

Opinion

BAKER CITY
Herald
Serving Baker County since 1870

Write a letter
news@bakercityherald.com

OUR VIEW

A better way to redraw districts

The 2020 general election may give Oregonians the opportunity to change the way legislative and congressional districts are drawn every 10 years. Backers of the move are expected to submit three petitions to change the system to the Oregon Secretary of State's office soon.

The idea makes sense. Currently the redistricting task belongs to lawmakers. If they cannot agree on a plan, the job falls to the secretary of state, and that plan can be appealed to the state Supreme Court. If lawmakers do come up with a plan, it can be challenged, the secretary of state creates a plan, and it, too, can be challenged in the state's highest court.

There's ample room for partisan politics in the current system, and that's what a commission system could be expected to change.

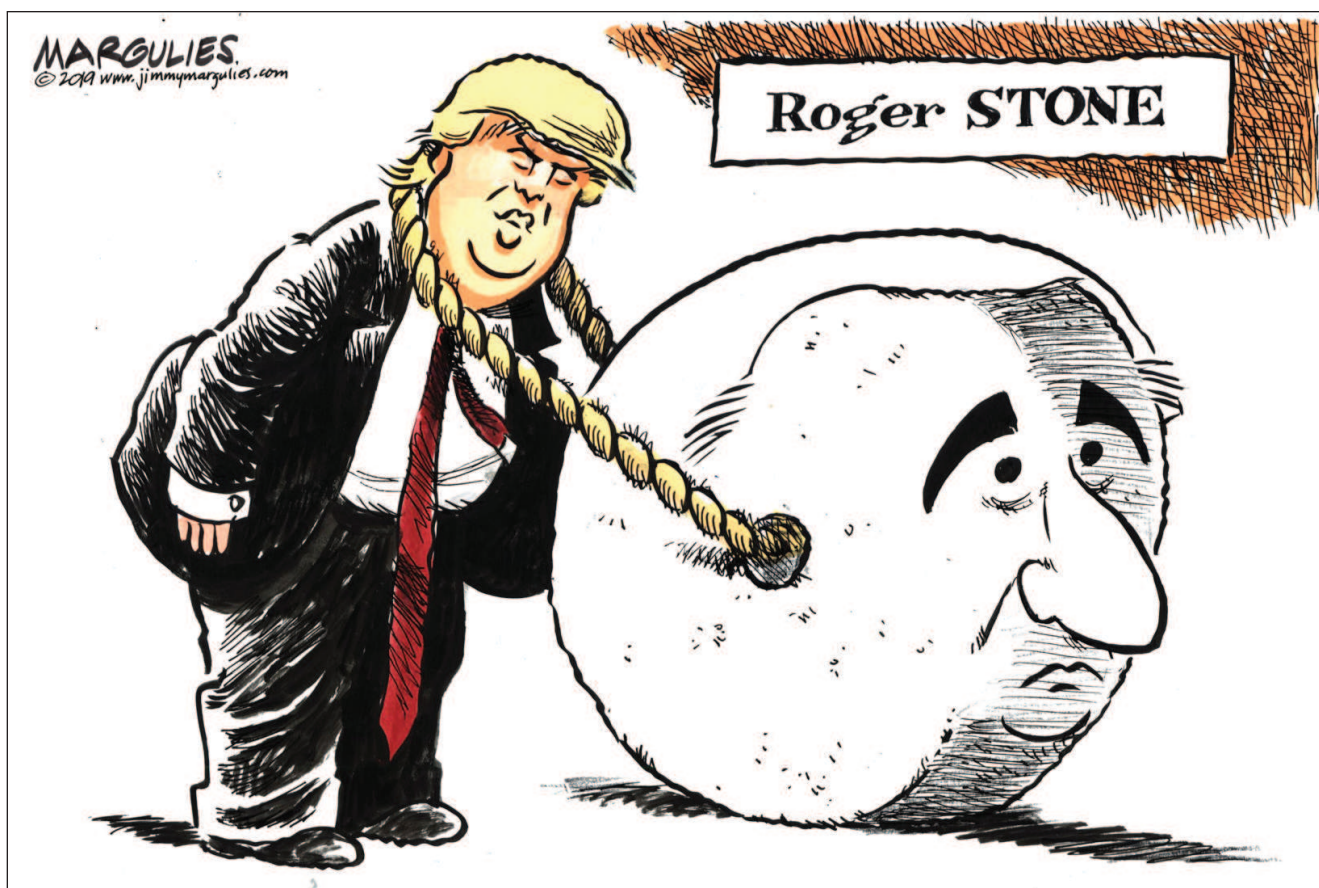
Supporters of the proposed plan include the League of Women Voters, Common Cause Oregon and OSPIRG, the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group, and others.

