

EDITORIAL

Name the city's top candidate

We know it's likely that either Steve Ashworth or Jonathan Cannon will be the new Baker City manager.

We also know that the City Council prefers one of the two.

What we don't know is whether Cannon or Ashworth is the Council's top choice.

We should know.

The City Council had the legal authority, under Oregon's Public Meetings Law, to discuss the three city manager candidates — councilors dropped Scott McClure from contention — during an executive session, which was closed to the public, on Tuesday, Nov. 17.

Councilors also rightly reconvened in a public session after that discussion to announce that they had authorized Mayor Loran Joseph to negotiate with one of the two finalists, and also with the other if the first negotiation didn't yield a tentative contract to bring to the Council for approval.

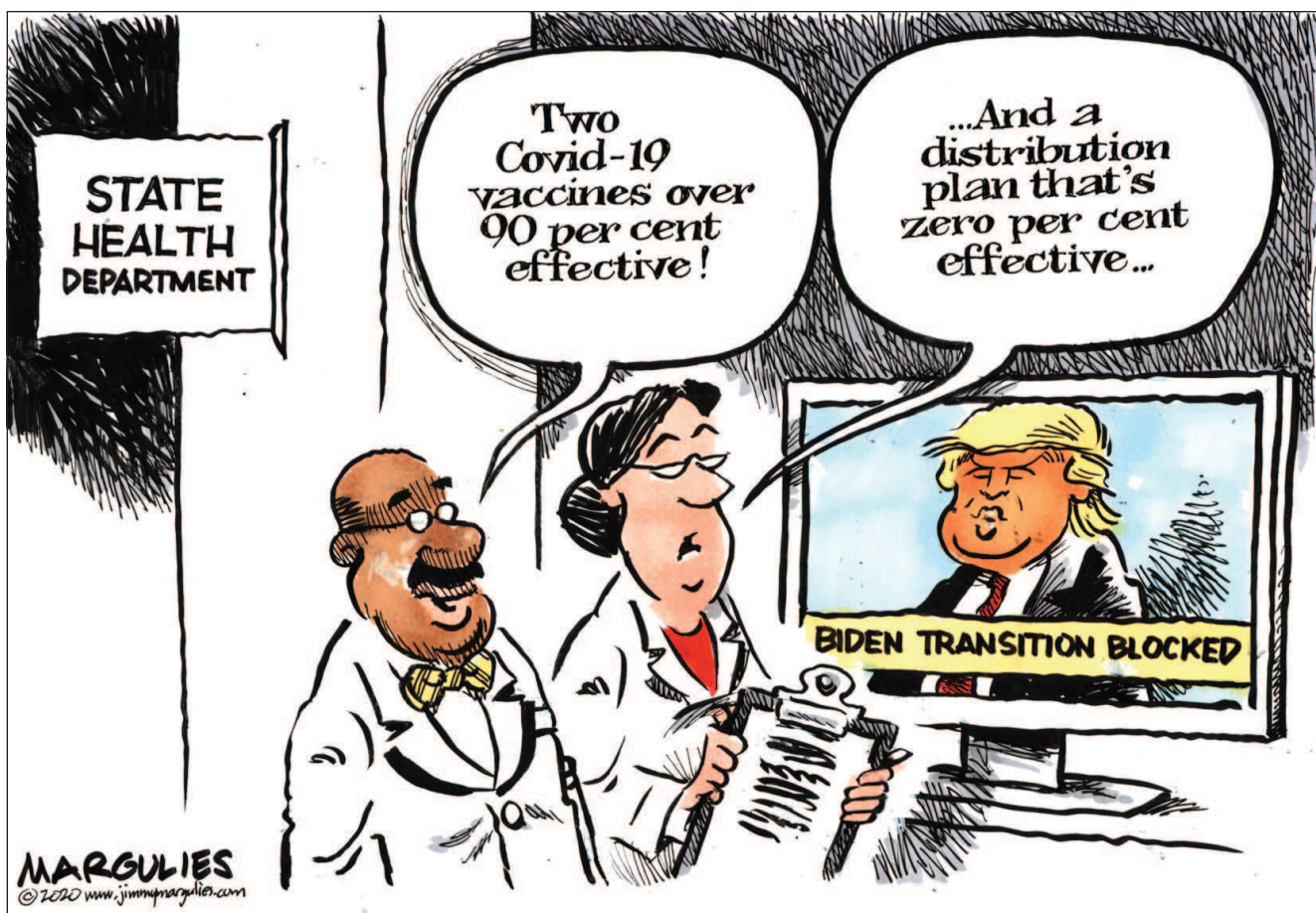
When the Herald asked Joseph which of the pair he'll be negotiating with initially, he said the Council didn't want to reveal its preference because "they were so close that we would feel comfortable with either of these two candidates and what we don't want to do is to create any hard feelings."

