

EDITORIAL

Don't let inmates out early

Only with the benefit of hindsight will we be able to judge whether some of the precautions taken to ostensibly stem the spread of coronavirus were proportional to the risk.

But one concept that Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is considering is not warranted. Brown has asked the Oregon Department of Corrections for information about roughly 3,200 of the nearly 15,000 inmates in state prisons to help her in considering the possibility of releasing some of that smaller cadre of inmates before they've completed their sentences.

The governor might consider releasing inmates within two months of release, and nonviolent offenders who, due to age or underlying medical conditions, are most vulnerable to the virus. A spokesman for Brown said Thursday that the governor has no timeline for making a decision. That decision could have an effect on Powder River Correctional Facility in Baker City. Many of the 366 or so inmates there are nearing the end of their sentence.

Inmates convicted of Measure 11 crimes — violent offenses such as murder, rape and robbery that include mandatory minimum sentences — won't be considered for early release.

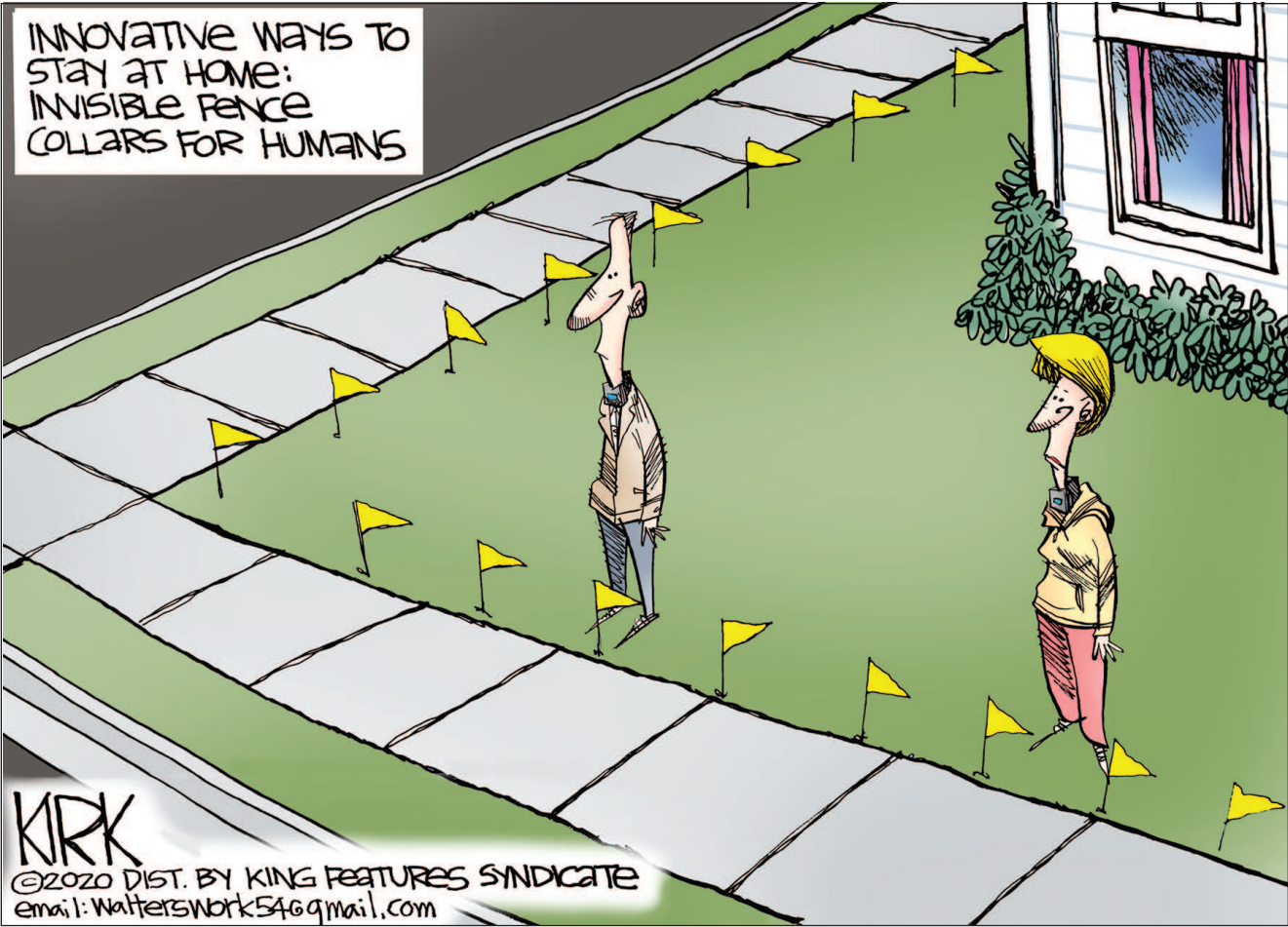
A group of inmates sued the state Monday alleging the state hasn't done enough to protect them from coronavirus.

