

Opinion

BAKER CITY
Herald
Serving Baker County since 1870

Write a letter
news@bakercityherald.com

OUR VIEW

Minimum wage hike problems

Fulfilling a campaign promise, Joe Biden wants to boost the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Farmers, whose livelihoods and property are on the line, are right to be wary of the possibilities.

Proponents suggest that employers are able either to absorb increased labor costs, or increase prices to offset costs without negative impacts to employees.

It's political claptrap.

Advocates say boosting the minimum wage will give millions of Americans a much-needed raise — or, at least, the ones lucky enough to keep their jobs. Politicians and proponents somehow miss the fact that hard-pressed employers will scour their operations for ways to reduce their payrolls to offset the increase. In addition to layoffs, many will switch to part-time and on-call employees as ways to save money.

Mechanization and automation, which eliminate jobs, will also become more attractive.

This wage hike would hurt small businesses the most. Big chains can absorb the increase, safe in the knowledge that their smaller competitors won't be able to keep up. Those smaller ag operations and processors in labor-intensive sectors will be forced to sell out to larger competitors.

And it's not only businesses that will feel the pinch. Local governments and school districts will also have to raise wages, or cut staff.

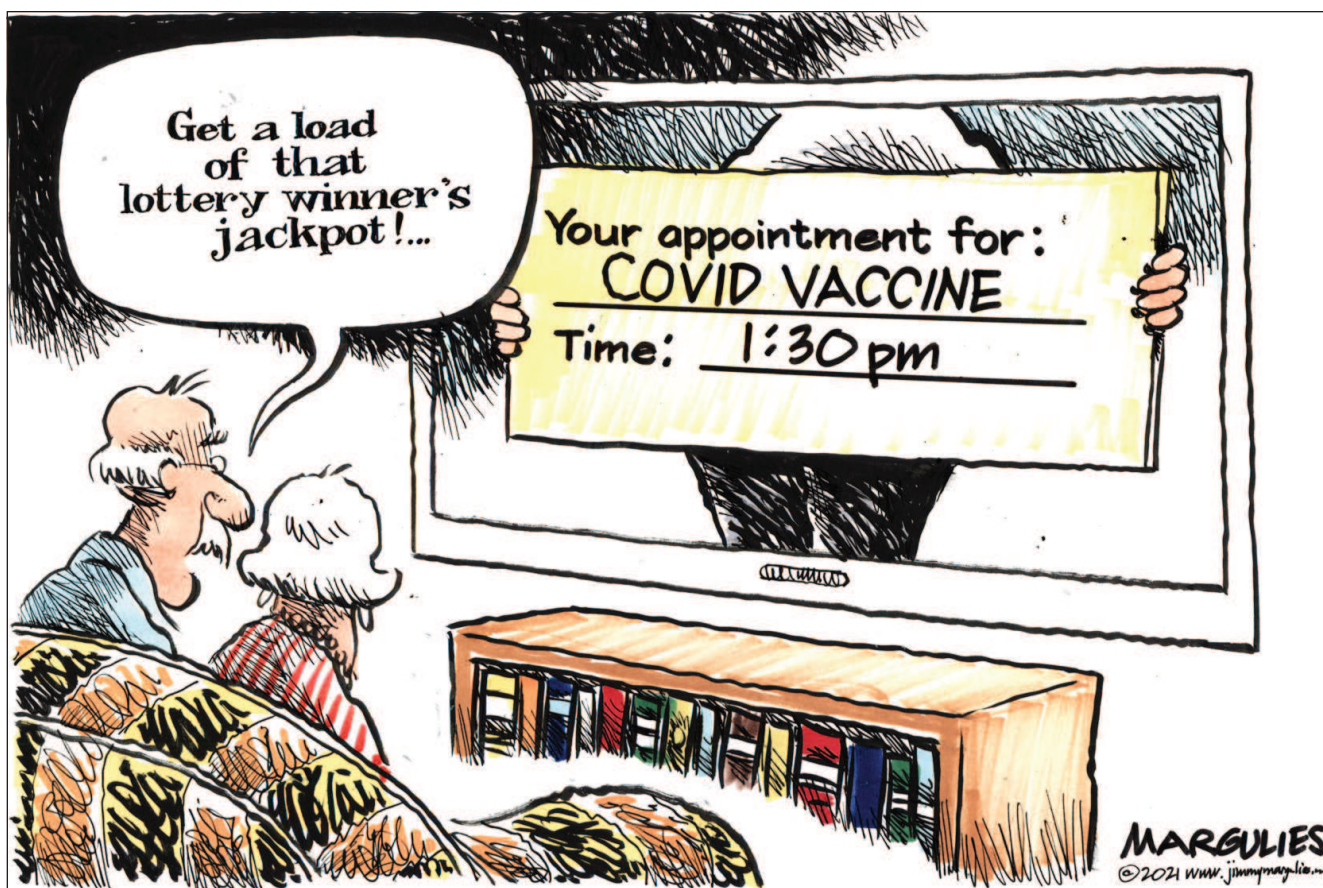
President Biden put his proposal to increase the minimum wage into his \$2 billion COVID relief package. He most likely believes reluctant lawmakers — even many moderate Democrats have balked at the \$15 figure — will have a tougher time saying “no” if it's wrapped in the flag of pandemic aid.

