

EDITORIAL

Bolstering Baker’s businesses

Business owners can adjust to the cyclical nature of the economy, but it’s unlikely that even the best-prepared merchant would have designed a business plan that anticipates anything like the upheaval wrought by the coronavirus pandemic.

It’s been heartening to see Baker County residents rally to support local businesses over the past month. This has perhaps been most noticeable with restaurants, many of which, literally overnight, have transformed their operations from traditional sit-down dining to a takeout and home delivery model.

But as economic downturns always do, the pandemic’s effects have rippled across many other segments.

Fortunately there is aid available for many businesses, and Baker County officials have strived to make it as easy as possible for business owners to navigate the labyrinth of programs.

The Small Business Administration is a key cog, and Jeff Nelson, who oversees that Oregon Small Business Development Center through Blue Mountain Community College in Baker City, is available at 541-406-4770.

Baker County, through its coronavirus emergency declaration, has also set up a Business and Recovery Task Force — its phone number is 541-523-0015.

Information is also available through the county’s coronavirus website — www.bakercountycovid19/business-information/.

Recently Peter Johnson, general manager of Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort, unveiled a “Shop Baker” campaign that not only asks residents to patronize local businesses, but also encourages business owners to work together by offering discounts or special deals to customers who show receipts from other local businesses.

“It is our belief that if all promote each other, it will help carry the message to our community to shop local,” Johnson said.

And although the focus now is of course on weathering the coronavirus storm, the momentum that Johnson hopes to create has the potential to yield benefits to the local economy after the crisis eases and restrictions are relaxed.

It’s likely that some residents have already learned that their local options are richer than they knew. That should bode well for Baker businesses even after customers are no longer as confined as they have been recently.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Donald Trump: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1414; fax 202-456-2461; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov/contact.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

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Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

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

State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Loran Joseph, Randy Schiewe, Lynette Perry, Arvid Andersen, Larry Morrison, Jason Spriet and Doni Bruland.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Fred Warner Jr., city manager; Ray Duman, police chief; Sean Lee, interim fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

Baker County Commission: Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.



OTHER VIEWS

Virus testing should be the priority

Editorial from The Dallas Morning News:

After approving a historically large \$2 trillion stimulus package last month, Congress was back at it last week, kicking around a plan to spend more money to help that nation’s economy recover from this pandemic. It seems Washington is prepared to spare no expense when it comes to recovery — no expense, that is, except for the one thing that will actually boost public health and morale and get our economy moving again.

More than expanded small business loans or airline bailouts, what we need right now is to know what we’re dealing with. We need to stop “shooting in the dark,” as U.S. Rep. Colin Allred (D-Texas) described it to us. We need COVID-19 testing on a massive scale.

In the absence of tests, America’s plan is essentially passive: quarantine everyone and wait for the curve to peak. But there is a more proactive approach. If we tested for the disease on a much broader scale, we could have a

much better idea of who has it, who has already recovered from it, who is a carrier, who might have some immunity to it and where the disease is spreading most.

In military terms, testing could tell us more about our enemy. It could get us to the stage public health officials call “surveillance,” where we can watch and contain the disease rather than shelter in place and hope it doesn’t show up on our doorstep.

Such an approach would require several things we need from the federal government. It would require leadership to identify a common goal (the right goal) and rally people to the cause. It would require coordination, not contention, with state and local health authorities as well as private sector labs and hospitals. And it would require an awareness campaign on the level of that for the annual flu shot, so that every American who wants a test knows they can get one.

Only once we have testing on demand for all Americans will many

Americans feel more comfortable in getting back to something resembling our old way of life.

This is where Washington should be focused. Congress should use its spare-no-expense attitude to push through a bill to fund nationwide testing efforts and awareness campaigns. We need a floor debate about the best path forward to reach a place where testing is not only providing surveillance but also peace of mind for Americans wondering whether they have or have had the virus. President Donald Trump should use his daily press briefings to call for this preferred future rather than to shift blame for mistakes of the past. And private industry should be unfettered as it produces more test kits and pursues treatments and vaccines.

Testing on this scale could give leaders clear and actionable data and give American workers confidence about going back to work when restrictions are lifted. Until we’re ready to do this, all our spending will be in an effort to dodge the problem more than solve it.

Oversight needed on stimulus bill

Editorial from The Baltimore Sun:

During the last serious economic downturn in 2008 and 2009, Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama pushed forward more than \$1 trillion in spending designed to revive the economy by doing everything from buying up toxic assets from financial institutions and spending more on public infrastructure to bailing out state and local governments. Much of it was controversial. Many political conservatives complained bitterly about this level of federal government involvement in the private sector, and there continues to be debate about how many jobs that effort saved (although the general consensus remains that American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 likely saved 1.5 million jobs or more).

But the one thing those programs had was some degree of independent oversight. Whether one approved of the Troubled Asset Relief Program or not, those banks and other financial institutions that benefited from taxpayer-funded bailouts were identified for all to see. Not only was some level of transparency mandated under TARP, but there was a well-funded watchdog, a “special” inspector general assigned to monitoring the asset transfers and who reported directly to Congress. More than once, that particular individual, former prosecutor Neil Barofsky, produced reports critical of the Obama administration’s handling of the program it had inherited. President Barack Obama did not fire Barofsky. Nor did Congress. His involvement helped Americans have confidence in the fairness and legality of the government’s actions.

That experience ought to inform how the United States moves forward now, but there are worrisome signs it isn’t. The \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act does not require disclosure of the names

of businesses that receive Small Business Administration loans, a program that has already received about a half-million applications. Other CARES programs do require such disclosures, but the names can be withheld if the Federal Reserve chairman deems it appropriate. And while the CARES Act does include an inspector general and a committee of Congress conducting oversight (although less well-funded than under TARP), the Trump administration has already attacked that provision. Administration officials now insist that any reports to Congress would have to be first scrutinized by the White House and a key candidate for the watchdog role was demoted by President Donald Trump who has, instead, nominated one of his own lawyers, associate White House counsel Brian Miller, for the post.

Such meddling leaves open the possibility that taxpayer money might be used for self-serving purposes, with the Trump administration potentially directing the enormous sums toward political allies and away from those the president perceives as foes. Certainly, Trump’s dislike of independent oversight was illustrated by his decision earlier this month to fire Michael Atkinson, the intelligence community’s top watchdog, because Atkinson did his job by informing Congress about the whistleblower report on Trump’s infamous Ukraine phone call. More recently, the president has been critical of

the Department of Health and Human Services’ inspector general for daring to point out that the country’s hospitals were ill-prepared for the coronavirus outbreak. House Democratic leaders say they are now looking into ways they can restrict Trump’s authority over inspector generals.

No doubt the White House relishes the opportunity to cast their disagreements in matters of oversight as a purely partisan exercise. But even Republican voters are going to notice if, whether deliberately or through circumstances, it becomes clear that Trump’s closest allies have directly benefited from stimulus spending denied others. Senate Republicans must not allow the president to continue down this path.

Congress needs to stick to its guns and strengthen CARES Act oversight. At the very least, Americans need the assurance that the supervision will be as robust as the scrutiny given TARP. That can start with a truly independent inspector general, not someone beholden to the president. That person also requires adequate resources and a guarantee he or she won’t be fired if untoward behavior is uncovered. This is not too much to ask, not when such an enormous amount of money is involved. A lot of people are hurting right now and scared. A global pandemic and a crashing economy will do that. The last thing we need is the added worry that there’s no check on potential public corruption in the nation’s capital.

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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