

Resident urges people to not toss federal stimulus aid into the trash

By Jayson Jacoby
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Cherie Ward considered tossing the envelope into the trash.

It would have been the most valuable piece of garbage in the sack.

The piece of mail that arrived Saturday, Jan. 9, actually contained a Visa card that was preloaded with the federal pandemic stimulus payment to Cherie and her husband, Bob, who live in Baker City.

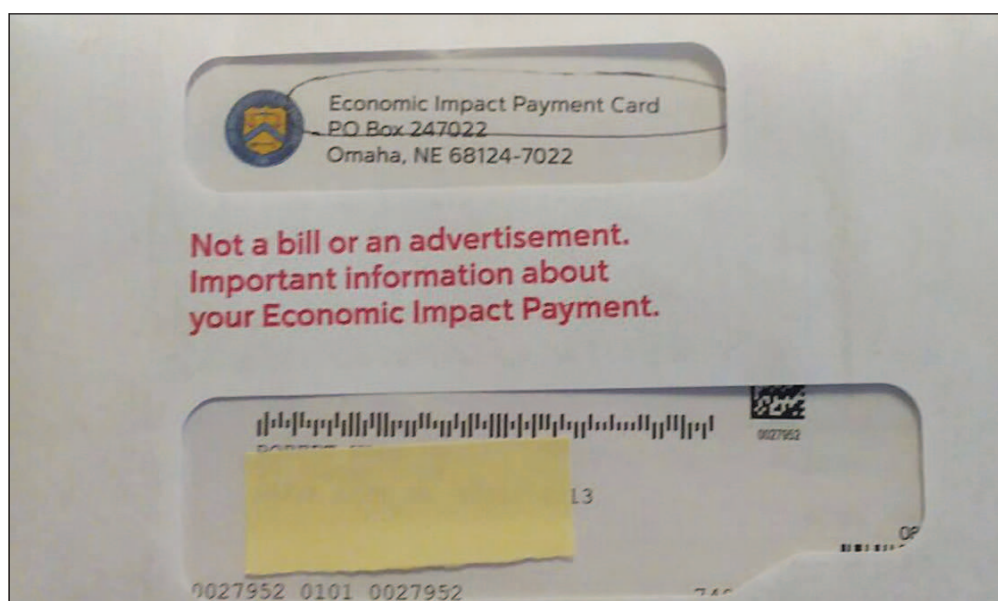
Cherie Ward said her initial thought was that the envelope contained a credit card offer.

"The kind you get all the time and that you throw away," she said.

But she was intrigued by the phrase "Economic Impact Payment," which was printed in two places.

Ward said she read the letter inside but was still skeptical, considering the prevalence of credible-looking scams.

For one thing, she said the couple's first federal payment



Cherie Ward/ Contributed Photo

This is the envelope Cherie and Bob Ward of Baker City received Saturday, Jan. 9. It contained a Visa card with their federal pandemic stimulus payment.

last spring was a direct deposit to their bank account.

"To get a Visa card in the mail is strange," Ward said.

Only after consulting the AARP website and calling her bank was Ward satisfied that the mail was legitimate. She and her husband called to activate the card.

Ward emailed the Herald Monday morning because she was concerned other residents would receive the same envelope and throw it away.

According to the IRS, the debit cards are intended to speed payments to Americans. Some people who received a check or a direct deposit this spring got the card this time.

In all, the IRS said it will mail about 8 million debit cards this month. People who don't receive a check or a direct deposit should watch their mail carefully for an envelope containing the card.

Unlike the cards mailed last spring, these envelopes include the Treasury Department seal.

Pair arrested on felony charges after traffic stop

A Baker City man and a Huntington woman were arrested Jan. 5 on felony charges after an Oregon State Police officer stopped them for an alleged traffic violation about 4 p.m.

Trooper Dakotah Keys made the stop on Highway 30 when he noticed a Chevrolet pickup

truck that was failing to drive within its lane, he wrote in his daily media log. The driver, who Keys said initially provided a false identity, was later identified as Derrick Lamont Dodge, 42, of Baker City, who had an outstanding Oregon State Parole Board warrant for his arrest. Keys said he

found methamphetamine and items of drug distribution after searching Dodge. He found drug paraphernalia and a firearm in a search of the vehicle.

Dodge was jailed on the parole violation charge and cited on charges of identity theft, felony possession of methamphetamine, delivery of

methamphetamine and failure to appear on a felony citation.

