

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Welcome back to the Bulldogs

It might be the first time the Baker Bulldog football team used sledding as a workout.

But if nothing else during the pandemic, we've learned to adjust, to accept the unusual.

Watching the players prepare for the rigors of a football season by sliding down the snow-covered slope at the north end of Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium, and then sprinting back to the top for another run, is just the latest in the series of strangeness that defines 2020 and the first part of 2021.

It will also be a trifle weird to watch the Bulldogs play football and soccer and volleyball, and compete in cross-country meets, when the trees are beginning to bud out at the cusp of spring rather than dropping their colorful leaves at summer's end.

Weird, but also welcome.

After a long, frustrating and at times agonizing wait, Baker High School and Baker Middle School students are ready to return to athletics, starting with the traditional fall sports.

Those students have missed a lot during the pandemic, including the benefit of learning from their teachers in a classroom each school day.

And although academics are more important for the students' futures than athletics, the latter is not unimportant.

Students who participate in sports benefit from teamwork and camaraderie. They recognize the connection between effort and achievement. And of course they have fun. So do the parents and grandparents and friends and community members who watch these young athletes compete.

Gov. Kate Brown was right to allow sports to start this month, including contact sports such as football. Games could begin March 1. The traditional fall sports season, which will continue through early April, is slated to be followed by spring sports (baseball, softball, track and field, tennis and golf) during April and early May, and concluding with traditional winter sports (basketball, wrestling and swimming) in May and June.

Baker schools have shown over the past few months that they can have in-person classes and keep COVID-19 at bay. Evidence from many other states that have already allowed prep sports shows that competition, when done with appropriate precautions, is also safe.

How these sports seasons will proceed is uncertain.

We know they'll be shorter than usual, lasting about six weeks rather than a couple months.

Scheduling could be a challenge, considering that the COVID-19 situation varies among counties, sometimes widely. Baker might not be able to compete against its traditional rivals. It's not clear whether the Baker girls basketball team will be able to defend their Class 4A state championship — a victory now almost two years in the past — or whether that will wait until the return of traditional state playoffs and tournaments in 2022.

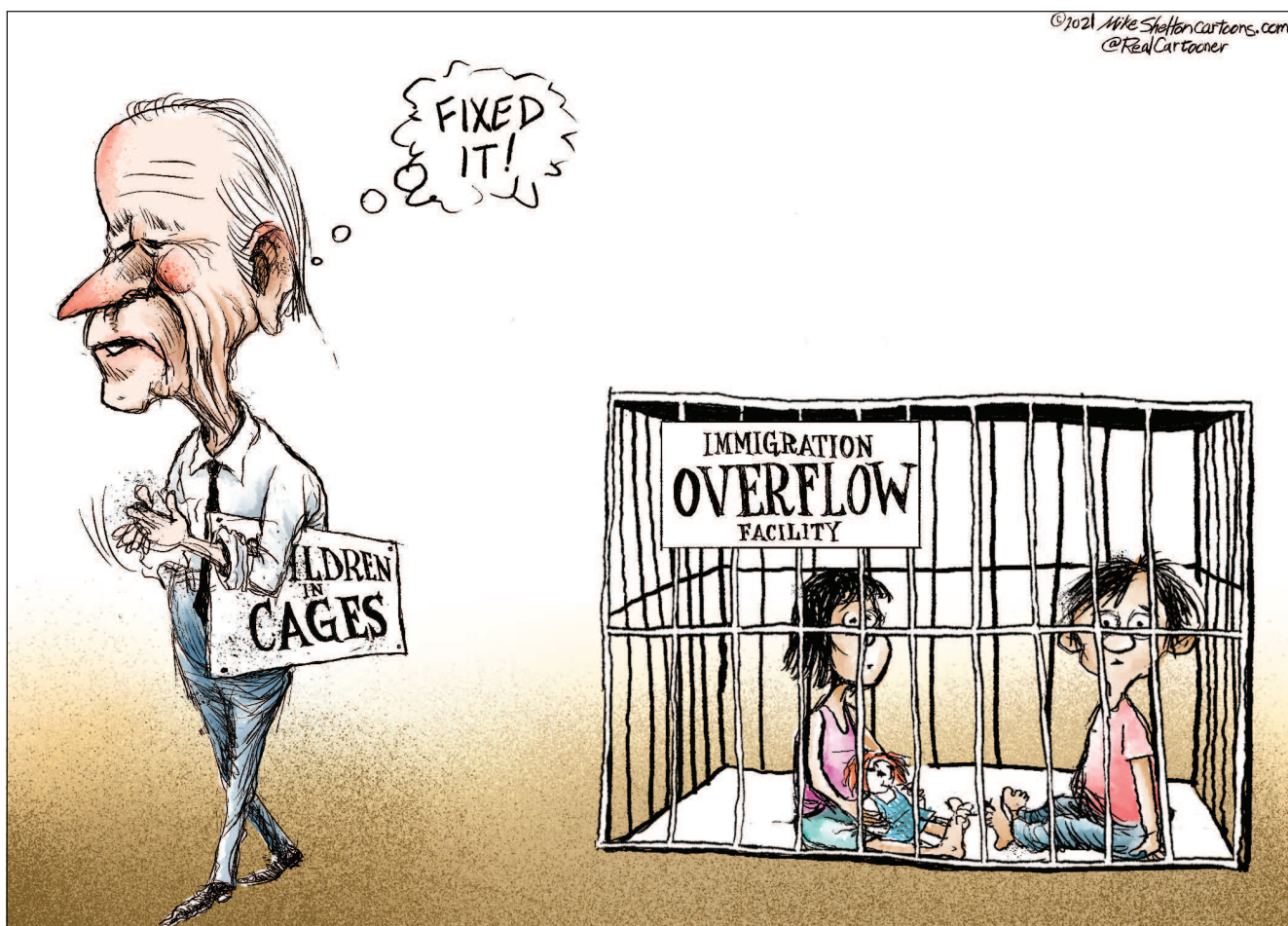
Yet the prospect of seeing the Bulldogs return to the field, the court, the track, the course and the pool is exciting regardless of the details.

