

EDITORIAL

Holidays
still worth
celebrating

At least we won't shiver.

Small consolation, to be sure, for the loss of yet another beloved Baker City tradition, the Twilight Christmas Parade and Tree-Lighting Ceremony.

Most of us, no doubt, would gladly endure the chill of an early December evening to watch the brightly illuminated floats slowly roll down Main Street, Christmas carols blaring and costumed people waving, and then eagerly await the moment when the dark tree in the Court Street Plaza suddenly gleams.

We would have been happy as well to deal with the summer heat while enjoying the Miners Jubilee and Shrine parades, watching cowboys try to stay astride bucking broncs and bulls, and seeing some of Oregon's best high school football players compete at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium.

The pandemic has deprived us of many of Baker County's cherished community celebrations in 2020. This dismal list includes events that traditionally usher in the Christmas season, including the tour of parlors in historic homes, the 4-H Bazaar and the aforementioned parade and tree-lighting ceremony.

But we ought not let the viral scourge infect our holiday spirit during what's supposed to be a joyous time.

Baker City is still a pretty bright place these days, with dozens of homes festooned with lights and other decorations. Take a drive one of these nights to see how creative your neighbors have been. Better still, divide the town into several sections and focus on one each night. The Chamber of Commerce has set up a lighting contest through Dec. 15. See details on the Chamber's Facebook page.

The Community Christmas Tree on Court Street still will be lighted every night through the end of the year.

In lieu of the annual parlor tour, CASA of Eastern Oregon (Court-Appointed Special Advocates, volunteers who help children) is inviting residents to decorate a porch, fence, walkway or yard. A driving tour map will be available starting Saturday, Dec. 5, at <https://casaeo.org/>, and paper copies will be available at the CASA office, 1937 Washington Ave.

CASA is also sponsoring a gingerbread house contest and scavenger hunt from Dec. 5 to Dec. 31. More information available at the website.

The 4-H Christmas Bazaar won't happen as usual at the Fairgrounds, but you can still buy local arts and crafts, food and other items through the online bazaar. It goes live on Friday, Dec. 4. The website is <https://hauserk3.wixsite.com/bakerbazaar>. Shoppers can scroll through the vendors and click to contact the seller to arrange payment and pick up of the items.

Remember, too, that this is an ideal time to support local businesses, including restaurants, that have suffered greatly due to restrictions intended to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Picking up a takeout meal would be a fine way to conclude a tour of local Christmas lights.

This strangest of years is almost over, and its end won't be lamented. But that doesn't mean we don't have much to celebrate.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Biden as ‘Empathizer-in-Chief’

Barring the nearly but not wholly unimaginable (it has been a crazy year), or an act of God, Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. will be sworn in as the 46th president of the United States in a few short weeks.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 rages and so do the heathen — all of us, left, right and center. We are angry, jumpy and generally alienated from each other.

The presidency is an impossible job anyway — structurally, politically, symbolically — and ideally should be broken down into parts and pieces and delegated out.

But that isn't going to happen, at least not on the main stage.

Biden will face not just an impossible job but an angry and heartsick country.

We are not only divided, but we have lost faith, in the system and in each other.

Perhaps only Franklin Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln faced rougher seas.

One thing Biden has going for him is a practical and deep understanding of the office of the presidency and its operational as well as political complexities.

That's a very good thing. To the extent that it is possible, he will delegate and he will surround himself with competence.

With competence, unfortunately, often comes arrogance. Some of the folks around President Barack Obama were very smart. But as a friend of mine, a longtime Washington correspondent, told me years ago: In Washington, everyone is smart, just ask any one of them.

What is really needed is wariness and a measure of humility.

That's another good thing about Joe Biden: He does not think he is the smartest guy in the room.

As a creature of Congress, he will respect Congress, even when he is at odds with Republican senators, for,

again, he understands Congress and its members.

But the best thing about Joe Biden, and I am far from the first to say so, is his empathy.

He has suffered, mightily, in his life. So he really does feel the pain of others. And he really does see all Americans as family — all of us bound to each other.

Thus, we are obliged to listen to each other and help each other.