But the statistics don't support either that claim, or that the pandemic justifies releasing inmates early and thus thwarting the justice system that's supposed to operate on behalf of all Oregonians.

As of Thursday there were a dozen confirmed coronavirus cases connected to state prisons —four employees at the state penitentiary in Salem, three inmates and four staff members at the Santiam Correctional Institution near Salem, and one inmate at the Shutter Creek Correctional Institution in North Bend. There are no confirmed cases at Powder River.

It appears that the state is doing an excellent job of keeping inmates and prison employees healthy and safe. Releasing hundreds of inmates now would have little effect inside prisons, but it might well reduce community security, and burden law enforcement and the health care system, at a time when we ought to be striving to reduce that burden.

—Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Bernie's out, but Biden still needs him

Editorial from The San Jose Mercury News and East Bay Times:

As U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders drops out of the presidential race on Wednesday, he leaves behind a Democratic Party reshaped by his two White House bids.

No candidate this year, or in modern campaigns past, has hammered the issue of the nation's wealth inequality as vociferously and effectively as Sanders. He has attacked the barriers to health care, education and housing, raising the pitch of the debate to an unprecedented level.

The challenge now for the party's presumptive nominee, former Vice President Joe Biden, will be to embrace Sanders' issues — and his followers — while hewing a more politically and financially pragmatic approach that's palatable for most Americans.

The anxiety and insecurity of poverty that Sanders sought to address have been laid bare by the coronavirus shutdown of much of the country's economy. In the weeks and months ahead, as we plunge deeper into recession, more people will struggle to pay their bills and access health care.

The presidential campaign, now solely between Biden and President Donald Trump, will be like no other: Trump's mercurial behavior was already certain to make the race unpredictable. The pandemic and the nation's economic implosion will make it triply so.

Biden will bring the empathy that Trump lacks. But, to succeed, Biden must build a big tent — and for that he needs Sanders and his followers. Conversely, for Sanders to succeed in his goals, now that he has left the big stage, he needs Biden.

He has no alternative. On the issues Sanders cares about, the nation has regressed under Trump, as the president has sought to undermine rather than improve upon President Barack Obama's health care plan; increased the economic divide with tax cuts for the wealthy that drove the country deeper into debt while the economy was strong; and undermined national attempts to address climate change.

While Sanders' purist progressive campaign was unfettered by the reality of the nation's political map, Biden seems to recognize that the key to Electoral College victory will lie in

centrist swing states like Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Florida. Biden doesn't have the luxury, nor does he have the political inclination, to indulge in the same uncompromising approach.

The question will be whether Sanders can accept that. Whether he embraces Biden — only figuratively in these times of physical distancing — as he failed to do with Hillary Clinton four years ago. Whether he acknowledges the political reality that, while Biden might not be the senator's perfect candidate, he at least cares about the same issues.

What Sanders does next, in the days and weeks and months to come, will help determine the fate of Biden's presidential quest. While Sanders was never able to expand his base and increase turnout of young voters as he promised, he nonetheless has a large and loyal following. He must now marshal them behind Biden as he failed to do for Clinton.