They would switch the state to a system much like the one currently used in California, with a commission equally divided among Democrats, Republicans, and others. Three administrative law judges would narrow the list to 150, from which six commissioners would be selected randomly. That six would appoint another six from the same pool. Most elected officials, their aides, political party officials, large political donors and lobbyists would be barred from serving on the commission.

Were Oregon to switch, it would join a growing number of states making the change, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. By 2020 at least 15 states will use commissions for state or federal redistricting, or both.

Giving Oregonians legislative and congressional districts that are designed to meet constitutional requirements of compactness, contain equal numbers of voters and respect "communities of common interest" is not the simplest task. Throw politics into the mix, and it can be nearly impossible. A nonpartisan commission could be expected to change that.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.



Your views

Lots happened at City Council besides train whistles

I recently attended the Nov. 12 City Council meeting and have a few observations. I wanted to see if as many people were concerned about the train whistles as had been about the City Council attempting to ban the roosters in Baker City last August. As I climbed the stairs to the first floor there was a group of five or six people standing there with white tags on their shirts with the words "Safer, Quieter and Healthier Baker City (SQHBC)." A young woman approached me and asked if I was going to the Safer, Quieter and Healthier meeting. I said, "No, I'm going to the City Council meeting." Upon with she lost total interest in me.

The City Council room was packed, standing room only. The SQHBC group leaders gave a Powerpoint presentation about the problems that the whistles create. After the City Council voted to file a notice of intent to apply for a Quiet Zone designation, there was applause and a few cheers from the crowd. Then all but eight or 10 people got up and filed out of the room, victorious. This was too bad as the next topics, Curfew/Truancy; Simplot buying land at the Elkhorn Industrial Park for \$235,620 to build a storage and distribution plant, thus creating jobs; Economic and Community Development did not seem to hold their interest.

The SQHBC group could have heard some very important discussions between County Commission Chairman Bill Harvey and the City Council. Mr. Harvey's passion for economic and community development for the entire Baker County, not just the town's Main

Street was heartfelt. He said that the County's most valuable resource is its children and if we want them to stay here we had better develop decent jobs for them around the whole county. Baker City gets two chances at tourists' dollars, while the outlying areas only get one.

The Chief of Police, Duman, had been sitting behind me and got up to leave the meeting. Since the meeting was almost over, it was 9:45 p.m., and things were getting kind of heated between Mr. Harvey and Mayor Joseph I got up and followed the Chief out. I introduced myself to him and thanked him for attending the lengthy meeting. He said that he tries to attend as many of the meetings as he can. And then he said something else, "how else am I getting to know just what all is going on in this town?" WOW.

Roger LeMaster
Baker City

School district needs to be more thrifty with budget

My father graduated high school from the historical Central School. I attended kindergarten there and my husband and son went to junior high in that grand old building. Through neglect and abuse, the school board tried to condemn it, but failed because it was built strong to last. They tried selling it and finally gave it to some program?!

Many of us answered surveys and gave suggestions for two different committees, with no results reported. Now a third committee has been formed. Why? Transparency is not the school board's policy.

First, the Central Building debacle

mentioned above.

Second, purchasing land for a new megaschool that we voters rejected.

Third, hiring an architect to design that school we neither need or want.

Fourth, your expensive campaign "For the Kids" to shame voters into compliance was insulting. We saw through it and voted you down.

Fifth, purchasing property near Brooklyn for parking space.

Sixth, the Baker Charter Schools are buying a new office building across town that was not built for a school or students.

What is going on with this rogue spending? It is our hard-earned tax money and we want to see it spent wisely.

