

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Fast work on motel problems

We don't know the person's name, but he or she deserves a hearty thank you.

Whoever tipped off Baker City Fire Chief John Clark a week ago today about egregious fire safety violations at two Baker City motels performed a valuable public service.

The informant's report prompted Clark to immediately inspect both the Super 8 and Motel 6. The chief confirmed the violations and on June 24 he ordered both businesses to close.

The violations can't be explained away as minor oversights.

Clark said he has evidence, based on conversations with contractors who had worked at the buildings, that management knew about the deficiencies about two months ago.

The problems, which Clark said were intentional acts rather than, say, vandalism, resulted in fire alarm systems, and in the case of the Super 8 a sprinkler system, being inoperational.

Which means that a fire in either motel would have been more likely to turn into a tragedy than if those required safety systems were working.

Clark was right to act as quickly as he did in closing the motels, which are owned by the same family.

But he also acted reasonably in allowing both businesses to reopen on Thursday evening, once he had confirmed that the two contractors the owners hired had fixed the problems.

Protecting people is of course the first priority, as Clark noted.

But neither should the city keep a business closed so long as it meets all safety standards.

Clark said he doesn't intend to change the regular schedule which includes yearly inspections of motels, except to do these during March and April, the idea being to deal with any potential problems before the busiest part of the tourist season.

That's logical.

But the severity of the violations at the Super 8 and Motel 6 warrant something more than four nights of lost business. Nonfunctioning alarms and sprinklers is a considerably more serious issue than serving a substandard continental breakfast or failing to replace soiled towels.

Clark said financial penalties are possible.

Either that, or a more aggressive inspection schedule for their properties until the owners have regained a level of trust, is appropriate.

Fortunately for the local economy, the owners acted quickly after the closure. But they are ultimately responsible for the situation.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Your views

Legislators work for the people, and they should also work together, as adults

I am so sad over the behavior of our legislature when they were afraid the cap and trade bill might possibly pass. They work for the PEOPLE and as such should behave like adults. Instead, they left not only the legislature but the state instead of working through their differences with the other side. Ladies and gents you looked like a lot of third-graders who could not play ball with their own ball. Ever hear of compromise? Ever hear of working it out? Please, from here on, act grown up and remember you work for the public and not yourselves.

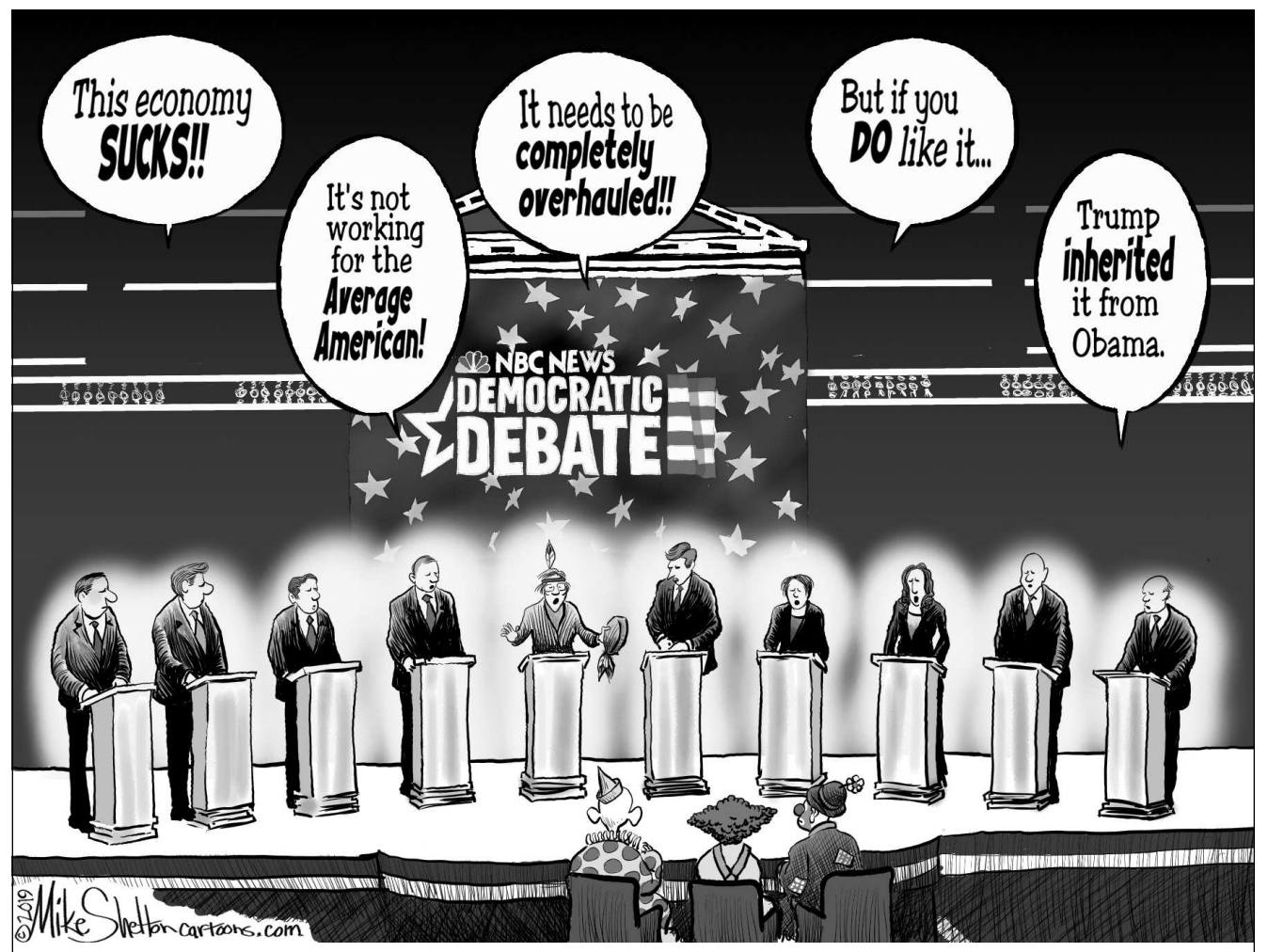
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Don't use children as pawns