To succeed in his goals, Sanders must convince his followers, from their perspective, to not let the perfect become the enemy of the good.

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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We saw Baker County through his keen eyes

For four decades Baker County has seen itself through the lens of S. John Collins' camera.

He captured the community's triumphs and its tragedies, his indelible images preserving our laughter and our tears, freezing for all time the fissured faces of those nearing the end of their days and the perfectly smooth cheeks of those just beginning the great journey.

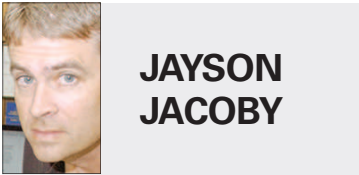
In terms of one person chronicling a community so reliably and for so long, few can match John's record.

You have probably heard of practitioners in other fields whose longevity spans generations — the teacher who explains the mysteries of algebra to her students, and to those students' own children, the barber whose scissors have trimmed the hair of the man and of his son in turn.

John has done that, and more, since he took his first photograph for the paper in 1978.

And so it is tempting, when pondering John's career at the Baker City Herald, to focus, as it were, on its length.

I have of course just done this



myself.

But that is not the story I wish to tell.

To define John's work by its duration, by the impressive but impersonal tallying of numbers, seems to me a great disservice — akin to rating a painter based on the stack of his canvasses rather than on how the scenes stir the soul.

I chose this analogy with purpose, because John is as surely an artist as someone who renders his visions in oils or pastels or words.

And it is the quality of his work that is his legacy.

And it's the reason, when I learned that his job at the Herald was among those lost due to the nearly unfathomable economic havoc wrought by the coronavirus, I felt a sense of despair deeper than any other during this crisis.

I base this on nothing but my

own impressions, but it seems to me that most people don't understand, or at least not very clearly, how great the difference is between amateur photography and the work of a skilled photojournalist such as John.

Not that this is especially surprising.

Almost all of us, particularly in the era of smartphones, take photographs frequently. And because the cameras in our phones are considerably more capable than the Kodak Instamatics and Polaroids that dominated before the digital revolution, most of the images we get are in focus and with an acceptably balanced exposure.

But capturing the sorts of photographs that John crafted over his career — tens of thousands of them, if you'll forgive my brief foray into the fixation on numbers about which I lamented some paragraphs back — requires vastly more attention to detail than pointing a phone at a comely mountain peak or meadow festooned with wildflowers.

John has the same complement of eyes that most of us are equipped

with, but his see the world in quite a different way.

By this I mean that he sees more — the way that a subtle shift in the way the light falls on a person's face transforms an ordinary portrait into something much more revealing and rich.

But it's much more complex than that.

Most of us, I think, when we are preparing to take a photograph, focus on the primary subject.

This is a natural approach, of course, and a reasonable one.

But John has the exceedingly rare ability to see the entire scene, fully realized, before he even raises his camera.

He can calculate the light and the background and the potential interaction between multiple objects almost immediately, and with a degree of detail that I believe is beyond the ken of almost all of us.

But even that talent, however prodigious, isn't enough.

John also can take that wealth of information and in effect translate it into the language of apertures and shutter speeds. This ensures that his photographs, to the extent

possible, bring to you, the reader (and viewer), as close to the reality of the situation as anyone could hope to.

This difference between what you might call "taking pictures" and photojournalism as art doesn't yield easily to explanations in words.

Fortunately, John's photographs tell the story in a much more meaningful, and gratifying, way than I ever could.

It was my great fortune to write hundreds of articles that shared space with John's images on the pages of the Herald.

We both tell stories.

And although I labor in words and he in photographs, I knew always that his artistry would lend a bit of its glimmer to my efforts, and that my sentences would perhaps shine a trifle brighter in the reflected glow.

That the Baker City Herald was immeasurably better for his work, and that Baker County's historical record is forever a richer one, are matters beyond question.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.