I was pleased to have a chance to learn more about the family’s operation.

I was not as pleased with the weather, however, and so when Dean suggested that the group repair to the barn rather than continue to stand outside and drip, I was glad to go.

We stood on a soft and fragrant layer of hay and straw and listened to Dean describe their cattle-grazing system, with his dad, Lyle, adding an occasional insight.

Dean’s wife, Sharon, was there too, along with the older of their two sons, Nathan, who is a medical doctor practicing in Baker City.

This scene struck me as significant — three generations of a family whose roots, if you’ll pardon me the indulgence of a cliché, plunge deeply into the Sumpter Valley.

But it was more than that. Because scrambling about in the straw was a member of the fourth generation — Nathan’s three-year-old daughter, Sloan.

It was a poignant scene, and a memorable one.

Such moments make this job seem worthwhile. And they remind me that there will always be families to admire, and stories to write.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.