

EDITORIAL

Keep the public in the loop

Baker County’s public councils, boards and commissions are striving to make their meetings accessible to the public via a variety of online and phone options in the era of coronavirus.

This is as it should be. Oregon’s Public Meetings Law is intended to make sure the public — that’s all of us — has the ability to see what our elected and appointed officials are up to.

But while Gov. Kate Brown’s executive order restricting the size of public gatherings is in effect, and while social distancing is the societal mantra, public entities should, when feasible, consider delaying meetings until restrictions cease and meetings can resume in their usual places, open to all rather than with limits on the number of attendees.

The current slate of “virtual” meetings doesn’t work for people who lack internet access. And with the Baker County Library closed, those people don’t have the free option that’s normally available.

In some cases public business needs to be conducted.

For many public bodies, including Baker City and Baker County, the fiscal year ends June 30, and the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year typically would be presented to budget boards in a month or so.

It’s natural that local officials also want to give updates to their constituents about the coronavirus crisis, and local government efforts to deal with it. Baker County commissioners, for instance, plan to meet weekly rather than every other week.

But the county needn’t convene a public meeting — one involving at least two of the three commissioners for the purpose of making decisions — simply to distribute the latest information.

Officials seem to be cognizant of their responsibilities under the Public Meetings Law. But they should be seeking ways to streamline their work and reduce the number of times they meet in forums that aren’t as public as a room in City Hall or the Courthouse.

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



Our future is in our own hands

I am not a sailor. But I used to try to be one on a friend’s sailboat, many summers ago.

I sailed with a true sailor — a guy who grew up with it and had been sailing since he was a little kid in Marblehead, Massachusetts. I called him “Skipper,” and he called me “Gilligan.”

We both earned our nicknames. And the Skipper is still sailing, indeed, racing. I never sailed into a full-blown storm with him. But I remember my first experience of a chop.

A chop is defined this way: “Waves that are short and steep ... a short steep sea, which makes a vessel continuously pitch and roll.”

Or, a “confused sea,” caused by a “combination of wind, waves and current.”

Continuously pitching and rolling is scary. You figure out very quickly how small you are and that nature was not created by Hallmark.

And how does one handle a chop? I quote the experts again: “There is no specific way to handle a chop.”

But some advice?

Batten down. Keep steady. Don’t try to outrun or out muscle it. Gut it out. Stay calm.

Or maybe hope you have an experienced skipper.

All that sounds a lot easier than it is. There is no substitute for experience. Or for calm.

If calm doesn’t come naturally, fake it until you make it. Practice, practice, practice.

There is no substitute for an even temper.

Or for faith — in ourselves and in a power beyond ourselves.

That power is both the end and the source of all mercy, all compassion, all kindness, all decency. And, yes, all strength and calm.

Our country is headed into a chop. We can no longer deny it or kid ourselves. “This is our generation’s war,” said a

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person who is daily exposed to the public and cannot work from home. She has no such option. She also has asthma and COPD. Her eyes are open. She is wary. But she is courage walking.

The pandemic may well also cause this generation’s Great Depression. It’s impossible to see how a shuttered national economy recovers in a matter of weeks or months. Wall Street may. The economy as a whole? It will take years.

And the national debt will, once we have come through this, take a generation to pay down.

The corona contagion, said New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo the other day, will change us forever. We will never be the same country.

And I knew he was right. I thought of a friend speaking of a third friend many years ago. The third man’s spouse was dying and the second man said: This will change him. It will change him.

As Cuomo said, the question is: What is the manner of the changed man when he gets up off the mat?

Our country, our republic, will come through this. We came through the Great Depression and a two-front world war followed. We came through that, too. We came through them both.

The corona pandemic is not a greater challenge.

The test for the country is the same as for individuals: Who will we be then?

Is it true that suffering refines character and soul?

It can.

Will it refine the American soul?

Is it true that adversity binds? It can. War creates a bond between warriors. The Depression created a sense of family and community we have not known since.

I would like to believe that this crisis will teach us how to draw closer at a distance. It would like to believe it triggers a rebirth of American values — of neighborliness, decency, practical compassion, personal responsibility and liberty under law.

I would like to believe it will toughen us without coarsening us.

I would love to see a rebirth and rediscovery of the American family and of spiritual and religious life.

I’d love to see Americans, especially young ones, discover the indispensability of daily, curated, professional journalism. Blogs and Facebook cannot inform you; cannot help you understand your world.

But these are hopes, the evidence of things as yet unseen.

Who will we be after we come through the chop? Will we be truly changed or will we reset and revert to old and lazy ways? Will we be better, or simply harder and smug?

No one knows.

My eyes, too, are wide open, and yet I have faith.

I think: First, the moral leadership of the country will arise not from Washington, or politics on any level, but from the ordinary interactions, and initiations, of ordinary, uncelebrated people.

Second, Americans do better in the chop, in adversity, than we do in abundance and leisure. When things are good and soft, we tend to look inward. When things are hard and tough, we step up and tend to be our better selves.

Third, Americans believe in better and best selves, and in a more perfect union. Practice, practice, practice, and you can become the person, or country, you want to be.

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OTHER VIEWS

Stop broadcasting Trump briefings

Editorial from St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

The president’s daily Coronavirus Task Force presentations have morphed into a beast that bears no resemblance to the informative crisis briefings they were originally intended to be. Once managed by a composed and eloquent Vice President Mike Pence, they are now the vehicle for the uninterrupted rambling and factually suspect musings of President Donald Trump. Whenever other officials speak, as if by command, their first-spoken words typically are in praise of Trump’s decisive, bold, courageous leadership. If the crisis weren’t so serious, the scene would be comedy material.

It’s time for the major television news networks to abide by their own professional standards and cease live broadcasts of Trump’s briefings.

He has less of an interest in keeping the public informed or helping beleaguered cities than in ensuring the spotlight stays on him. Aid dispensed must include praise and thanks to Trump. He erupts merely upon being

questioned about his words not matching his deeds, or his words not matching the facts.

State governors who fail to properly acknowledge Trump’s decisive, bold, courageous leadership will risk being placed at the back of the line for federal assistance. Woe to the journalist who dares read back the president’s own words to him and ask for accountability.

“Sir, what do you say to Americans who are upset with you over the way you ... downplayed this crisis over the last couple of months?” CNN’s Jim Acosta asked on March 30. He listed a series of quotes from Trump: “We have it very much under control in this country. The coronavirus is very much under control in the USA. It’s going to disappear. It’s like a miracle. It will disappear.” “We have a very small number of people in this country infected.” “We’re prepared. We’re doing a great job with it. It will go away. Just stay calm.”

Trump responded, “Instead of asking a nasty, snarky question like that, you

should ask a real question. And other than that, I’m going to go to somebody else.”

PBS reporter Yamiche Alcindor asked Trump about a statement he made on Fox News suggesting New York might be exaggerating its need of 30,000 ventilators. Trump interrupted her question before she could finish. “Look, let me tell you something: Be nice,” he snapped. “Don’t be threatening.”

The networks keep airing these tantrum-filled briefings because Trump’s buffoonery is ratings gold. But the public should not confuse this with news. In fact, it’s the opposite of news because the information Trump dispenses is filled with misinformation. Airing it live, knowing Trump’s record for dishonesty, is professionally irresponsible.

He is using this free air time to substitute for the campaign rallies he cannot attend in a time of social distancing. It’s up to the networks to deny him the live, unfiltered coverage he clearly desires but no longer deserves.