

EDITORIAL

County
commits
two gaffes

The Baker County Board of Commissioners has had a couple of puzzling oversights over the past month or so.

Neither gaffe is likely to have lasting effects, but the pair, happening close in time, suggests commissioners need to pay closer attention to the details.

First, in early February commissioners posted on the county’s website a proposed Second Amendment Preservation ordinance.

Yet just 15 months or so earlier, in November 2018, county voters had overwhelmingly (5,432 to 2,736) passed just such an ordinance.

Commissioner Mark Bennett said the proposed ordinance was posted because, due to what he called a “clerical error,” he and Commission Chairman Bill Harvey didn’t realize how robust the Second Amendment protections are in the voter-approved ordinance.

Once they understood the mistake, they had the proposed ordinance removed both from the website and from any consideration because, Bennett and Harvey agreed, it’s not necessary.

The Baker County Republican Party officials who were chief petitioners for the 2018 ordinance were pleased that the matter was dropped. But they weren’t happy that the proposed ordinance, despite being withdrawn, omitted the section from the voter-approved ordinance listing penalties for local officials who violate the Oregon and federal constitutions, and listed several state statutes that the GOP officials believe should be challenged.

Ultimately, there’s no good reason that commissioners didn’t read the full ordinance that voters had approved little more than a year earlier, and that had, moreover, been posted on the county’s own website.

The second issue arose last week as part of the commissioners’ consideration of the county’s contract for operating a visitor center in Baker City. The Baker County Chamber of Commerce is the current contractor for the \$77,000-per-year contract, the money coming from the tax that guests pay at motels, bed and breakfasts and other lodging businesses.

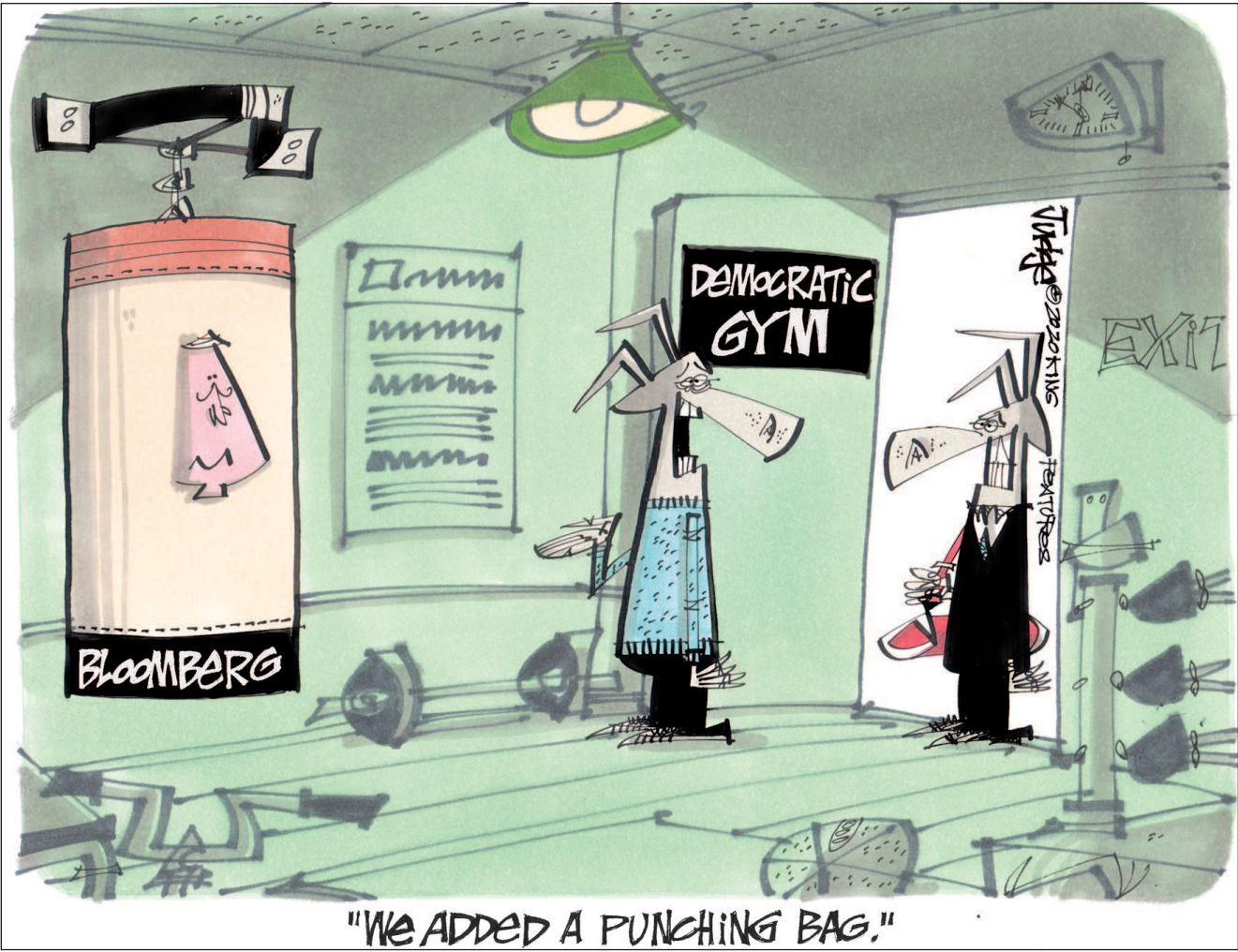
Both the county’s lodging tax committee and the Baker County Economic Development Committee recommended commissioners award the contract to Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, the only other bidder, along with the Chamber of Commerce.

