

EDITORIAL

Problems paying for our parks

Karen Spencer, coordinator of the Baker County Parks Department, had ample reason to recently describe the department’s financial situation as “not sustainable.”

One of its consistent sources of revenue — camping and other fees from the Hewitt and Holcomb parks on Brownlee Reservoir near Richland — has dropped significantly the past few years.

Meanwhile, occasional sources of money, including log sales from county-owned property and the outright sales of some parcels, have gone away or likely will soon as county officials look to sell the few remaining parcels to temporarily plug the budget gap.

Expenses, on the other hand, have been rising, albeit relatively slowly.

A simple solution doesn’t seem to be available. Raising rates at the two parks certainly isn’t feasible. Officials say the main reason for declining revenue is a combination of low water in the reservoir and advisories regarding toxic algae in Brownlee, both of which have discouraged anglers and boaters. Charging people more to use parks they’re already shunning likely would make the situation worse.

A possible option that Spencer mentioned is asking voters to create a special district that would boost property taxes to raise money for the parks department. Similar districts already exist to pay for, among other things, libraries and control of noxious weeds and, in part of the county, mosquitoes.

That’s a reasonable idea. But convincing voters to increase their property taxes probably would be difficult.

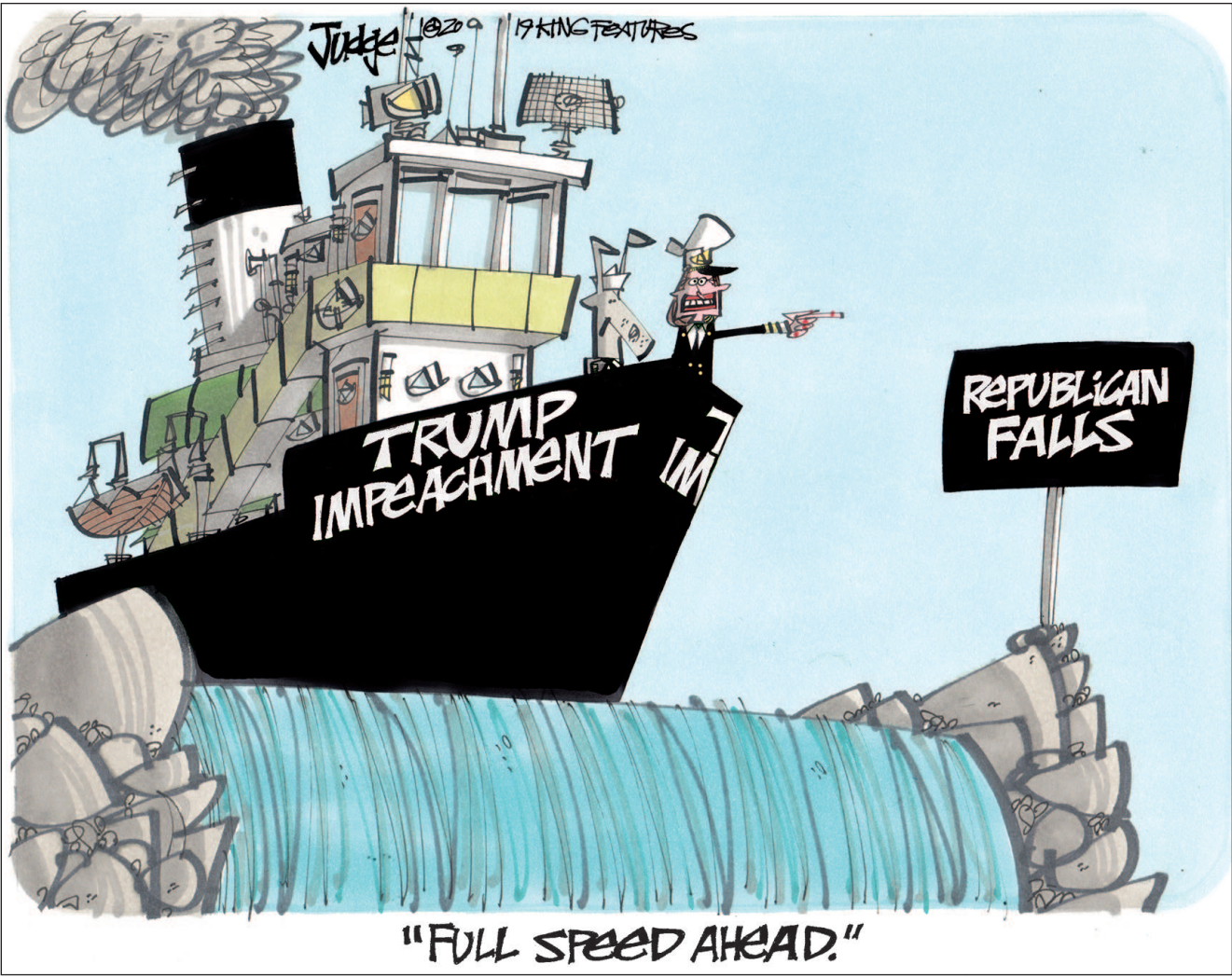
A more promising prospect is asking Idaho Power Company to either increase its financial support for the parks — the company already contributes about \$30,000 annually — or even to take over operation (but not ownership) of the parks.

