

EDITORIAL

Shifting focus to the future

The discussion among government officials has shifted this week from a focus on how much we should restrict society to combat the coronavirus, to how we can start resuming something resembling normalcy in our lives and our economy.

This is a welcome, and necessary, adjustment. It's also a responsible one.

This pandemic is not, and never has been, a competition between saving lives and saving jobs. To suggest otherwise is to indulge in the sort of absolutist, us versus them, simplistic thinking that is neither warranted by the complexity of this issue, nor helpful as society struggles to find a level of medically sound precautions that doesn't unnecessarily stifle the economy for no demonstrable health benefits.

The government's chief task now is to seek that balance.

Until recently it seemed that prominent politicians who suggested this approach were widely chastised for giving the economy precedence over public health.

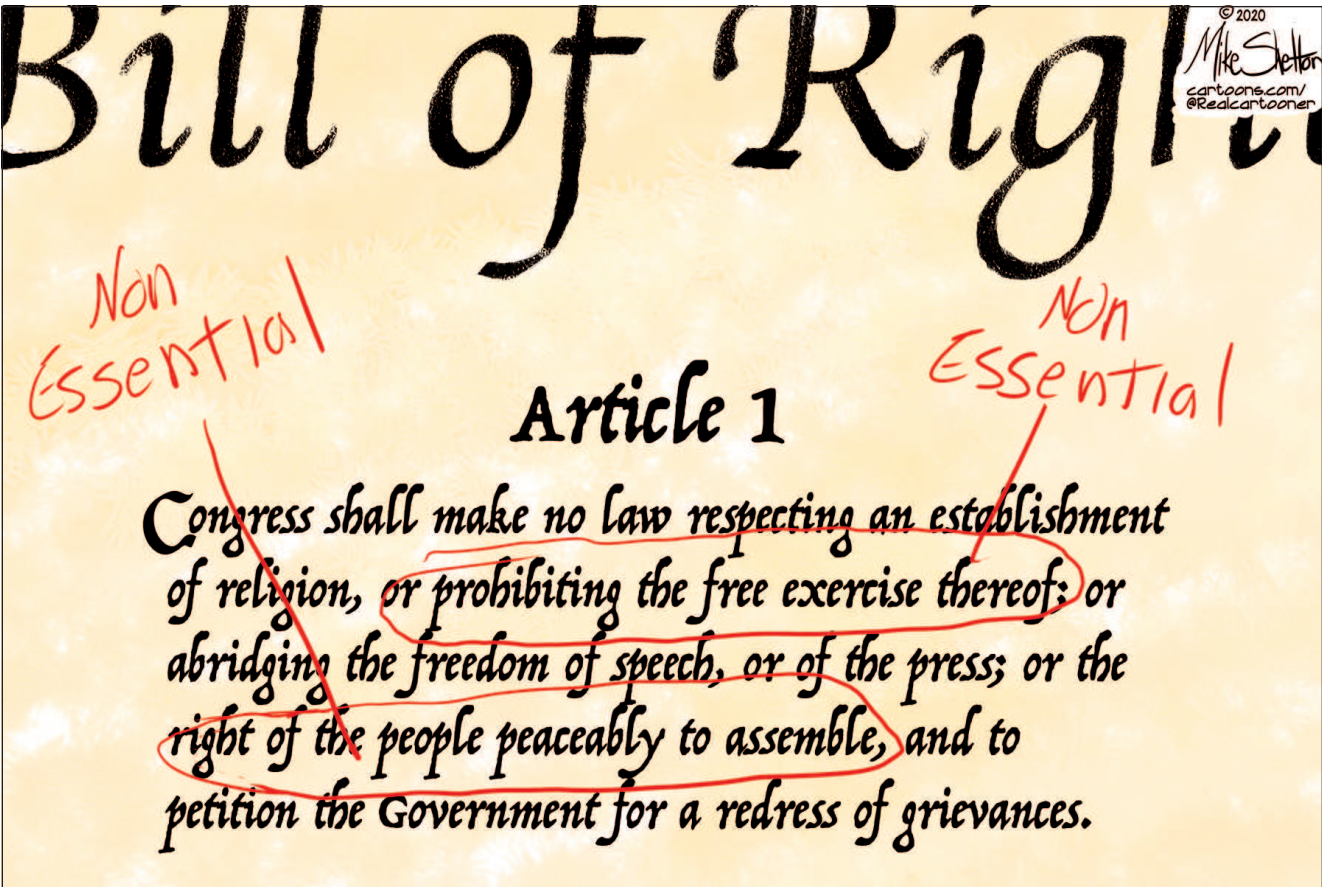
President Trump, for instance, was castigated for expressing the hope — it was hardly a promise — that restrictions could be eased significantly by Easter.