Dodge's passenger, Lacey Dawn Kolb, 39, of Huntington, was lodged in the Baker County Jail on a probation detainer and cited on charges of giving false information to a police officer and possession of a firearm by a felon.

RISK LEVEL

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Brown owns two of those businesses, Barley Brown's Brew Pub, and Tap House.

Brown said Monday that moving back from the high-risk category to extreme would not only cut into his potential business, but also force him to reduce his workforce just two weeks after he was able to rehire several employees.

"It's incredibly frustrating for us as operators, but it's just as frustrating for the employees," Brown said.

He said that on Saturday, Jan. 9, his brew pub, despite being limited to no more than 50 people including employees and customers, did a steady business.

He had 10 employees working that day.

But Brown said that if the county returns to the extreme-risk category and is limited to takeout meals — as was the case in Baker County from Dec. 3-31 — he'll only need three to four employees.

As a county with a population between 15,000 and 30,000 (Baker County has about 16,800 residents), Baker will be in the extreme-risk category if it exceeds either of two measurements:

- a test positivity rate of 10% or higher during a two-week measuring period
- 60 or more new cases over the two-week measuring period

The county's risk level, for Jan. 15-28,

will be decided based on COVID-19 figures from Dec. 27 through Jan. 9.

Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, said on Monday morning that she tallied 87 new cases during that two-week period.

That includes 25 cases among inmates at the Powder River Correctional Facility in Baker City. Those cases aren't counted toward the county's total if the inmate infections would push the county into a higher risk category.

But even after deducting the Powder River cases, the county's two-week total remains above the threshold for the extreme-risk designation, Staten said.

Bennett also said that the county's test positivity rate likely will exceed 10% for the period.

Based on data from the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), the county's positivity rate was 15.7% from Dec. 27 through Jan. 9.

However, neither Bennett nor Staten could confirm whether those totals included test results from the free testing clinic that happened Jan. 6 in Baker City.

Staten said 86 county residents were tested during the five-hour event, and two of those tested positive.

But even if those results were not included in the OHA total they wouldn't drop the county's positivity rate below 10% for the measurement period.

Bennett said he has asked officials in Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's office to

consider changing the standards so that Baker County, despite likely exceeding the thresholds by small margins, doesn't move back to the extreme-risk level just two weeks after moving down.

Bennett said the only response he has received from the state is that there is no provision in the current regulations to allow an exemption.

Staten, along with public health administrators in five other rural counties, recently sent a letter to the state asking to make the high-risk category the highest level of restrictions, which would mean restaurants could continue to have limited indoor dining, and fitness centers and museums could also open with occupancy limits.

Staten said state officials have not made any decision about the administrators' request.

Bennett said he believes it's "too hard" on county businesses to shift from one set of restrictions to another every two weeks.

"It's total chaos in the hospitality industry," Bennett said. "And that's too mild a term for what it's causing."

Brown agreed.

Planning to operate a restaurant, including buying food and scheduling employees, is difficult, he said, when one day you serve diners inside and the next you're limited to takeout.

"We don't operate like a light switch," Brown said.

COUNCIL

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Due to COVID-19 restrictions, attendance inside City Hall is limited, and people are required to wear face masks.

Although the public notice for tonight's meeting from City Recorder Katie LaFavor states that this evening's Council meeting will take place via Zoom, with limited space for the public and the press, several councilors said they planned to attend in person.

In an email to LaFavor, Perry wrote: "I think it is VERY IMPORTANT that the first meeting with this many new council members be in person at City Hall!!! There should be plenty of room for six foot distancing. We have done it in the past."

In a response to Perry, LaFavor wrote: "We are in the midst of a pandemic, and OSHA has required masks be mandatory while inside city hall. Some new Council has expressed that they, or family members and friends who wish to

attend, are unable or simply prefer not to wear masks, and that is ok. We are trying to be respectful and accommodating by offering oaths outside. There are certain communities in Oregon who are strictly virtual, oaths included."

McQuisten, in an email to LaFavor, echoed Perry's point.

"It's critical for Council Chambers, and therefore our local government process, to be as fully open and transparent to the public as possible," McQuisten wrote. "This means every public meeting, in my opinion, should see those Chambers open to Council and to the citizenry. It is true that certain other cities have

chosen differently, but I've found that has little bearing on what's right. Livestreams do not allow the public to fully interact with their own government. Zoom is an excellent alternative, which I think should also be kept in place for Council members and members of the public who either can't or don't wish to attend in person."