When faced with two women who each claimed to be the mother of the same child, King Solomon announced that he would slice the child in two and give half to each claimant.

One woman was pleased. The other wailed in sorrow, and begged the king to give the child to her opponent.

Solomon immediately understood that the woman who wanted to save the child even though it meant she'd lose him was the true mother.

There are no Solomons among us today. Children are once again being used as pawns and commodities in our national immigration debate, and the adults are fighting to gain philosophical and political advantage at their expense. The battles are waged on social media, on the pages of our national and local newspapers, in our homes and, most regrettably, in the halls of Congress.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez calls the detention centers which hold immigrant children "concentration camps," evoking the ghosts of millions of dead Jews, and she is rightly criticized by all decent people for that manipulation of history and language. While the literal term "concentration camp" could be stretched to include a facility where people are not able to leave and are held in temporary housing until their legal status is established, the congresswoman's intention was to equate what is going on at the border with Nazi death camps. This was not lost on the United States Holocaust Museum, whose spokesperson noted

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that it "unequivocally rejects efforts to create analogies between the Holocaust and other events, whether historical or contemporary."

But the fact remains that children are being held in places where they are not getting enough food, water, clean clothing, blankets, hygienic items and — most importantly — contact with caring humans.

President Donald Trump points to the fact that his predecessor was the one who initiated a program that separated children from their parents, which is technically true. But when you dig a little deeper, you realize that Obama's plan was sporadic, while the Trump administration made a sustained policy decision to separate families as a disincentive to cross the border.

Congress dithers about solving the crisis at the border, with one side insisting on pouring money into a wall and refusing to engage in good-faith solutions for legalization, while the other side calls their opponents racists, evoking imagery of Nazi camps. And then, when the House finally reaches a consensus about funding to provide the detained children with the necessities we regularly give to prisoners and accused terrorists at Guantanamo, only a handful of Republicans voted in favor of the bill because the package didn't

include anything for border security. Then late Thursday, the Senate's version of the bill was signed onto by a reluctant Nancy Pelosi, guaranteeing that some money and support will reach the children.

And this is where I realize that neither side in this debate has any incentive to find a solution to the crisis that is ripping this country to shreds.

This controversy is deep and wide and burning, echoing the rift our ancestors confronted over slavery, and it is already leaving scars that will not fade even with the therapeutic balm of legislation and reconciliation. The detained children are the canaries in the coal mine of our national morality, and seeing them in this sustained state of crisis and neglect says some troubling things about who we are content to be.

It is fair to worry about the larger, overarching policy issues when discussing immigration. But this moment is not about partisanship. Our recent historical past shows that there is enough blame to go around. And when we start pointing fingers at one side and give the other a pass, the immigrants are the ones who end up suffering.

There should be no question that a country that turns its back on children for political gamesmanship is not the type of country any of us should be proud to call our own.

Christine M. Flowers is a lawyer and columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News. Readers may send her email at cflowers1961@gmail.com.

GUEST EDITORIAL

Editorial from The Medford Mail Tribune:

Pacific Power is doing the right thing by announcing in advance that it may shut off electricity in fire-prone areas if conditions warrant this summer. The company's plans are reasonable, and it is making every effort to limit inconvenience to customers.

A power line was the cause of the Camp Fire last year that killed more than 80 people and destroyed the town of Paradise, California. PG&E, the utility responsible for that line, now faces bankruptcy and billions of dollars in damages.

After the fact, a newspaper investigation found the company had delayed a safety overhaul of the century-old line. Also, PG&E had planned to shut off the line before the Camp Fire erupted, but customers objected to losing power.

Pacific Power has taken that lesson to heart, and is explaining its plans now in detail, so customers are prepared should

Letters to the editor

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it become necessary to interrupt power. That would likely happen during drought conditions if high winds threaten to blow trees and other debris into power lines.

Shutting off power would be a last resort, and power company officials say data from the past decade showed conditions would have prompted only one shut-off for about one hour. Shut-offs ideally would be announced 72 hours in advance.

If shut-offs do occur, the company will

offer air-conditioned tents for residents who must leave their homes during a power outage.

Pacific Power's regional business manager told the Mail Tribune the company has a strong maintenance program, and we have no reason to doubt her. Beyond contingency planning, the company is also increasing its efforts to clear vegetation from around power lines and poles and ramping up inspections.

None of these measures will prevent fires igniting for other reasons. Lightning remains the biggest risk factor, along with human causes such as carelessness in dry forests and sparks from vehicles.

But planning to shut off power at the right time will remove one potential ignition source, helping keep residents as safe as possible in high fire risk areas. Rural residents should be prepared, and sign up for their county's emergency citizen notification system if available.

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