

Opinion

BAKER CITY
Herald
Serving Baker County since 1870

Write a letter
news@bakercityherald.com

EDITORIAL

Bridging public land 'islands'

Baker County's 2 million acres are divided almost equally between private and public land.

But that statistic comes with an asterisk.

Not every one of those approximately 1 million acres of public land is public in the most fundamental sense — that we, the public, can go there.

There are in fact at least a few dozen chunks of public ground in Baker County — and many hundreds across the West — that are surrounded by private land for which the public lacks legal access.

These "islands" of public land constitute a two-pronged problem. First, the public can't reach them without trespassing. And the second, related, issue is that the owners of the adjacent private property in some cases are more likely to have people trespassing on their way to the private parcels.

Fortunately the federal government is at least considering ways to deal with this unsatisfactory situation.

A conservation bill that Congress passed and President Donald Trump signed into law last year requires that the government try to gain legal access to these public land islands.

The Bureau of Land Management, which manages more public land than any other federal agency and has the largest number of inaccessible parcels — including those in Baker County — is asking residents to nominate pieces of ground for a priority list that the agency will release by mid March.

William "Perry" Pendley, the BLM's acting director, said the agency welcomes "information from the public that will help us pinpoint barriers to access."

After the BLM has compiled its priority list, the agency will ask Congress for money to buy rights-of-way or easements across intervening private parcels, or look for other ways to ensure legal access.

That's likely to be more effective than the federal government's tactic of proposing land swaps in which the feds sometimes try to exchange dozens of parcels of public land for private parcels of similar value, with the goal of consolidating ownership and in effect ridding the map of "islands."

The problem with land swaps is that they usually take years to complete. And in some cases they never actually take place due to complaints about a lack of balance between public and private interests or other factors.

The BLM's current project, though welcome, is not likely to be a panacea for the problem of public land islands in Baker County.

That's because the priority list will include parcels of at least one square mile — 640 acres. Many of the public land islands in Baker County are smaller than 640 acres, with 40 to 120 acres being a common size. Most of these are in the eastern and southeastern parts of the county.

It's logical that BLM officials would focus first on the biggest inaccessible parcels. Ideally the agency will be successful in this initial campaign and then move on to the smaller pieces. Forty acres might seem a pittance for an agency that manages more than 245 million acres, but it's a pretty fair spread for someone who wants to go hiking or hunting.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Impeachment trial as TV ad

It's kind of interesting that the central goal of Democrats in the wild-and-wooly Capitol impeachment hearings is to use their misapplied, blistering power to ruin the re-election chances of Republican President Donald Trump. Their central case against Trump is that this is the kind of thing he did — use his powers in delaying military aid to Ukraine to get the country to stomp on Joe Biden and thereby ruin his chances of replacing Trump as president.

The Democrats know, of course, that they are not going to get enough support from the Senate's Republican majority to give them the two-thirds vote necessary to actually evict the president. Here, however, is what they have been enjoying: hours and days of TV time in which they lambast the president in every way possible in the hope of winning over voters. Their top spokesman, Rep. Adam Schiff, has demonstrated his skill as a debater as others jump in to call the Republicans treacherous to America, show videos out of context, toss misinformation into the mix and repeat points so often as to make sure no one misses them.

Because of the coverage of multiple TV networks, what it amounts to is one great big, incredible TV ad with millions watching. To obtain this opportunity, no money was required, just a rushed House procedure in which a whistleblower relied on hearsay for his

JAY AMBROSE

allegations, Republicans were denied the right to call witnesses and minimal evidence was produced.

Schiff says the evidence was overwhelming and the truth inescapable even if he wants more witnesses to support the truth. You imagine him at a restaurant with a waiter providing a full glass of water. "Pour in more," Schiff demands. "But the glass is full," the waiter says. "I still need more water in the glass than that," Schiff would then bark, his eyes glaring, his rhetoric getting ready to flood the room and his tip likely to be withheld.

