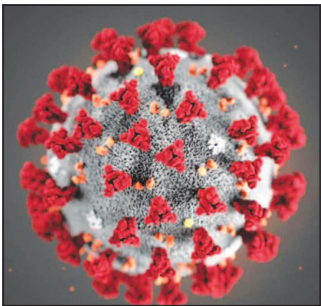


Some officials say virus an excuse for denying rights

By Nicholas K. Geranios
Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — In deeply conservative eastern Washington state, a prominent state lawmaker kicked out of his Republican Party caucus labels the coronavirus as a foreign bio-weapon, accuses Marxists of using the pandemic to advance totalitarianism and rails against lockdown restrictions imposed by the Democratic governor.

A California teleconference last week to consider sport fishing limits in rural areas unprepared to handle influxes of anglers descended into chaos — with callers branding state officials as “fascists” and declaring it was time to “make fishing great



CDC photo
A COVID-19 particle

again.” Across the U.S., elected officials from Pennsylvania to Oklahoma suspicious of big government and outraged with orders to close churches, gun stores and other businesses deemed nonessential insist that the public health response is being used as an excuse to trample constitu-

tional rights. The shutdowns reinforce long-held beliefs by some that governments would eventually use a national emergency to limit civil liberties and the vitriol is particularly strong across the pine forests of eastern Washington state — where conservative Rep. Matt Shea is a co-founder of the Coalition of Western States, a loose federation of politicians suspicious of big government, plus militia supporters. Its goal is to “stop unconstitutional actions against United States citizens,” according to a December report into Shea’s activities paid for by the Washington state House issued just before his own caucus exited him. After Washington state

Gov. Jay Inslee issued the earliest U.S. mandatory closing of schools and businesses, Shea questioned whether Inslee would use the state’s National Guard to enforce his orders and if he would force inoculation of residents after a coronavirus vaccine becomes available. “Quarantine is only supposed to be for sick people not mandatory for healthy law abiding people,” Shea wrote on Facebook. “Otherwise constitutionally and legally that starts creeping into martial law territory.” Joining Shea in the vast expanse of eastern Washington, hundreds of miles and political light years away from ultra liberal Seattle, was Republican gubernatori-

al candidate Loren Culp, who wants to deny Inslee a third term. Culp is the police chief of the town of Republic and author of the book “American Cop: Upholding the Constitution and Defending Your Right to Bear Arms,” praised by rocker Ted Nugent. “If I choose to peacefully assemble, go to church, go to a gun shop, take my family fishing, open my business, enjoy the outdoors, or exercise any of my constitutional rights, I should not be restricted from doing so by a would-be dictator,” Culp told supporters during a recent conference call. Shea’s efforts were lambasted by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which said in a statement that he was

promoting fear mongering and providing “legitimacy for a network of extremists” in western U.S. states “at a time when hundreds of Washingtonians, and thousands more Americans, are dying from coronavirus.” The lockdown order criticism isn’t limited to states led by Democrats. From northern Idaho, where suspicion of government also runs deep, Bonner County Sheriff Daryl Wheeler demanded in a letter that Republican Gov. Brad Little reconsider his statewide stay-home decree. Wheeler’s letter questioned the reliability of World Health Organization coronavirus information and said “now it is time to reinstate our Constitution.”

COUNCIL

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“The governor, World Health Organization, the (Baker County) commissioners and President Trump all have declared emergencies. I don’t know that there will be a need for the city to do it but to just cover all bases, we are in an emergency situation,” City Manager Fred Warner Jr. said.

The city resolution gives the city manager the authority to impose curfews and evacuations, close roads and prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages and gasoline, among other things, but Warner has no plans to use any of that authority.

A city ordinance requires the City Council, as soon as possible, to confirm any decisions the city manager makes under the auspices of the emergency declaration.

Tuesday’s meeting started with the five councilors who were present approving a resolution allowing Perry and Morrison to participate via Zoom. The resolution was necessary because a 2013 resolution requires councilors to attend meetings in person.

Councilors went on to award two contracts — one to drill a new well near Quail Ridge Golf Course

to give the city another source of drinking water, and one to fill cracks and apply sealant to pavement on the main runway and a parallel taxiway at the Baker City Airport.

New well

Councilors unanimously awarded the contract to Schneider Water Services of St. Paul, Oregon, the lowest of four bidders at \$677,005.

The city will also pay the company \$87,000 to decommission the existing well at the golf course, as required by the state. That well was mainly used to irrigate the city-owned course.

“The combined cost is approximately \$3,000 under the engineer’s estimate,” Owen wrote in a report to councilors. “The consulting engineers reviewed Schneider’s previous qualifying work and deemed Schneider Water Services a qualified bidder.”

According to Owen’s report, the new well will act as an additional water source when demand peaks in summer, and as a backup when the existing well near the city’s reservoir is being maintained.

Drilling of the new well, which will be in the golf course parking lot, is proposed to start in October and be finished by May 2021.

Airport work

Councilors unanimously approved a task order of \$99,972 to T-O Engineers for design services. The money is from a federal grant.

According to a staff report from Owen, the City entered into a Professional Services Agreement with T-O Engineers for aviation construction engineering services in January 2020.

The upcoming project for the Baker City Municipal Airport is a crack fill and seal coat of the main runway and the parallel taxiway.

“The City receives an annual \$150,000 in FAA entitlement funds that require a 10% City match,” Owen wrote in a report to councilors. “In addition, the City is slated to receive an Oregon COAR grant for the match up to \$15,000. A portion of last year’s FAA entitlement funds will cover the costs of project design and engineering services during construction.”

The crack-filling and sealing will cost an estimated \$180,000 to \$220,000.

Property purchase

Councilors approved a lease/purchase agreement with Cutter’s Edge for \$30,000 for a 1-acre parcel in the Elkhorn View Industrial

Park south of Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative’s headquarters.

Cutter’s Edge, which made rescue saws, closed last year. But the company owns the property where the city’s training structure for firefighters sits.

The company offered to sell the city the property. According to Warner’s report to the council, the city has no other place to put the training structure, and moving costs would be substantial.

Fee schedule

Councilors voted 6-1, with Morrison opposed, to approve a resolution setting a variety of city fees for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

The schedule includes 2.3% increases in water and sewer fees, the amount based on the federal Consumer Price Index. That equates to about \$1 more per month for the base fee for most residential customers. That fee includes 3 units of water per month (one unit is 748 gallons). The cost for each additional unit would increase from 93 cents to 95 cents.

Councilors also decided to increase the fine for violating the dangerous dog ordinance from \$100 to \$200.

Councilor Doni Bruland noted that although the fee schedule

includes the public safety fee, which has been in effect since 2017, councilors won’t decide until later this spring whether to continue assessing the fee. If councilors don’t take action, the fee will expire June 30.

A previous City Council enacted the fee — \$3 per month per residence and \$6 for businesses — to raise money for the city’s match for a three-year federal grant that allowed the city to hire three new firefighter/paramedics.

“I just want to make sure so everybody knows that we will not be doing anything with the public safety fee at this time,” Bruland said. “It’s just a placeholder, it says to be determined.”

In other business Tuesday: • Mayor Loran Joseph proclaimed the week of April 20 as the community’s Arbor Day Celebration and celebrating Baker City’s 35th consecutive year of being recognized as a Tree City USA. Just five Oregon cities have longer runs as Tree Cities.

• Councilors decided to continue advertising for one vacancy on the city’s budget board. The city has received one application, from Jason Bland.

• Councilors adopted the 2020-2021 City Council goals.



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