

EDITORIAL

Staying vigilant

Baker County just had its worst week during the coronavirus pandemic.

But our worst week wasn't very bad.

Indeed the adjective "worst" more reflects the lack of COVID-19 cases in Baker County during the pandemic — only one until June 30 — than it does the severity of the situation so far in July.

As of Friday, Baker County's case total was 10. Nine of those have been reported in the past 11 days.

Just six of Oregon's 35 other counties have had fewer cases.

No one has died from the virus in Baker County.

And as far as we can tell based on the limited details available, nobody is hospitalized for treatment, either.

Nor is there any evidence that the outbreaks in two of our neighboring counties — Union, with 368 cases, and Malheur, with 286 infections — has spread here in any significant way, if at all.

Five of the nine cases reported in Baker County during July are all U.S. Forest Service employees who have spent a lot of time in a single home. They, and another 13 co-workers, self-isolated to reduce the risk of infecting others.

All this is to the good.

But the danger is not over. Indeed, the percentage of people who test positive has increased recently. During the period June 28-July 5, of those Oregonians tested, 5.3% were positive. That's the highest weekly percentage since late March and early April.

We need to continue to practice social distancing and to wear face masks when we patronize local businesses. The organizers of large gatherings planned later this summer should emphasize those precautions to people who attend.

Would that our recent "worst" week retain that dubious title for the remainder of the pandemic.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Wearing a mask is a matter of science, not politics

I wish to defend Tom Wilcoxson's right to not wear a face mask, as he so passionately proclaimed in his letter to the editor on July 7.

Yes, Tom, you have that right and I will defend it to the death as long as you stay 6 feet away from me. The only reason I wear the stupid uncomfortable thing is because I respect you, Tom, as well as all of my fellow humans. I am pretty sure all the spouted negatives of mask wearing have been dashed by, of all things, scientific fact. Why so many people want to turn a simple mask into a political statement baffles me. It's just a mask. A

mask that has been proven to slow the spread of viruses. A mask that will help protect everyone, not just the more vulnerable, from sickness and, in a worse case scenario, death. A mask that shows respect for others.

I equally defend the person (you mentioned Tom) taking video and shaming non-mask wearers. I disagree with those tactics, because, again, it turns a simple protective piece of cloth into something it is not — but I will die defending his right to do it. I am positive that no one is going to hold you down Tom and force a mask onto your face but if I see that happening I will pull them off of you. I will be wearing a mask though and will pray you won't

see me as a "hater" trying to "shove" my agenda on you.

Today (July 7) I learned of a 62-year-old man who died last Thursday from complications of coronavirus in La Grande. I have no clue as to your age Tom but I'm 68 and overweight so while retaining your God given right to not wear a mask please stay 6 feet away from me, that's all I ask.

I disagree with your premise that we are all just Americans. That would be true in a perfect world where we were all treated with the same rights and respect but alas ...

Peace to all.

Mike Meyer
Baker City

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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.

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; walden.house.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.

Civil War football and the lure of half-truths

Football, it scarcely needs to be said, is not war.

The sport has borrowed quite a number of terms from actual combat, to be sure.

But linemen, no matter how violent their collisions, are not actually "in the trenches."

They are in no danger of being eviscerated by an artillery shell or picked off by a sniper.

Quarterbacks, regardless of how far they can heave the ball, do not throw actual bombs.

We understand all this implicitly. Just as we understand that the term "Civil War," which has been applied to the annual football game pitting the University of Oregon against Oregon State University for nearly a century, and more recently to other athletic contests between the two schools both built on the banks of the Willamette River, is not a literal reference to the American Civil War.

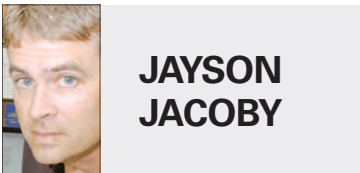
At least I thought this was patently obvious.

But recently U of O president Michael Schill and OSU president Ed Ray announced that the universities will no longer refer to their rivalry games as the "Civil War."

In a statement, Ray acknowledged that the term was "not intended as reference to the actual Civil War."

He said the universities agreed to drop the moniker anyway because it "represents a connection to a war fought to perpetuate slavery."