This was unrealistic — an example of Trump's antipathy for the measured rhetoric most politicians prefer. Yet just a day after the holiday, the governors of Oregon, Washington and Idaho said they will work together toward the goal of reopening their economies.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Tuesday said there is no timeline, and she emphasized that the process will happen "gradually, carefully and incrementally" and will be based on factors including the number of new cases, increased testing and the availability of personal protective equipment for health care workers.

This approach is also reasonable. It's gratifying to see officials recognize that just as they have a duty to protect the public's health, they're also obligated to end restrictions on life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, to borrow from an august document, as soon as it's reasonable to do so.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

S. John Collins' layoff a loss to the entire community

Hyperbole seems to be in high fashion at the moment. "World's biggest," "fastest ever," "like nothing you've ever seen before," etc. So it is with some caution, but with absolute conviction, that we say the loss of S. John Collins is a true loss to our entire community, the Baker City Herald, and to the Eastern Oregon Media Group.

We understand the need for all of us, individuals, businesses, and organizations, to pull together in this time of upheaval and uncertainty. It is also, however, an opportunity to re-evaluate the things we have grown accustomed to — including business practices, organizational structure, budgets, and relationships — and to consider thoughtfully the things we value most deeply. Newspapers are not exempt.

When a resource is widely recognized as "one in a million," doing away with it should be more than simply a corporate decision based solely on the bottom line. John Collins' value as an

outstanding asset is clear in any business model.

Jayson Jacoby captured the essence of John's contributions to this community and to the Baker City Herald over the past four decades (April 11, 2020, issue). Surely the smart corporate folks of Eastern Oregon Media Group can re-examine this issue. Perhaps a creative restructuring of the photographic needs of the entire corporation (not just the Baker City Herald) could result in retaining John Collins.

You know the old saying, "You never know what you've lost 'til it's gone." Bring John back!

Dave and Joyce Hunsaker
Baker City

Wear a mask if you can't maintain social distance

Earlier this week I made a shopping trip into Baker City. I wore a mask into both stores I entered. I am a retired nurse practitioner so I am aware of infection transmission. I was amazed to not see anyone with a mask on in one of the two businesses

I entered. The second one I entered had about six folks with masks. Folks, your political leanings are up to you; believe the President or not, but you do not have the right to infect the air in the store anyone else is in. Wear a mask when you can't maintain social distance. This disease is a killer.

Iva Mace
Baker City

Grocery customers need to cover their faces

Just returned from senior hours at Safeway.

The staff and clerks are doing everything they can to keep up with demand and they are doing an amazing job! Not so much all customers. Sad face. I mean two uncovered coughs and one huge sneeze. Allergies? Who knows? Since many have no symptoms before they get this disease they are putting all shoppers and store personnel at risk. So please please please think of others and cover your face.

Sherry Thomas
Baker City

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.
- Mail:** To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814
- Email:** news@bakercityherald.com

Enjoying spring's beauty in a responsible way

I went for a walk on the warmest day of the year and the mild April sunshine felt so fine on my cheeks, and so familiar, that for a few moments I could believe that this spring was proceeding in the normal way.

But then a car went by and I noticed the driver was wearing a face mask.

This sight, which a month ago would have been so atypical that I likely would have given myself a literal pain in the neck as I swiveled my head to confirm what I thought I had seen, today is commonplace.

