

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Coming in from the cold

A cold wind will likely be blowing Thursday, but there is no reason why anyone in Baker County should not sit down to a steaming hot Thanksgiving meal among pleasant company.

This holiday is a favorite for comedians, who often employ the Thanksgiving dinner table as the ideal setting for jokes about family dysfunction. Humor aside, the point is that this is a day when families gather.

But of course not everyone will have a chance to celebrate with relatives.

We are fortunate, though, to live in a community with a goodly number of generous residents — people who, on occasions such as Thanksgiving, seek to ensure that everyone, whatever their circumstances, has a chance to share good food and companionship.

Your options on Thursday include:

- Inaugural NE Oregon Regional Thanksgiving Day Gathering & Potluck, Churchill School Dancehall, Broadway and 16th streets in Baker City, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

- Free Thanksgiving dinner at the Calvary Baptist Church, Third and Broadway streets in Baker City, 3 p.m.

- Thanksgiving dinner at the New Bridge Grange, noon. In addition to a dinner provided by the Grange featuring turkey, ham, potatoes and gravy, everyone is invited to bring a side dish and dessert, and then stay after dinner for games including pinochle, dominoes, Yahtzee, Monopoly and other games that participants bring.

For many people it's a daunting prospect to attend an event at an unfamiliar venue, one where you probably won't know anybody.

But those who overcome their trepidation might receive something more in exchange for their courage than just a nice meal. A friendship is a gift that continues to enrich your life long after you've forgotten how good the pumpkin pie tasted.

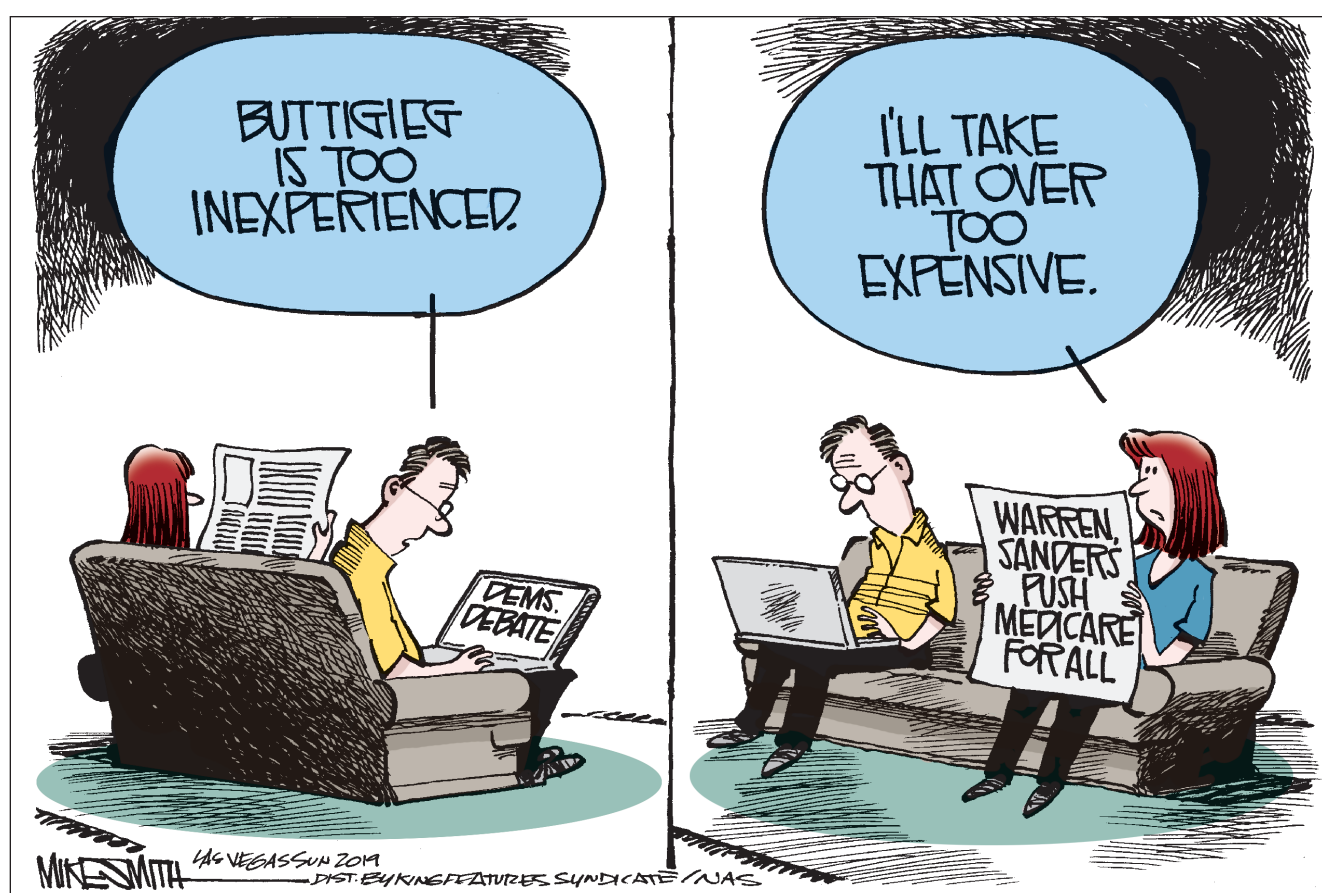
— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

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.

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Punishing financial success

“The demonization of wealth in this country is mind-blowing. Now all success is scrutinized. Merely to succeed, especially financially, invites scrutiny, judgment, abuse.”