If Obama was the Visionary-in-Chief and Ronald Reagan was the Great Communicator, Biden will be the Empathizer-in-Chief.

It sounds nice after a president who was a pit bull capable of much, but incapable of empathy.

But can it work? Can we progress under a Great Empathizer — Fred Rogers as the most powerful man in the world?

I am of two minds.

In an immediate and measurable way, mostly not.

Biden says he wants us to heal. I doubt the left or right are ready to try.

He wants an era of good feeling in Washington — on the Hill and between the parties. This will not happen on things like a Green New Deal. But it is possible on things like infrastructure and Social Security reform and maybe even immigration. It was always possible. Cooperation happens every day in Washington, on the lesser stages.

One key to Biden's success will be his Cabinet and sub-Cabinet. (And the first signs are comforting.) If he picks mostly old pros and pragmatists, a lot can get done. If he goes all woke and precious and tries to create another New Deal or Great Society, Washington's dysfunction will only deepen.

For we don't really need new programs and “answers” and initiatives and taxes. We need something far more important — something a president can help us achieve. We need a restoration of values, and faith in those values.

Here Biden can make a difference. The model is not FDR, but Dwight Eisenhower.

Let us rest and renew ourselves.

Give us a break from politics and the presidency. Be the president, Joe Biden. But also let the country be.

If you travel the country's back roads as I just did for a few days, you see that America is still intact. Families still take care of each other; teachers still turn on the lightbulb in students' minds, people still hunt, and fish, and watch football, and cook, and work on old cars, and pray on their knees on Sundays.

We're actually OK. We just need to escape the blue and the red and the fulminating haters on TV and social media for a while.

The other model for Biden is Biden. Just be what you were during the campaign, sir — a national grandpa, who knows how government works and can forge a compromise, but, most of all, believes empathy equals patriotism.

Wearing a mask and social distancing, says Biden, are acts of civic piety — and brotherhood.

This kind of Biden presidency can succeed. Because the president is not, in the end, primarily the master legislator or reformer. He is the caretaker of the American ideal and the American ethos.

Biden did not really run on issues. He ran on restoring the nation's soul. He should stick with that — the theme that got him nominated and elected.

When he talks about the dignity of every American, reminds us that we can be adversaries without being enemies, and ends every speech with “May God protect our troops,” he is edging us toward restoration.

A presidency based on American values, rediscovered and restored, is worth a try.

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Letters to the editor

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- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information

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- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

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OTHER VIEWS

Janet Yellen an excellent choice as treasury secretary

Editorial from The New York Daily News:

It makes headlines but is ultimately of no moment that Janet Yellen will, when confirmed, become the nation's first female secretary of the treasury, just as she was the first female chair of the Federal Reserve. Women filling government's top jobs is inching ever closer to becoming simply the norm.

What matters about Yellen — born and bred in Bay Ridge, Jewish daughter of a schoolteacher and doctor, valedictorian at Fort Hamilton High — is that she is a bril-

liant economist and public policy tactician, a believer in aggressive government intervention who knows how to move both fiscal and monetary levers to goose business expansion and job growth.

She will have to draw on that expertise immediately to help craft and champion robust stimulus measures that can get an economy walloped by a historically horrible pandemic, in which millions remain unemployed, back on solid footing.

“There is a huge amount of suffering out

there,” Yellen said in late September. “The economy needs the spending.” Amen; this is no time for handwringing about deficits and debt.

Though Yellen hails from the left side of the ledger ideologically, she is more opportunistic than doctrinaire, and more power to her. A few years ago, progressives may have thrallled to Elizabeth Warren's inquisition of Yellen for supposedly having done too little to lay the groundwork for the breakup of big banks.

Today, out-of-work Americans don't have the luxury of resting on easy ideology. They need pragmatic plans to rescue sectors knocked flat on their backs. They need aid rushed to cities and states — like Yellen's hometown, New York — and help for renters soon to be on the business end of eviction orders.

In tapping Yellen, Joe Biden enlists a battle-ready economic general to develop and execute strategies equal to the national crisis. Fight, fight, fight.