But Congress needs to be cautious. The result will be fewer jobs, fewer businesses and a weaker rural economy. Putting the thousands of businesses battered by government reaction to the virus on a better footing makes more sense than increasing their costs.

Those seeking higher minimum wages want to use other people's money to make political points with their supporters.

Proponents of higher minimum wages may be disappointed to find out that a robust economy, not governmental fiat, benefits workers most.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.



Your views

America needs dialogue rather than destruction

Letters to the editor, op-eds, editorials, public forums, and meetings — in other words, dialogue — are the appropriate means to address differences, whatever the subject. The more we disagree, the more we should be talking and writing, not breaking and burning. America needs thoughtful and significant discussion, not violence that tears us apart emotionally, destroys things we need, hurts businesses, and takes lives. The attack on our Capitol was a sad and horrible event that is now a permanent stain on our American history. Not since the War of 1812 has our Capitol been physically attacked. It should never have happened and should never happen again. Destruction and vandalism are never acceptable actions. Those responsible should be found, prosecuted, and punished.

America also needs fairness, but media and political response has been extremely biased. The one-day attack on our federal Capitol building was labeled insurrection and sedition but the 100-plus-day rioting attacks on the Portland federal building and entire downtown area were just called protest. Riots, destruction, and burning in Portland and other large cities over the summer caused much more structural damage and took more lives than the Capitol attack but were generally downplayed, or even supported, by liberal politicians and press. President Trump was impeached but Governor Kate Brown and Mayor Ted Wheeler,

who joined the Portland rioters, don't seem to be facing any consequences. If press coverage were consistent, it would be pursuing Brown and Wheeler far more than Trump.

Also regarding fairness, I'm a left-brained, logical, methodical, rational civil engineer. Engineers as a group aren't crazy and don't do crazy — it wouldn't work well in our profession. We make decisions and base our calculations on fact or, lacking that, best available information. It is a gross insult and extremely unfair to say that I am crazy, a cult follower, or need to be deprogrammed because I liked what former President Trump achieved (off the top of my head I listed 15 things but too much verbiage for this letter) or see possible election fraud (see the Navarro Report, available online) as something to be investigated. And any personal success is not because of white privilege. I served in the Marine Corps to fund my college education and worked over the last 46-plus years as an engineer. It's been a good career and I have been blessed but there were no handouts.

Jim Carnahan
Baker City

American democracy has stood the test of time

Appears that Mr. Rienks is still unable to accept the results of a fair and legal election, only this time he has focused his disturbing denial on our beautiful state of Oregon. I am referring to his latest “alternate facts” published as a rambling letter to the editor on Jan

12, “Political system doesn't reflect local interests, values.” It makes me think that the insurrection and incitement of violence by our disturbed former president has shifted his focus and a bit of his undying Trump support has fallen to the wayside, perhaps? Let me be the first to inform you Rick, counties don't vote, never have and never will — people do. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could change that, make it so that the results fit your own personal beliefs! Sorry, Rick, but this is America, the real world, and we've historically done pretty good with our election integrity in the state of Oregon. People can choose whatever state they wish to live, but by doing so they must also accept the “values and interests” of the majority.