During their Feb. 19 meeting, commissioners tabled the matter until Oct. 1. Among the issues raised, this one by Commissioner Bruce Nichols, was the county’s lodging tax ordinance, which requires commissioners to approve requests for proposals that the lodging tax committee proposes.

But here’s the thing — the commissioners, on Nov. 6, 2019, did approve the lodging tax committee’s request for proposals for the visitor services contract.

Commissioners will consider other issues — Bennett said he wants to examine the relationship between the county and Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, for instance — but Nichols’ question about whether the lodging tax committee had complied with the ordinance by getting approval for the request for proposals, had already been answered — in the affirmative — when he posed it.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Confronting climate change

I’ve often thought of the efforts of my ancestors in Baker County and the sacrifices they had to make when they arrived in the Burnt River country in the summer of 1863. The efforts and sacrifices they had to make just to get here were difficult enough. The years of labor, grief and sacrifice that faced them in the process of carving out a niche in this new and unsettled country no doubt required much more than those they’d already endured in the journey.

Every time those thoughts creep into my mind, they’re accompanied by a bothersome question: How can I hold up my end in this generation-to-generation challenge to maximize our contributions to the betterment of life?

Regardless what my answers are, the challenges I’ve faced still seem trivial when compared to those of my ancestors. Until now. Until the daunting task of doing my part to mitigate the effects of climate change have become my responsibility, one that I cannot and will not refuse, even though a much easier choice would be to pass the buck on to the next generations and go fishing.

Not that I’ve been sitting on the couch eating bon-bons for the past 30-plus years. My main focus over those past years has been on protecting, preserving and finding as many different paths as I can to avoid damaging this planet we depend on for our life. But, in spite of the time and effort I — and many others — have invested in those past efforts, we still find ourselves facing a world that is teetering on the edge of rejecting us, along with all other life forms who’ve been our cherished traveling companions. And we’ve run out of time and options for coming up

MIKE HIGGINS

with fixes for the literally life-threatening conditions we’ve created.

Faced with the reality of our present situation, we absolutely have to re-order our priorities. We must start taking effective and what may seem to be drastic actions to bring the warming of our planet to a screeching halt. Our failure to do so has very real, very predictable, and very disastrous consequences, none of which we’d willingly pass on to future generations.