This is perhaps the ultimate example of a half-truth. Those always fascinate me, but never more so than when they're proffered in



defense of a decision based on the flimsiest of logical foundations.

Ray could as well have said that the Civil War was fought not to perpetuate slavery, but to end that inhumane practice.

Which of course it was.

And which of course it did.

The good people won.

The bigots lost.

Righteousness prevailed.

That's historical fact.

But it's also, according to Ray himself, an irrelevant fact when it comes to sporting events between two universities that are a couple thousand miles from the nearest battlefield of the actual Civil War.

The term "Civil War" is not the exclusive domain of the conflict between the Union and the Confederacy fought from 1861-65, after all.

In the case of the Ducks and the Beavers the name reflects that the universities are just 40 miles apart and that, besides the aquatic habitats their mascots prefer, they have much else in common, including thousands of Oregon families who over the generations have had members attend one of the schools.

I graduated from the U of O.

I'm not angry about the universities' joint decision to end the "Civil War" tradition.

I'll continue to use that term when I'm talking about the games, and I daresay a majority of fans will

as well.

But I will also remain perplexed by the flawed premise behind the decision by Schill and Ray.

Most particularly I'm bothered by Ray's comment about avoiding the term because it "represents a connection to a war fought to perpetuate slavery" even while he concedes that there is no actual connection.

That he qualified his statement by saying no connection was "intended" is, to me, irrelevant.

I sincerely hope that neither Ray nor Schill would condone altering their respective universities' history curriculum to somehow sanitize their examinations of the actual American Civil War.

Yet Ray seems to contend that some people infer not only a connection to the real war, but that somehow the universities' use of the term implies that they endorse slavery.

If applying the generic term "civil war" to sporting events is offensive to some, then I can't see how teaching college students about the real war, in which one side fought to preserve the obnoxious practice of slavery, wouldn't also at least have the potential to cause some of them discomfort as well.

I concede that there is a vast difference between two universities changing the nickname of their athletic rivalry on the one hand, and revising how they teach about actual, and immensely important, historical events on the other.

Which is to say, it's much easier to justify the former than the latter. And as I said, I've heard nothing to suggest that either university is seeking to censor actual history.

Yet I also hold to the notion that the presidents of public universities have an obligation to apply sound reasoning to their decisions, even when those decisions involve something as comparatively trifling as games.

And in the case of the Civil War sports rivalry I find Schill's and Ray's premise far too flaccid to be persuasive.

Because to accept their premise I must believe not only that any reference to "Civil War" invariably means the American Civil War but also that this reference constitutes a defense, if not a celebration of, the cause of the Confederacy, even if this connection is merely inferred by an unknown number of people.

There I will not — indeed can not — go.

To do so, it seems to me, would be tantamount to concluding that we also ought to avoid references to World War II because, to borrow from Ray, those references represent a connection to a war fought to perpetuate fascism and to complete the extermination of European Jews.

Instead, of course, we celebrate World War II, and we honor those who fought and died during that terrible conflict, because our cause was just and because we were victorious.

The difference in the American Civil War is that both victors and vanquished were Americans. But that doesn't change the basic equation, which is that the forces of good prevailed in 1865, just as they would do 80 years later.

But again, the key point here is that none of this military history

has anything to do with football games between the U of O and OSU. I don't believe there is now, or ever has been, a scintilla of evidence in the Ducks-Beavers Civil War series that suggests the term has anything to do with slavery, much less that it constitutes an endorsement of slavery.

The futility of this gesture by Schill and Ray strikes me as especially noteworthy because it stands in such contrast to another recent, and related, decision, this one specific to the U of O.

Schill announced earlier in June that the oldest building on the Eugene campus would no longer be called Deady Hall.

Quite unlike the civil war name, this connection, and the reason it is offensive, are explicit. The building was named for Matthew Deady, Oregon's first federal judge and first president of the university's board of regents.

Deady was also a blatant racist who advocated banning Blacks from settling in Oregon.

Removing his name from a campus building is appropriate — a recognition that the university ought not continue to bestow such an honor on the legacy of a man with such obnoxious beliefs, no matter that he also made significant contributions to the university.

But there is no parallel case to be made for doing away with a generic term applied to games in which bragging rights for alumni are at stake, but not lives.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.