Sure, it will feel a bit strange to watch a football game and smell new grass rather than woodsmoke, to walk into the BHS gym to take in a basketball game or wrestling meet on a warm, sunlit spring evening rather than a dark and chilly winter night.

But the peculiarity will be as nothing compared to the joy of seeing young people wearing the purple and gold again, to watch them compete on fields and courts that were silent and empty for so many months.

In the meantime, we can all help by taking the precautions, such as wearing a mask where required and following social distancing, that have helped Baker County's virus cases plummet over the past month.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

City shouldn't spend money on train quiet zone

Thank you for your article covering the Baker City Council meeting held last Tuesday evening. The railroad quiet zone and golf board appointment process caught my attention.

It was pointed out that Baker City residents already voted 82% to reject the idea. A recent petition signed by 230 residents only reflects approximately 2% of Baker City's current population. I used to own a business within spitting distance of the railroad tracks and my daughter owned a house with nothing but field between she and the tracks for years. We got used to dealing around the whistles; they not only warn humans, but wildlife of all sorts including our beloved pets out for a potty break. The railroad is a part of the history of this community and the whistle is a way for them to protect our citizens. As far as South Baker School is concerned, it is truly unfortunate that site was chosen so close to the tracks, but it is there and they work around it. To ask the school board again about their thoughts is a waste of time as they already addressed it a year and a half ago. Better to be irritated by the whistle than to have a child hit by the train. As a long-term resident of Baker, I do not want to see the city spend more resources around this issue. Our very precious civil servants' time and our ever higher tax monies all need to be used wisely and frugally at this time.

Finally, I found the comments of Councilor Jason Spriet questioning the mayor as to why she did not appoint his preferred candidate after she already logically explained why. As quoted in the article he stated hers was "an emotional response." That comment, most would consider sexist and rude, and has no place on the Council.

Betty Milliman
Baker City

Thankful for the well-run COVID-19 vaccine clinic

A very sincere "Thank You" to the Baker County Health Department,

Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Letters are limited to 350 words. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days. Writers must sign their letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Email letters to news@bakercityherald.com.

local pharmacists, and all the volunteers for the COVID-19 vaccine clinic held Friday, Feb. 12, at the Baker High School gym, for the well-organized, friendly and efficient manner for receiving our first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

So very pleased with your service and organized manner! Thanks to each and every one of you!