This isn't the election of a high school student body president.

Ashworth and Cannon are vying for a job that likely will have an annual salary between \$100,000 and \$115,000. It's farfetched to believe that if Joseph can't reach a tentative agreement with one candidate, then the other would turn down the job solely because he wasn't quite the Council's top choice.

Baker City residents shouldn't have to resort to guessing which of the two candidates their elected representatives most want to hire.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Trump's troop reductions too hasty

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:

President Donald Trump has decided to end his presidency with a flourish by withdrawing many of the U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq. The drawdown, announced Tuesday by acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller, is alarmingly abrupt, and it pre-empts what should have been a decision by President-elect Joe Biden.

The announced reduction in U.S. troops in Afghanistan is especially troubling. The U.S. has more than 4,500 forces training and advising the Afghan military and engaging in counterterrorism operations there. Trump plans to cut that number to 2,500, after suggesting last month that all of the troops would be home by Christmas. Meanwhile, U.S. forces in Iraq will be reduced from 3,000 to 2,500. The target date for the reductions is Jan. 15, five days before Biden is sworn in.

We oppose a sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan, but not because we believe U.S. forces should remain perpetually in that country. We welcomed

the Trump administration's willingness to negotiate with the Taliban. In February, those talks produced a tentative agreement linking withdrawal of remaining U.S. forces to a commitment by the Taliban to prevent al-Qaida, Islamic State and other militant groups from using Afghan territory to launch attacks on the United States.

However, further negotiations, including those between the Taliban and the Afghan government, have been halting and not very productive. Trump's drawdown would deprive the U.S. and the Afghan government of leverage in those talks. A rushed troop cut also could leave U.S. bases in Afghanistan vulnerable to being overrun.

Trump acted after firing Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, who reportedly wrote a memo opposing drastic troop reductions, pointing to continuing violence, potential dangers to remaining troops and an adverse effect on the peace negotiations. The president also disregarded advice from the secretary-general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization — an alliance that has played a key role in

Afghanistan — and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

It's understandable that, almost two decades after U.S. forces were deployed to Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Americans would tire of this commitment, even though the number of U.S. troops there now is minuscule compared with the 100,000 deployed in 2010. Regardless of what happens in the negotiations with the Taliban, the U.S. might eventually decide to remove remaining troops from Afghanistan and explore other ways to protect this nation from terrorists who might seek to operate there.

But that decision should be made by Biden, who, echoing Trump, has talked about ending "forever wars." And it should be made deliberately and in a way that doesn't suggest political calculation. Given Trump's pattern of confusing his political interests with those of the U.S., it's hard to resist the suspicion that this decision is designed primarily to allow him to claim that he brought the troops home and pocket that accomplishment for a possible presidential campaign in 2024.

Feeling a chill wind blow during the 'freeze'

For the first time I have cause to wonder whether I might come under the scrutiny of the police, and solely because a couple of cars are parked in my driveway that aren't normally there.

It is a queer feeling.

Unsettling.

The comfortable cloak of security that all responsible and law-abiding citizens have a right to wear suddenly seems to me a threadbare garment, the chill wind slithering through gaps in the frayed fabric.

It is as if I have awakened in a place which seems superficially the same, except I understand that this is not quite so.

It is a place where a passerby, rather than casting a slightly jealous eye at the neighbor's landscaping skill, instead feels compelled to count the number of faces briefly glimpsed behind a lighted window.

A place where the holiday season is marked not by amity and congeniality but by suspicion and bitterness.

Already I feel nostalgic for the era when the biggest problem likely to happen during Thanksgiving dinner was that that one uncle — and every family has one — would quaff a couple too many cans of Keystone Light and start cursing at the TV because the Cowboys were down by three touchdowns.