Alderson and Sells both said they prefer to have councilors meet in person this evening.

Councilors, in addition to having their first meeting with newly hired City Manager Jonathan Cannon, will elect from among their ranks a new mayor and vice mayor.

APPLIANCES & MORE

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OBITUARIES

Continued from Page 2A

Agnes Heck

Baker City, 1936-2021

For those who would like to make a donation in memory of Agnes, the family suggests either Memory Lane (outdoor bench), the Alzheimer's Association or St. Francis de Sales Cathedral through Tami's Pine Valley Funeral Home & Cremation Services, P.O. Box 543, Halfway, OR 97834. Online condolences can be made at www.tamis-pinevalleyfuneralhome.com

Robert Vancil

Formerly of North Powder, 1939-2021

Robert M. Vancil, 81, a former North Powder resident, died Dec. 29, 2020, after a battle with cancer.

Services for Bob will be announced at a later date.

Bob was born on Aug. 22, 1939, at Walla Walla, Washington, to Marvin and Merna Vancil. Bob is best remembered as someone who approached everything he did with enthusiasm and a positive attitude.

While growing up, Bob lived in various small towns in Eastern Oregon, including Enterprise, Arlington and North Powder. He graduated from Powder Valley High School in North Powder and attended Oregon State College before graduating from Eastern Oregon College with his teaching degree. It was there he met his future wife, Judy, and they were married in August 1961. After a brief sojourn to Maine, they returned to Oregon for him to teach Social Studies in junior high and high school in the Oregon City School District. He remained a teacher in Oregon City until he retired in 1998 and moved to Eagle Crest near Redmond, where he continued to be active for many years.

Church life was a constant for Bob, whether at Oregon City First Presbyterian Church or at Redmond Community Presbyterian Church. He was active in leadership and serving in both locations.

Bob loved to travel. He took many students through the People to People program to several European countries, including some behind the former Iron Curtain. In one instance they went to locations in the USSR, but the next year those same locations were in Russia. Later, he traveled with Judy to many other places, such as Australia, New Zealand, and Croatia, making many friends along the way.

Sports and activities were an important part of Bob's life, whether playing golf or basketball with his family, sailing on rivers, watching his kids and grandkids perform, or rooting for his Oregon State Beavers. While teaching, he often served as athletic director at the schools, and was a strong advocate for the growth of girls' sports.

Bob also tried his hand at artistic endeavors, including painting and writing. Bob published his first book in 2019, "April and My Classmates," which looked back at growing up in small towns in Eastern Oregon. His next book, a novel, is now with the editor and to be published in the future.

Bob will be greatly missed by his family and many friends.

He is survived by his wife of nearly 60 years, Judy; his three children, Michael (Diane), Steve (Linda) and Karen; his four grandchildren, Andrew (Helen), Mason, Anna and Paige; and his sisters, Lynne Adams of La Grande and Dana Copenhaver of Burns.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Marvin and Merna Vancil; and his brother, Donald.

In lieu of flowers, please make donations to the Community Presbyterian Church of Redmond Youth Group (info@redmondpc.org) or the St. Charles (Bend) Hospice Care (<https://foundation.stcharleshealthcare.org>).

VISITORS

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During the Jan. 6 meeting, Commission Chairman Bill Harvey noted that the Chamber of Commerce's visitors center is "open full hours as requested by the TLT board and they have hired some other part-time staff ..."

Anthony Lakes has proposed to operate a visitors center at The Trailhead, its ski and bike shop on Main Street in downtown Baker City.

In other business on Jan. 6, commissioners:

- decided to schedule a work session for Wednesday, Jan. 13, to discuss proposed amendments to the Baker County Zoning Ordinance. Commissioners will have a second public hearing on the proposed changes at their next regular meeting, Jan. 20.

- voted 2-1, with Harvey opposed, to extend the county's contract with economic developer Bryan Tweit for two months. Harvey proposed a six-month extension.

"I can't vote for something that long," Bennett said. "I can vote for a month or two months while (the county's Economic Development Committee) get a chance and the (new) city manager (Jonathan Cannon) gets on board, but six months is a long time and I want their input."

- designated Jan. 24-30 as School Choice Week.



Robert Vancil



Bennett