Cheryl and Richard Gushman
Baker City

Senators need local input on wild, scenic rivers bill

Senators Wyden and Merkley's River Democracy Act of 2021 is actually a 3-million-acre land grab. This proposal is to blanket designate as either wild, scenic or recreational, "nearly 4,700 miles of rivers in all corners of Oregon." It would change the land use designation of more than 3 million acres in Oregon, by enforcing a buffer of 1/2 mile on each side of the waterway's high-water mark. This means that at least an entire section of ground, 640 acres, per river mile, will be eliminated from activities which are not allowed under the Wild and Scenic River Act. This "interim" land withdrawal will last for at least six years until a comprehensive management plan is completed. The economic effect of this bill will be devastating to an economy that is already suffering. Many streams listed in this bill are not found to be in "near natural condition, with all, or almost all, of their natural values intact." Mile-wide unmanaged stream corridors will be vulnerable to wildfires, which will im-

pact water quality for decades. Detailed studies of each of these river segments should have been completed before any of the waterways were proposed. The local citizens should have had input into these designations. This bill needs to be either dropped, or a whole lot of work and consultation must take place in order to avoid serious consequences to areas affected by this more than 3-million-acre land lockup. Contact Senators Wyden and Merkley and ask them to drop this bill, and hold local hearings on any streams before they change their designations.

Ken Alexander
Unity

City should figure out a way to quiet train whistles

I don't do this very often, but couldn't pass up the chance to rebut the mayor's comment about the "Quiet Zone." In 2002 I was in my early 50s and a lot of things have changed since then, especially my age. In 2002 there were 8 or 10 trains a day and they went through Baker at about 10 mph, now there are, according to your count, 24 and they go through Baker City at a speed of around 40 mph and they start blowing their horns at Pocahontas Road and don't stop until they cross the underpass. At that speed, they never stop blowing their horn. If we as a city can't figure out how to make the money needed, use part of one of Leo's grants and raise my water and sewer bill some more, again. There is a reason La Grande spent the money.

The only other solution I can see is to put the horn on the inside of the cab of the engine.

On another subject, the mayor said she didn't put Fred Warner Jr. on the golf board because he didn't stop and say "hi" in the hallway. I was a member of the golf board for nine years and don't think I ever talked to anybody on the council in the hallway. That sounds to me like something you hear in junior high or high school. Fred would have made a great addition to the golf board.

Larry Smith
Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Gov. Cuomo's COVID-19 cover-up

Editorial from The New York Daily News:

We don't hold New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and his administration personally liable for the deaths of more than 40,000 New Yorkers from COVID-19, or for the more than 15,000 nursing home and adult care facility residents among that tally. Anyone who currently claims, with what information is available, that they can lay blame for all those deaths at Cuomo's feet is being disingenuous.

What's difficult to excuse, though, is the fact Cuomo and his team took so long to release the full count of nursing home and other adult care facility deaths, and misled New Yorkers about the reason for the delay.

A new recording of a meeting between Cuomo's top aide Melissa

DeRosa and some Democratic state lawmakers undermines the rationale the state Health Department offered for months as an excuse for why it was taking them so long to give New Yorkers real answers about how many nursing home residents had succumbed to COVID. In August, State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker blamed the delay on tedious, ongoing efforts to ensure its accuracy before releasing it publicly.

DeRosa's explanation was different: The state stonewalled legislators' requests for data because they feared President Donald Trump's unscrupulous Justice Department would "use" the data "against us." At the time, DOJ had launched investigations into nursing home deaths in states led by

Democratic governors, despite the fact nearly all states across the country, both Democrat- and Republican-led, experienced severe nursing home COVID outbreaks and deaths.

Though convenient, the Trump bogeyman was no excuse to keep the public in the dark on a matter of intense, life-and-death interest. Nor did it match up with reality: Even when Joe Biden became president, Cuomo kept fighting freedom of information requests — until a court order forced his hand.

The cover-up is always worse than the crime. For this one, executed via repeated misleading statements to the public, there must be consequences, starting with a better explanation and some true contrition from Cuomo.