I have to say, though, that I myself would like to see a couple of witnesses on the stand, namely Joe Biden and his son Hunter. Trump had mentioned to the Ukrainian president in the famous phone call that he'd like an investigation of Biden. After all, Hunter Biden was vastly enriched when named to the board of directors of a Ukrainian energy company after Vice President Biden was named point man on Ukraine. The senior Biden threatened to withhold \$1 billion in U.S. aid to Ukraine minus the firing of a prosecutor wanting to probe the company widely considered corrupt. All of this was a stark conflict of interest that even worried some in the Obama administration, and to think there's

nothing objectionable is absurd.

With no proof, the impeachment crew still says the only reason Trump acted was to damage Biden politically and one member called it the worst thing any president has ever done. Actually, lots of presidents have done pretty much the same kind of thing, just as impeachment Democrats are doing the same kind of thing, but there is this to be said. When you put it all together, it is something Congress should rightly have looked into with serious reprimands as possibilities. But it and the other charges against Trump are not impeachable offenses, and to treat them as if they are is to erode our principles and open the door for impeachment as an everyday kind of destructive activity.

The Republicans, of course, are shouting back and making good points on such matters as defending executive privilege as crucial to presidents being able to manage the nation's affairs. They are absolutely right that what we have had here is a prolonged effort to rip the selection of presidents from the hands of voters by those seeing themselves as their superiors. And they are right that the Senate is wasting time when there are oh, so many truly major issues to be addressed. The sooner we turn this TV ad off the better.

Jay Ambrose is an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service. Readers may email him at speaktojay@aol.com.

Your views

Saddened by the loss of newspaper carriers

In Monday's paper there is an article written by Karrine Brogotti. It's a Q&A article about the Baker City Herald

being delivered via USPS. I have some questions that were not covered. What happens to the carriers? Did they lose their jobs? Were they offered a new job within the company? There are some

carriers who worked for the Herald for quite some time. This truly saddens me. Thanks to our carriers, Bill and Sherri.

Barbara Meyer
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Closing the education success gap

Editorial from The Mi:

At a time when news about educational achievement gaps is mostly negative, it's worth noting even a glimmer of positive change. Recent data from the respected National Center for Education Statistics indicate that for the first time in four decades, one of the gaps is nearly closed.

An NCES study found that the high-school-or-equivalent completion rate for the nation's African American 18- to 24-year-olds is not measurably different from that of whites in the same age group. In the years between 1977 to 2016, the rate among whites was consistently and significantly higher. But the 2017 data shows only a 1 percentage point difference, with white student completion at 94.8%, compared with 93.8% for black students.

NCES reported a promising trend of more black and Latino teens and young adults understanding the need for a high school diploma, GED or some other form of educational certificate. It means that fewer young people are doing without some kind of post-middle-school education.

Joel McFarland, NCES statistician and an author of the report, told an editorial writer that the disparity between black and white young people has narrowed over time. "It's within a pattern of findings that we're seeing across a lot of different data sources — it's pretty clear that high school completion rates have increased and dropout rates have decreased."

McFarland said NCES collects and reports the data, but as a nonpartisan, independent agency it mostly leaves the interpretation to other education researchers and scholars. He acknowledged that significant disparities still exist for the traditional four-year graduation rates that are based on state and school district public school information.

Data on 18- to 24-year-olds is collected differently — through a combination of census and other sources. And the older group includes young adults who have received GEDs, been home-schooled or who have completed other post-high school certification programs.

It's an encouraging sign, but it still doesn't eliminate continuing achieve-

ment disparities from preschool to grade 12. The strong need to work on those gaps remains.

A fall 2019 Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis study showed test score differences in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math proficiency as high as 30 percentage points between some students of color and poorer students versus their more affluent white peers. Those persistent, wider-than-average disparities prompted the bank officials to call Minnesota's gaps a "crisis."

Based on the study, Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank President Neel Kashkari and retired Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Alan Page recently announced an effort to change the state's Constitution to guarantee the right to a quality public education for all children. They're hoping to make education an undeniable, fundamental civil right.

Though much work remains to narrow and close education gaps, the NCES study indicates some progress among young adults across the country.

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.

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

Email: news@bakercityherald.com