There are common-sense solutions. Like: modernize the Central Building for K-6. Create a beautiful K-8 campus for our students, where they are in a safer and central location. (Portland passed a bond to fix up three 100+-year-old schools.) Use Brooklyn for the online school and other programs. You already own this property and it can house offices as well as students. Use some of the playground for parking, not new lots. In time South Baker could be sold to help finance the Helen Stack campus.

Since Baker High has extra room, keep it for high school students only and bring back vocational programs. Teach them job skills and help solve Oregon's graduation rate, which is disgracefully the lowest in the nation.

We citizens are taxed to the teeth and trying to be thrifty — the school board needs to show respect and do the same.

Patricia Hanley
Baker City

• 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

Impeachment doesn't make election irrelevant

The weakness of the Republicans' defense of President Donald Trump is implied by the obvious hollowness of many of their arguments.

Here's an example: There was never the slightest possibility that an impeachment inquiry could be conducted in secret. Yet during the public testimony of Ambassador Taylor and Secretary Kent last week, House Intelligence Committee ranking member Devin Nunes was barely into his opening statement before he lambasted the Democrats for the Oct. 22 "closed-door" deposition of Ambassador Taylor.

Nunes charged that Taylor was put through a "star-chamber audition" in a "cult-like atmosphere in the basement of the capitol."

Sure, it sounds terrible if you put it that way. But Nunes doesn't mention that he was actually present at the "secret" meeting, along with Trump's most combative defenders,

JOHN M. CRISP

including Reps. Jim Jordan, Mark Meadows and John Ratcliffe, all of whom vigorously exercised their rights to participate in this "closed-door audition."

Last week's testimony was rife with many other extraordinary defenses of Trump that do not stand up to fair-minded scrutiny.

But here's an argument that should worry every American who is concerned about the health of our democratic institutions: Several times during the recent hearings Republicans have noted that the next election is less than a year away. Why not just let the American people decide Donald Trump's fate?

This argument has a strong natural attraction for a democratic nation with deep faith in the wisdom of the ballot box. Wouldn't it be nice if we could put these ugly

impeachment proceedings behind us and just wait to see what the people say in November of 2020?

But before we kick this can so casually down the road, remember that the integrity of our elections is at the very heart of the current impeachment inquiry.

The 2016 election is relevant here. I've never rejected the legitimacy of Trump's election, and I've acknowledged him in print as "my president." That's the way the Electoral College works.

And Trump's defenders often point out that Americans knew who Donald Trump was when they elected him. Trump never bothered to keep his attitudes toward brown people, women and Muslims secret. He boasted openly about acts that can only be described as sexual assault. Many voters were aware of Trump's sketchy business history.

But there was a lot that we didn't know about Trump in 2016. We didn't know (and still don't) what

his tax returns look like. We had no idea how extensively Russians interfered in the election, nor how eagerly the Trump campaign would encourage the interference, nor the extent to which the Trump administration would go to cover it up. And even now we don't know how much impact Russian interference actually had on the vote count.

In 2016, voters didn't know that by 2019, Trump's "fixer" Michael Cohen would be in prison, in part for hush money payments to a porn star just before the election. There's considerable evidence that Trump knew about this cover-up. What impact might that piece of information have had on the 2016 election?

We'll never know. But we've learned enough about Trump since 2016 to cast considerable doubt on the 2020 election. The impeachment inquiry is all about how little Trump learned from his dabbling with foreign interference in the 2016 election. In fact, Trump has said

openly that he would accept foreign assistance in his re-election. There's considerable evidence that he has not only encouraged outside interference but has used the powers of his office to extort it.

And just as in 2016, we have no idea how much Trump has done that we still don't know about. Can we be certain of the integrity of the next election if no lessons are learned from the last one?

Depending on the 2020 election to set things right is no more a way of "letting the people decide" than is impeachment. In 2018 the people decided to elect a House more willing to examine scrupulously the behavior of an unfit president. Especially when our elections themselves are under attack, impeachment is another important constitutional way to "let the people decide."

John M. Crisp lives in Georgetown, Texas, and can be reached at jcrispcolumns@gmail.com