

Opinion

BAKER CITY
Herald
Serving Baker County since 1870

Write a letter
news@bakercityherald.com

GUEST EDITORIAL

Debate can still be healthy

Editorial from The East Oregonian:

Democracy can sometimes be a messy — or contentious — business.

A good example was Rep. Greg Walden's town hall session in Athena Sunday.

Eastern Oregon is traditionally a friendly place for the Hood River federal lawmaker. But on Sunday, Walden faced some tough questions regarding the immigration crisis and the climate.

That's how it should be.

We don't support town hall meetings becoming shouting matches and, thankfully, that didn't happen Sunday. We do, however, believe town hall meetings are essential for our democracy.

Not only do they allow voters to hear what their elected representatives are doing — or, in some cases, not doing — in Washington, D.C., but such gatherings allow voters to ask questions and seek answers.

Walden faced pointed questions — especially about the ongoing immigration and border crisis — and delivered his answers.

On the border issue, Walden stuck to his familiar mantra that America must have secure borders, while he said he didn't support the Green New Deal concept.

Those two issues generated some vigorous debate and that is a good thing.

Walden — and other members of the Oregon federal delegation — deserve kudos for sponsoring such town halls across the region. Sure, it isn't easy to face tough questions from voters. However, that is part of the job and Walden and his elected colleagues seem to understand that.

Yet those who took the time — on a Sunday no less — also should be lauded.

Democracy can be messy but it does not work unless people participate. Our system of government demands that lawmakers and voters interact with each other on a regular basis. Sometimes that isn't easy but it is essential.

Walden also brought up a good point — when answering a question about lack of bipartisanship — that lawmakers on both sides of the political fence typically cooperate to get things done.

Often that interesting fact gets lost in the daily, weekly and monthly white noise of the political atmosphere in Washington, D.C.

We all tend to focus on what isn't working — rather than legislative success — because that grabs headlines and good sound bites.

Walden and his colleagues could just as easily shed the town hall concept and choose to communicate with voters in a different manner — like Twitter. That they don't is a good sign that despite everything, our elected leaders not only want input but actively seek feedback from voters.

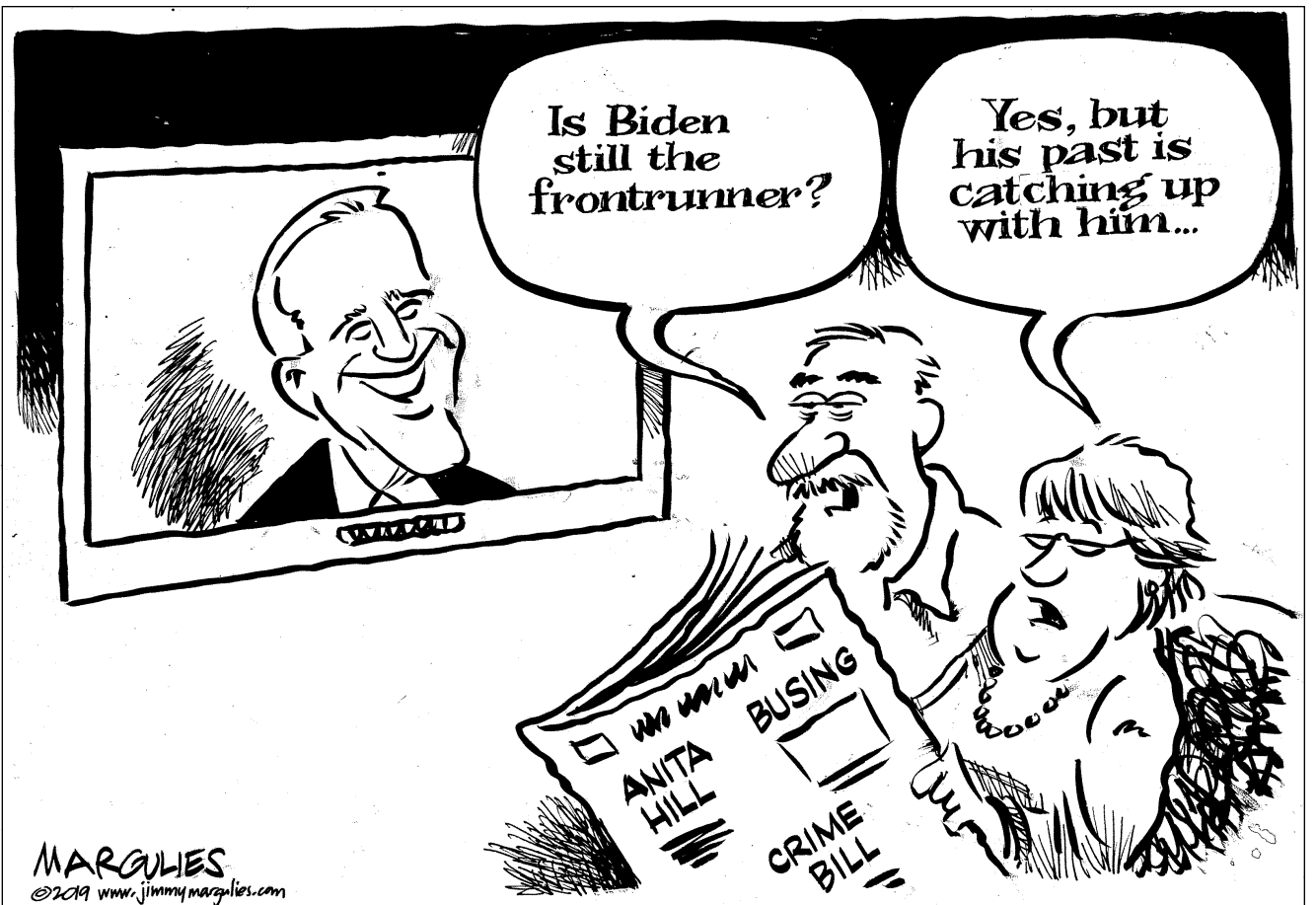
That's a good sign our democracy isn't in as dire straits as it is often portrayed.