I will add that they must also accept the election laws as put forth in each state's Constitution. Most of your letter is dedicated to your dissatisfaction with our sacred democracy and how it works against your wishes, dreams and your personal political wants. Can't, nor would I ever, help you with that. Our time-tested democracy seems to have worked pretty damned well for over 200 years!

As for “If we fail to learn from history we are doomed to repeat it.” Not sure what your point is with that quote, Mr. Rienks, but it is truly sage advice when looking at what our dangerous former president, without regret or conscious, unleashed on our nation's Capitol.

Mike Meyer
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.
- 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

In-person school classes are crucial — and safe

By **Kevin Pham and Lindsey M. Burke**

COVID-19 has been an unrelenting feature of our daily lives and will continue to be so for at least several more months as vaccinations roll out. But there is no reason for our children to be kept out of the classroom.

A recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found that K-12 schooling, including fully in-person classrooms and hybrid in-person/virtual classrooms, has rarely been a source of outbreak. This reaffirms the fact that in-person classroom learning is one of the safest activities, and that schools need to be reopened as soon as possible.

While some schools in different states have reopened to varying degrees, a great many more have not. A new nationally representative survey released by the journal Education Next finds that more than half — 53% — of students are receiving totally remote instruction. Worse, many school administration

or public health officials actively oppose reopening schools to students.

For instance, the superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, Austin Beutner, cites COVID-19 case rates in Los Angeles for having a direct impact on the district's ability to reopen classrooms.

The problem here is that children, especially those of elementary school age, are at decreased risk of infection and of minimal risk of severe disease outcome due to COVID-19. Indeed, schools have been found consistently to account for a minority of COVID-19 transmissions based on the experiences and data from schools throughout the world. Thus, maintaining school closures can only have, at most, an indirect link to the safety of school-children.

The Fairfax, Virginia, teachers union refuses to commit to having schools reopen by next fall — despite teachers in the state beginning to receive vaccinations last week. The Fairfax Education Association said schools should remain in hy-

brid mode until all children receive a vaccine.

Keeping schools closed to in-person instruction is an untargeted measure that punishes children for a trend on which they have little effect, thereby placing a great burden on children without much, if any, benefit. We know this because of the trends preceding the fall spike in COVID cases.

During that time, the age group with the highest incidences of COVID-19 were those 18-24 years of age. It is possible to say that college-aged adults may have driven the fall spike because they made up the majority of cases that lead into the spike. This makes sense because these young adults are at low risk for severe disease and have the most mobility.

By contrast, the recent CDC report noted that increases in childhood cases did not precede spikes in community cases in early September. The agency found that incidences of COVID-19 in counties with in-person learning were 401.2

per 100,000, compared to counties offering solely remote learning with 418.2 per 100,000.

In other words, COVID-19 rates were essentially identical between counties with and without in-person classroom learning. The empirical evidence has shown that school lockdowns yield no benefit to society but great harm to children.

The CDC report comes on the heels of updated guidelines issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics, on the safety of schooling during the pandemic. As their guidelines note, “all policy considerations for school COVID-19 plans should start with the goal of having students physically present in school.”

There were many unknowns at the start of the pandemic. But with each day, we have a better understanding of COVID, particularly how it affects children. Schools should reopen tomorrow to in-person instruction. If they don't, families should be able to take the money that would have been spent

on their child to a school of choice that is.

Indeed, private schools are open and operating safely, meeting the needs of children and families. While just 24% of students who attend public school are receiving fully in-person instruction, 60% of private schools are open to in-class learning, as the Education Next survey found.

A family's ZIP code should not determine whether or not their child has access to in-person learning. States across the country should provide families with education savings accounts to enable them to select into learning environments that are open and the right fit for their children.

That's good policy anytime, but is crucial as the pandemic, and learning loss, continues.

Kevin Pham, M.D., is a visiting policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation.

Lindsey M. Burke, Ph.D., is director of Heritage's Center for Education Policy and its Will Skillman Fellow in Education.