Idaho Power, after all, operates Brownlee Dam. And although the company has no choice but to lower the reservoir level during spring for flood control (as dictated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), it does determine water levels at other times based on its power production needs. It’s reasonable for the county to ask the company for help when those needs create conditions that drive customers away.

Spencer, along with Bill Harvey, chairman of the Baker County Board of Commissioners, and Ed Elms, chairman of the county’s parks advisory board, all said the ultimate goal is to keep the parks open, and in county ownership.

That should indeed be the county’s objective. But if options such as increased financial aid from Idaho Power don’t materialize, county officials shouldn’t shy away from taking the matter to voters.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Pelosi’s comments on impeachment are inspiring

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has shown us the difference between partisan political wrangling and much deeper spiritual and Constitutional imperatives.

Acting on principle, the Democratic majority in the U.S. House of Representatives is moving resolutely toward impeachment.

In a formal statement on Dec. 5, Speaker Pelosi summarized the case: “The facts are uncontested. The president abused his power for his own personal political benefit, at the expense of our national security. Sadly, but with confidence and humility, with allegiance to our founders and a heart full of love for America, today, I am asking our chair-

man to proceed with articles of impeachment.”

But later, as she was leaving her weekly news conference, a reporter for Sinclair Broadcast Group, a conservative television network, loudly broached a derisive GOP talking point: “Do you hate the president?”

Speaker Pelosi’s immediate response was heartfelt and indignant: “This is about the Constitution of the United States and the facts that led to the President’s violation of his oath of office. And as a Catholic, I resent your using the word hate in a sentence that addresses me. I don’t hate anyone. I was raised in a way that is a heart full of love and always prayed for the president. And I still pray for the president. I pray for the president all the time. So, don’t mess with me when

it comes to words like that.” To me, this is a call to our deeper, shared, common humanity and destiny. It is this awareness that I believe is essential if we are to successfully meet the grave challenges we face.

The Constitution directs us to: “... form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity ...”

Let us pause frequently to reflect on how we can implement that profound imperative.

To my mind, Speaker Pelosi has provided an inspiring example for us to follow.

Marshall McComb
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Evidence supports impeachment

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times

The House of Representatives’ inquiry into President Donald Trump’s actions on Ukraine is not yet complete, but the evidence produced over the last two months is more than sufficient to persuade us that he should be impeached. Witness after witness testified that the president held up desperately needed, congressionally approved aid to Ukraine to extort a personal political favor for himself. In so doing, Trump flagrantly abused the power of his office.

The Times’ editorial board was a reluctant convert to the impeachment cause. We worried that impeaching Trump on essentially a party-line vote would be divisive. It is also highly likely that Trump would be — will be — acquitted by the Republican-controlled Senate, and that, rightly or wrongly, he would point to that in his reelection campaign as exoneration.