That statement didn't come from a conservative pundit or a Wall Street banker. It came from none other than actor Alec Baldwin, a liberal activist with strong ties to the Democratic Party. When the man who plays Donald Trump on “Saturday Night Live” double barks at the over-the-top, anti-wealth rhetoric coming from many of the Democratic presidential candidates these days, there's clearly some trouble ahead.

Elizabeth Warren, chief anti-success antagonist, is pushing a wealth tax. Last week, sounding as if it were her civic duty, she started running a wealth tax ad, outing the net worth of four top business leaders while disparaging them personally.

Not to be outdone in taxing the rich, Bernie Sanders has even raised the idea of a “wealth registry.” What could possibly go wrong with putting federal bureaucrats in charge of defining and designating success and thereby who makes the list?

In August, Forbes published a list of the net worth of all presidential candidates. Not surprisingly, Trump came in first, with an estimated wealth of \$3.1 billion. But what is more interesting is the fact that most of the current top tier of Democratic presidential candidates can hardly call themselves middle class. Budding populist Warren can claim a net worth somewhere in the neighborhood of \$12 million, Joe Biden comes in at \$9 million and Sanders at \$2.5 million.

Add the wealth of billionaires Michael Bloomberg and Tom Steyer and multimillionaires John Delaney and Michael Bennet, and you've got the makings of one blockbuster hedge fund. Pete Buttigieg may be surging in Iowa, but his meager net worth of \$100,000 puts him at the bottom of the pack financially.

But for all the Democrats' anti-wealth rhetoric coming from the campaign trail, amazingly, five of their presidential candidates have gotten contributions from 30 or more billionaires. Kamala Harris took the top spot with contributions from 46 billionaires. Of the leading candidates, Biden takes the prize with 44 billionaires giving to his campaign, with Buttigieg right behind with 39 billionaire supporters.

Even Warren and Sanders managed a few uber-rich contributors.

DAVID WINSTON

The truth is the loudest voices arguing the moral imperative of wealth redistribution are, in fact, wealthy, at least by most people's definition of the term. If the Democrats running for president spend the next year talking about all the evils foisted on the American people by the wealthy, most of them would be talking, in effect, about themselves. It won't take long for middle-class voters to figure this out.

Calling out hypocrisy

In a Pittsburgh focus group back during the tax reform debate of 2017, an independent voter zeroed in on millionaire socialist Sanders' anti-wealth hypocrisy and personal tax rate:

“Bernie Sanders, who's preaching all this, he pays 13%. ... I'm like, 'How can you preach anything? You're not paying what I'm paying.' I don't fault anybody for having money. I think that's great. But they should pay at least what we're paying.”

There has long been frustration and anger over profit levels in certain industries and dissatisfaction over pay disparities between media stars and professional athletes and other worthy, underpaid professions like teachers and nurses. The American people don't look kindly on excess, and they are no fans of Wall Street or Hollywood. Arguments over income inequality definitely have resonance outside the Democratic base. But beyond far-left circles, there doesn't appear to be a burning, organically grown movement to redistribute other people's money.

What I do hear a lot more from voters is deep skepticism of politicians like Sanders and Warren, as that Pittsburgh voter described, “preaching” about wealth redistribution to fund more “free” government programs, which voters know won't be free at all. This is made all the more hypocritical by the levels of personal wealth enjoyed by the presidential candidates promoting those concepts.

Centrist, middle-class voters are rightfully suspicious of politicians telling them that a million dollars is OK but a billion dollars isn't. This approach lets these wealthy candidates tell voters, “You're OK, but I'm OK too.” What they miss is that they are making the wrong argument.

People aren't against success. Economic improvement isn't lowering the

income of someone else but being able to increase your family's income. They want fairness, yes, and an opportunity to rise, but most are more interested in getting from \$75,000 to \$90,000 a year or \$100,000 to \$125,000. They want the chance to succeed. And experience and instinct tells them that tax-the-rich schemes somehow always make their way to the middle class, directly or indirectly.

Waving the red flag

There are still some Democrats, however, who see the inherent flaw in this kind of economic warfare, ginned up to drive more division and fund new trillion-dollar government programs.

Rahm Emanuel warned his fellow Democrats in a recent Politico op-ed that Democratic candidates who won tough contests in 2018 and 2019 “spoke to issues that middle-class voters face every day” and “didn't embrace pie-in-the-sky policy ideas or propose a smorgasbord of new entitlements.”

He then posed a critical question: “Why aren't our leading presidential candidates looking to replicate that success?” before going on to say, “There's a gaping disconnect between that successful playbook and the strategic choices on display during the ongoing presidential primary debates.”

Emanuel understands that these “strategic choices on display” may put Democrats in danger of making this a historic economic election with the issue of wealth distribution, driven by wealthy Democratic candidates, at the center of it all.

Ultimately, economic arguments and taxes will return this country to its center-right roots faster than almost any other issue I've observed over time.

Given what's coming out of the primaries, this Democratic field of mostly millionaires has chosen a class-based strategy, pitting American against American based on wealth, not understanding that by doing so they will inevitably push the debate to the economic playing field, where Republicans have a distinct advantage — if they are willing to defend their economic principles.

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. He advises Fortune 100 companies, foundations and nonprofit organizations on strategic planning and public policy issues, and is an election analyst for CBS News.

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Oregon Legislature: Legislative documents and information are available online at www.leg.state.or.us.

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Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Ray Duman, 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.

Baker County departments: 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Jeff Smith, roadmaster; Alice Durlfing, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; Kerry Savage, county assessor.