This year a person could end up with his name on a misdemeanor citation because somebody dropped by unexpectedly while the pumpkin pie was being sliced.

I suspect the whipped cream wouldn't taste quite so luscious if



JAYSON JACOBY

you were looking at 30 days in jail and a fine of \$1,250, penalties that Gov. Kate Brown says she has the emergency authority to impose under the guise of thwarting the coronavirus.

That's better than a bout with botulism from a bad can of peas, I suppose.

But only barely.

I'm not especially worried about having my dinner interrupted by an official knock on the door from a police officer checking to see if guest numbers comport with what the governor has deemed proper.

My family, which numbers considerably more than six when its various branches congregate, canceled our annual gathering at Sunriver. It's a Thanksgiving tradition that started when The Knack's "My Sharona" was still getting regular radio play, when the Empire had only recently struck back but before the Jedi had returned.

(I'm sure I could think of other pop culture references to indicate how venerable this holiday celebration is, but that trio apparently tops my memory's list when I think of 1980.)

My own driveway scarcely has room for one additional car so I'm not likely to attract unwanted interest during the 2-week "freeze" that the governor has decreed will continue through at least Dec. 2.

But this episode of the government flexing its beefy regulatory muscles still troubles me.

I have a boundless affinity for America, and for its fundamental principles that elevate the individual over the government. And so when I sense that this foundation, which has served us so well for nearly two and a half centuries, is perhaps not so solid as I believed it to be, I feel a cold dread. I expect I would feel much the same if I were sitting in a waiting room and the doctor walked in, holding an X-ray and looking grave.

We are not living in ordinary times, of course. Pestilence lies heavy on our land, and I give the viral scourge the respect I believe it deserves.

It is all well to quote the fatality rates.

But I am not altogether comforted by the notion that people I love have, say, a 2% chance of dying from a disease none of us had heard of a year ago.

Because a year ago there was no chance at all that they would die from this disease. And zero happens to be the only odds, in this context, that I can treat with equanimity.

And so I endorse and practice the precautions that have become as familiar as the admonitions to brush our teeth twice a day and cut back on the saturated fat.

I keep my distance from people outside my circle of family when possible.

I wear a mask when it's not possible or when it's required, as in businesses.

But these are buildings frequented by the public, and with the commensurate responsibilities required of patrons.

Our homes are different.

Or anyway they're supposed to be.

A business can tell me to leave if I refuse to wear shoes.

But in my home I can wander around barefoot all day.

A more appropriate analogy, as related to Oregon's current COVID-19 restrictions, is that the government doesn't allow me to stroll around public parks with a beer in my hand, but I'm free to have a bottle of suds in my backyard.

I understand the argument that the pandemic changes everything, that in matters of life and death the usual standards no longer apply.

But I look around, with a wide view, and I see no compelling evidence to support this notion.

The threat from COVID-19 is not dangerous enough to warrant the government significantly restricting access to grocery stores, much less closing them. But if seven people gather in my dining room to demolish the roasted bird then a violation has occurred, and the government has cause to detain me and take some of my money.

The consensus among police agencies seems to be that they're alerted to potential violations they intend to educate residents about the restrictions rather than dole out punishments.

Police certainly will field reports. Only the most naïve person could

believe that there aren't among us those who would sprain a finger in their haste to dial the police when they see half a dozen rigs parked across the street.

But I don't much care if police never cite anyone for being a bit too hospitable during the holidays.

The issue isn't whether the government punishes people for exceeding an arbitrary limit with their guest list, it's that the government has asserted that it can do so.

We can get over the virus.

The vast majority of those infected recover. Our bodies are amazingly resilient vessels, our cells capable of replicating, and in some cases they can repair damage inflicted by invaders.

And of course we have brains that allow us to create vaccines that make our already formidable immune systems even more robust.

But I'm not so sanguine about the likelihood of healing wounds that are deeper than physical, that are beyond the bounds of medicine.

I fear that the boundary between the government and the citizen secure in his home, once pierced, will be difficult and perhaps impossible to rebuild.

I fear that many of us have lost forever the certainty that some rights are inviolate, the confidence that in our homes, unique among the spaces we inhabit, we can feel that immeasurable sense of security of being in the place that is ours alone.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.