That reality has arrived in the Panhandle of Baker County, resulting in the formation of a group devoted to confronting the challenge of climate change, the Panhandle Climate Change Awareness group (PCCA). Initially, PCCA members began asking questions like:

- What changes can I make in my day-to-day living that will reduce my carbon footprint (the most prevalent greenhouse gas)?
- What do I already do that contributes to a smaller carbon footprint and how can I expand/improve on that practice?
- How can I contribute to a community-wide awareness of climate change and to efforts that help my community conduct less environmentally harmful and more climate-friendly lives?
- How can we, as a community, link up with other communities throughout NE Oregon in order to both support each other’s efforts and to expand our earth-protecting, climate-friendly lifestyles?

Recognizing the urgency of the climate change issue, our PCCA group has undertaken several projects aimed at confronting climate change, some of which had already been launched in response to their immediacy:

- Opposing the clearcutting and subsequent pesticide spraying of a large tract of privately held timber, all of which is in the watershed of the city of Halfway, and individual wells, springs and irrigation ditches;
 - Mounting a petition drive aimed at restoring passenger rail service to Eastern Oregon. Next step: endorsement of the Baker County Commissioners; coordination with AORTA (Association of Oregon Rail & Transit Advocates).
 - Inviting speakers to educate us re climate change options and actions;
 - Committing to individual projects aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, such as tree-planting, ride-sharing, electricity generation using solar panels, heating by the use of passive solar, etc.
- If we are to be successful in our efforts, we need the participation of everyone. This is a challenge that cannot afford any bench-sitters. From the youngest of us to the oldest, this has to involve everyone doing whatever we’re capable of doing to meet the challenge. Sacrificing — deferring what’s desired for the sake of something having a more pressing claim — will be required. That more pressing claim is continued life on this planet.

Please join us.
Contact information: higginsm363@gmail.com; chezjude@hotmail.com

Mike Higgins lives in Halfway.

OTHER VIEWS

Paving the way for women in science

Editorial from The Dallas Morning News:

If women and girls in this country are making any progress on shattering the negative stereotypes of what they can do in mathematics and engineering, they have Katherine Johnson to thank for helping to pave the way.

Johnson was a pioneer at NASA and the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics between 1930 and 1970. She, along with other black women, helped make critical calculations that launched our astronauts into orbit.

But as important, the challenges they fought through inspired generations of women, and especially women of color, who came after them to believe that they too could succeed.

We join a nation in mourning Johnson’s death Monday at the age of 101. Hers was a life well-lived — an example of how talent, perseverance and hard work can benefit all mankind.

It’s encouraging that the world finally came to recognize this important pioneer and her colleagues. Johnson, Christine Darden, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson were celebrated in

the movie “Hidden Figures.” Johnson was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015 from President Barack Obama. And all four were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal when President Donald Trump signed the Hidden Figures Act into law last year.

They’ve received such accolades because they represent the possibilities of overcoming obstacles and the potential for success in STEM fields for women and girls.

It’s that spirit that led Dallas ISD to open Solar Prep, the all-girls school focusing on science, technology, engineering and math. It’s the reason the district has put so much effort into its P-Tech programs to offer pathways to STEM degrees to match up the hundreds of available jobs with skilled workers who can fill them.

We know we still have a long way to go to improve the number of women in such jobs. Women are still underrepresented in STEM fields, with estimates of about a quarter of the workforce. The percentage of women of color is far less than that.

Studies show that gender biases and

stereotypes that girls are not good in math present barriers that continue to block women’s progress.

But these are lucrative fields that drive our economy and can help women earn more to potentially close the gender pay gap. Not to mention that women can contribute mightily to advancements in technology and engineering.

The Hidden Figures bill authored by U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Dallas credited Katherine Johnson and other black women with contributing to World War II aircraft testing, supersonic flight, the Voyager probes and landing the first humans on the moon in 1969.

“The stories of these four women exemplify the experiences of hundreds of women who worked as computers, mathematicians and engineers at NACA beginning in the 1930s,” the bill’s text reads.

Who knows how many more Katherine Johnsons might be out there today. We have to do everything we can to find them and give them the opportunity to succeed.

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.
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