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Letters are limited to 350 words; longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be published.
- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814

Email: news@bakercityherald.com



Your views

Weeds mar city's beauty

I have lived in Baker (City) most of my life. I consider it home and a fine place to live. However, I do have some comments about the town.

Baker professes pride in being called a tree city, but I wonder if it wouldn't be better described as a weed city. In the spring almost any direction you go you can see whitetop and dandelions grow-

ing in abundance. On top of that there is a good supply of elm trees that are nothing more than big weeds themselves. When their seeds start falling the surrounding area is covered with them, and if the wind is blowing it's almost like a snowstorm. I have been in Baker's library, stepped out the back door and seen the surface of Powder River covered with elm seeds.

If you live in an area that contains elm trees as we do, you spend the summer eliminating seedlings from your garden area much like fighting weeds.

If you really want to beautify our town, how about promoting the elimination of whitetop, dandelions and a few elm trees.

Dick Culley
Baker City

Election 2020: It's up for grabs

Now that the 2020 presidential campaign is truly underway, here's what we've learned so far.

President Trump is delivering the same angry, divisive message he used to mobilize his mostly white, mostly conservative voters four years ago. At his campaign's kickoff rally, he told his followers in Orlando, Florida, that Democrats are "driven by hatred, prejudice and rage; they want to destroy you and destroy our country as we know it." This time, Trump has the added advantages of incumbency, a unified Republican Party and a strong economy.

The Democrats are trying to reassemble the broad multiracial coalition that elected Barack Obama twice and almost elected Hillary Clinton. But as we saw in their debates last week, the scramble for primary voters is driving them leftward toward policy positions that could be trouble in the general election campaign — on health care and immigration, for example.

Trump's divisiveness is a calculated, purposeful feature; it was key to his electoral college victory in 2016. Several teams of political scholars produced postmortems on that election and came to the same conclusion: Trump won because he seized control of the debate and hammered at issues that touched on race, ethnicity and national identity, including Mexican immigration and Islamic terrorism.

The fact that he has reopened the playbook this year is dispiriting but shouldn't come as a surprise.

This time, however, Trump has a powerful new talking point: He's presided over 2½ years of robust economic growth. The president is notorious for inventing his own facts, but on the economy the truth is mostly on his side.

Unemployment in May was 3.6%, the lowest rate in almost 51 years. Democrats argue that most of the credit should go to Obama for launch-

DOYLE MCMANUS

ing the recovery, but Obama isn't on the ballot.

Normally, a first-term president with a booming economy should be able to coast into a second term. That's how Ronald Reagan won in 1984, Bill Clinton in 1996 and Obama in 2012.

Not Trump. He's so unpopular that he's generated his own headwinds. He's the only president whose job approval has never reached 50% since the Gallup Poll began asking in 1938.

His personal unpopularity has produced a backlash against his positions, too.

After Trump began sweeping Republican primaries in 2016, backing for Obama's healthcare law increased. So did support for offering undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship. And more Americans said the country hasn't done enough to ensure equal rights for black citizens.

Most of the change in sentiment was among Democrats, who coalesced around the opposite to the president's views.

In 2014, according to the Pew Research Center, 57% of white Democrats said they believed the "country needs to continue making changes to give blacks equal rights." By 2017, the number had risen to 80%.

So the Democratic primary electorate is more liberal than it used to be — partly, it appears, because of that polarizing Trumplash. In 2009, 32% of Democrats described themselves as liberals; this year, it was 46%.

Those numbers help explain the noticeably progressive tone of the back-to-back Democratic debates. As my colleague Janet Hook pointed out, the candidates embraced positions well to the left of anything Obama espoused

during his two terms, on a wide range of issues.

On health care, Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren (and maybe Kamala Harris, who has muddled her position) said they favored abolishing private health insurance, an idea most voters oppose. Most other candidates, including Joe Biden, have said they would allow private insurance to compete with a government-run "public option" plan.

On immigration, all 10 candidates in Thursday's debate said they would allow undocumented immigrants to enroll in their healthcare plans, something Obama never proposed.

Trump can be counted on to campaign gleefully against both of those positions, as well as the Green New Deal energy plan several candidates endorsed. He's already denounced all the Democrats as "socialists," including the ones who have explicitly denounced socialism.

"The most challenging thing in a presidential election is to be the party out of power when there's a strong economy," noted Lynn Vavreck, a UCLA scholar who co-authored one of the best of the 2016 postmortem studies, "Identity Crisis."

Democrats "need to find an issue to focus on that voters will consider more important than the economy," she told me. But it can't just be opposition to Trump. "That was one of the lessons of Hillary Clinton's campaign in 2016."

Trump, on the other hand, has an opportunity he hasn't yet seized.

"His best shot at winning is to highlight the economy," Vavreck said. "He should probably run a different campaign in 2020 than he did in 2016." There's no sign of that yet.

Bottom line: This is an election both sides are fully capable of losing.

Doyle McManus is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Pendleton office: 310 S.E. Second St. Suite 105, Pendleton 97801; 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

Rayburn Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.gov.

State Sen. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-301, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. District office: P.O. Box 1027, Ontario, OR 97914; 541-889-8866.

State Rep. Lynn Findley (R-Vale): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep. Lynn Findley@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Mike Downing, Loran Joseph, Randy Schiewe, Lynette Perry, Arvid Andersen, Ken Gross and Doni Bruland.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Dustin Newman, police chief; John Clark, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.