But those concerns must yield to the overwhelming evidence that Trump perverted U.S. foreign policy for his own political gain. That sort of misconduct is outrageous and corrosive of democracy. It can’t be ignored by the House, and it merits a full trial by the Senate on whether to remove him from office.

The story began with release of a reconstructed transcript of the notorious July 25 telephone call in which Trump asked new Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate former Vice President Joe Biden (a leading contender for the Democratic nomination to face Trump in 2020) and to shore up a debunked conspiracy theory that Ukraine, not Russia, hacked Democratic Party emails during the 2016 presidential campaign. The document vindicated the unnamed whistleblower who’d asserted that multiple officials had reported that Trump “sought to pressure the Ukrainian leader to take actions to help the president’s 2020 reelection bid.”

Then a parade of current and former government officials who testified before the House Intelligence Committee established that Trump’s call was part of

a larger effort to condition a White House meeting with Zelenskiy and the release of the aid on an announcement by Zelenskiy that he would initiate the specific investigations desired by Trump.

As constitutional experts testified before the Judiciary Committee, the framers of the Constitution had just such self-dealing in mind when they wrote the impeachment clause.

In announcing her support for articles of impeachment, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said that Congress must act because Trump “has engaged in abuse of power undermining our national security and jeopardizing the integrity of our elections.” Reasonable people can disagree over whether arming Ukraine in its conflict with Russia serves U.S. foreign policy interests, and it is also true, as the GOP has repeatedly argued, that — in the wake of the whistleblower’s complaint and pressure by Congress — the security assistance for Ukraine was eventually released.

But none of that exonerates Trump of abusing his office, apparently to obtain a benefit for himself. And if the president was willing in this case to subvert U.S. foreign policy for personal and political gain, why wouldn’t he feel emboldened to do it again? The president, after all, continues to maintain that his call with Zelenskiy was “perfect.”

Any articles of impeachment approved by the House will act as the political equivalent of an indictment, setting forth specific instances of misconduct; the Senate would then convene a trial to decide whether Trump should be expelled from the presidency. It’s obvious that at least one article should cite Trump’s improper approaches to Ukraine, whether they are described as “bribery” (an offense specifically mentioned in the Constitution’s impeachment clause) or abuse of power. A separate article would be warranted for his outrageous efforts to obstruct Congress by keeping information from the impeachment inquiry.

Finally, we continue to believe that the House should consider an article of impeachment addressing the ac-

tions Trump took to thwart or hobble special counsel Robert S. Mueller III’s investigation. Mueller did not conclude that Trump committed obstruction of justice, but neither did he exonerate the president. Attorney General William Barr and then-Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein subsequently concluded that the evidence developed by Mueller was “not sufficient to establish that the president committed an obstruction-of-justice offense.” But in deciding whether Trump’s attempted interference amounted to an impeachable offense, Congress could well come to a different conclusion. And the allegation that Trump obstructed justice in the Mueller investigation involves the same sort of disrespect for legal norms as his defiant actions toward Congress’ inquiry into the Ukraine matter.

Trump’s defenders argue that the evidence against him on Ukraine is incomplete and thus inconclusive. They’re correct that some potentially important witnesses — including acting Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, who reportedly put the hold on the Ukrainian aid, and former national security advisor John Bolton, who reportedly objected to the efforts to persuade Ukraine to conduct the investigations — haven’t testified. But that is because Trump has objected to such testimony. Delaying impeachment because of no-show witnesses would reward Trump’s obstructionism.

Besides, as the president himself tweeted on Thursday: “If you are going to impeach me, do it now, fast, so we can have a fair trial in the Senate, and so that our country can get back to business.”

Holding the president accountable for gross abuse of power is the business of Congress. The House should get on with that business by writing articles of impeachment that make it clear to the Senate — and the American people — why the extraordinary remedy of impeachment is necessary. And Republicans who complain that the process is partisan could easily rectify that situation by abandoning their lockstep loyalty to Trump and looking at the facts.

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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