That brief glimpse of a masked face jolted me from my daydream and into the less pleasant realm of reality.

Yet the good tidings of taking a stroll on a balmy spring afternoon lingered, and within a few blocks I felt again a surge of optimism.

I passed one yard where the sun-warmed violets spangled the new green grass with purple and perfumed the air with their inimitable aroma.

I had to duck my head a few times to avoid dangling tree limbs heavy with buds.

And when I started west toward home the great wall of the Elkhorns came suddenly into view, solidly white in a way unique to early spring, before the snow has begun



JAYSON JACOBY

to slough off the steepest spots, exposing the dark stone beneath.

I had for the first time in months left both my fleece and down jackets home, draped over one corner of our lodgepole pine bed frame. But still a thin film of sweat dampened the back of my neck.

In July this would be an unpleasant sensation. But in early April it's a benign one — you need only step into a patch of shade, or turn your back on the gentlest zephyr, to feel the instant soothing balm.

As I reached the last block it struck me that much of what I had experienced over the past hour — the violets and the sunshine and the towering mountains and the beads of sweat — was tangible proof that this virus, terrible though it is, lacks the power to sully so much that is good in the world.

Those microscopic particles can't prevent the changing of the seasons, can't impede the warmth of the westering sun after the persistent chilly period that is a Baker County winter. They can't stop the violets from blooming, can't block

the buds from erupting at the tips of the willows and the birches and the maples.

Nothing, of course, can erase the tragedy we are living through.

We can't replace the lives lost. We might struggle for many months to resurrect our economy.

Our students can't make up the hours they lost with their teachers and their classmates.

But I believe it is no small thing to be able to smell violets, to let sunshine soak into your pores, to gaze at grand peaks, aloof and massive and, from our puny perspectives, all but eternal.



When it comes to social distancing I'm akin to a 5-year-old practicing the crucial "did you look both ways?" mantra before trying to cross the street.

Or a soldier on sentry duty.

Once I leave the secure confines of my property my head is on a swivel, alert to all possible incursions on the 6-foot gap.

But it seems to me that state officials have either lost, or purposely set aside, a reasonable perspective about what's necessary to comply with this important guideline.

I received an email the other day from the Oregon COVID-19 Emergency Coordination Center-Joint

Information Center — which is enough syllables to leave somebody wheezing even if their respiratory system is otherwise hale and hearty.

The email started with this anthropomorphic admonition: "Message from the outdoors to Oregonians: stay home for now."

On its face this is sensible enough.

Staying home is indeed an effective way both to reduce your risk of being infected with coronavirus and of spreading it to others, should you be an asymptomatic carrier of the virus — as some of us undoubtedly are.

What bothers me about this message is that it's inconsistent.

Although the government is urging me to stay home and to eschew visiting the millions of acres of public land with which Oregon is so fortunately endowed, it deems acceptable "walks or jogs in your neighborhood while maintaining physical distance."

It happens that over the past month I have walked in my neighborhood on more than a dozen days (I avoid jogging unless facing an imminent attack from a snarling dog or other potentially painful encounter).

I have also hiked on several days on public land in Baker and Grant counties.

And not surprisingly, given the

difference in population densities between a city and the woods, I saw quite a lot more people when I was heeding the state's advice than when I was not.

In other words the state's suggestion made it harder, not easier, to keep my distance, as it were.

Now I understand that dispensing advice to 4 million people, in the 10th-largest state by size, is by necessity a matter of generalization, and one that can't reflect equally every circumstance.

And certainly there are places — I'm thinking here of the narrow, cliff-clinging hiking trails in the Columbia Gorge — where it would be impossible to maintain social distancing without someone having to leap to their death. And those trails happen to be within an hour's drive of the homes of a couple million people. The potential conflicts are obvious, as is the wisdom of the state's advice. I understand why the Forest Service has closed public land in the Gorge.

Still and all, I wonder whether state officials recognize that in much of Oregon, public lands are a better — which is to say easier, and safer — place to get outside and practice social distancing than a neighborhood is.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.