

EDITORIAL

Taking time on the lodging tax

The Baker City Council made the right choice Tuesday, Feb. 23, in deciding not to withdraw from its 2006 agreement with Baker County under which the county administers the local lodging tax.

Councilors need to gather more information before they can reasonably consider whether to make a change in how the tax is collected and spent.

Although about 73% of the taxes are collected in Baker City, the ramifications affect all of Baker County.

The lodging tax is straightforward. Guests at motels, bed and breakfasts, RV parks, vacation rental homes, campgrounds and other lodging businesses pay the tax, which is 7% of the rental rate (the businesses themselves do not pay the tax; they only add it to the rental bill). The money, except for 5% set aside for administrative costs, must be spent for tourism promotion and economic development. The basic idea is that local governments, rather than taxing local residents and businesses to promote the area to tourists, should instead tax the tourists themselves. Most cities and counties charge a lodging tax.

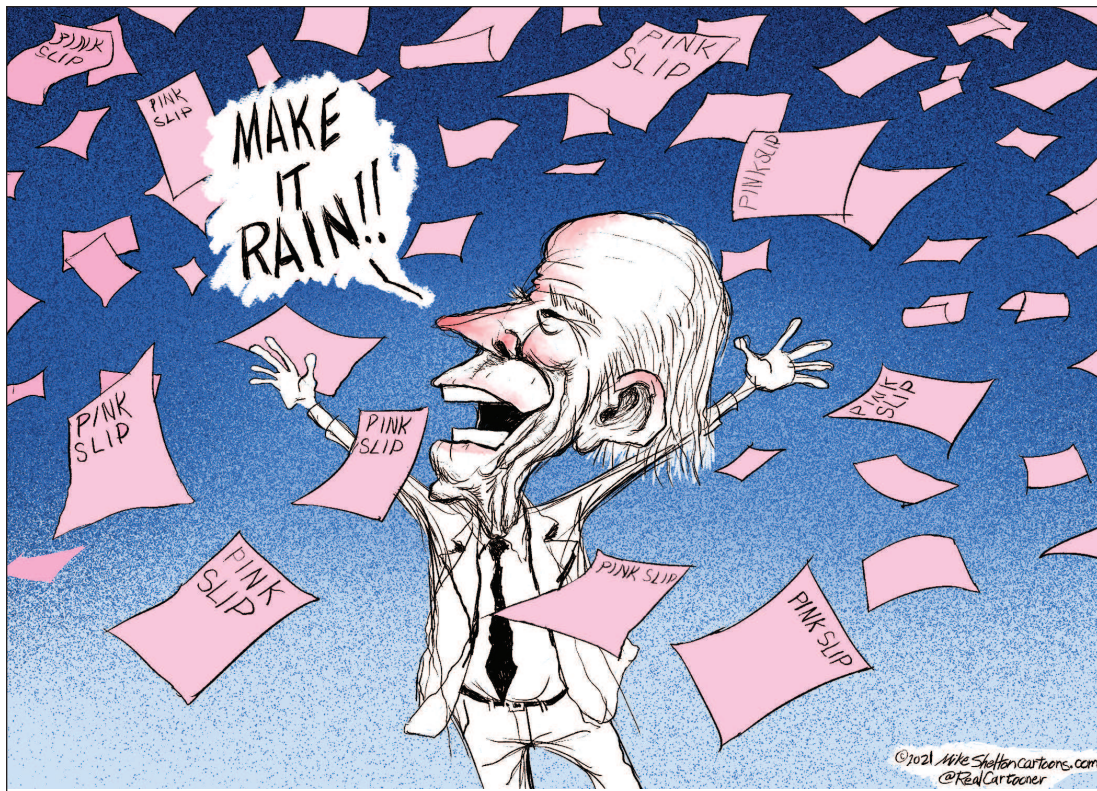
Locally, Baker City was the first to impose a lodging tax, in 1984. Later the county expanded the tax to unincorporated areas, and other cities, including Halfway, Sumpter and Unity, also assess the lodging tax. Since July 1, 2006, the county has been responsible for collecting the tax, including within Baker City, and for spending it. An ordinance requires that 70% be used for tourism promotion and 25% for economic development. The tax revenue, among other things, pays for the visitors center the Chamber of Commerce operates, and for the contract with tourism promoter Timothy Bishop. The county also has used the money to buy ads in travel magazines and other publications.

Councilors heard from several business owners Tuesday, including one who owns an RV park. They all told councilors that they benefit from the tax, and urged the city to continue the 2006 agreement.

That's not to say the lodging tax system can't be improved. County Commissioner Mark Bennett said commissioners plan to discuss the issue Wednesday, March 3. He said the City Council is a key player in the topic. Considering most of the money is collected from guests at Baker City establishments, Bennett is right. With the pandemic easing and a potentially busy tourism season ahead, city and county officials should reassess the lodging tax and consider ways to maximize its benefits in boosting the county as a tourist destination.

But until the city has a detailed plan for how it would spend lodging taxes collected within the city limits, it's premature for the City Council to withdraw from an agreement that's supported by the business owners who are supposed to benefit. They told councilors that the city-county joint effort works. The city needs a compelling reason to start going it alone.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Humane solution at the border

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:

The Biden administration's decision this week to reopen a detention center in Texas for unaccompanied teenaged minors drew outrage from immigrant rights advocates, including U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, D-N.Y., who denounced the move as Trumpism revisited, or at the least extended. It's not that simple.

To be sure, resurrecting the 66-acre, 700-capacity site in Carrizo Springs is jarring, given that President Joe Biden pledged to roll back former President Donald Trump's draconian rules and policies governing immigration. The move, and a reported decision to reopen another facility at Homestead, Florida, must be temporary.

There are few valid reasons to incarcerate unaccompanied minors who arrive at the border seeking help. Under federal law, the government is supposed to assess them while holding them in the least restrictive environment possible, and speedily hand them over to guardians — parents, relatives, foster care — while their immigration and asylum cases work their way through the system.

Under the 1997 Flores settlement, the government is supposed to detain children for no longer than 20 days, but the reality has been much different, with detentions more than doubling that on average and lasting months in some cases as immigration officials try to vet the youngsters' stories and their guardians. Although often time-consuming, it's necessary to avoid releasing children into dangerous environments. No one wants a repeat of the 2014 episode in which overwhelmed immigration officials mistakenly released a number of Guatemalan minors to traf-

fickers who enslaved them at Ohio egg farms.

Conditions for children have been atrocious in some of the detention facilities run by Customs and Border Protection and private contractors, including complaints about unsanitary and unsafe conditions and reports of sexual abuse. Yet even at the best-run shelters, children suffer an additional psychological and emotional ordeal after fleeing their homes, often traveling alone northward to the border.

The government must do better. It's understandable that trying to process newly arrived children — whose numbers have been increasing in recent months — while adhering to COVID-19 restrictions requires more space. But the underlying problem here isn't space so much as staff and capacity to vet stories and find placements for these children as quickly and safely as possible.

Some of the minors ultimately may not win permission to stay, but some will, either under immigration codes that allow abandoned or orphaned minors a safer harbor, or international agreements and laws — not to mention basic human decency — that bar returning people to unsafe environments. But that's not the issue of the moment.

The issue is ensuring that the government treats these children as required by law, with detention of minimal duration and in the least-restrictive conditions possible. The ultimate goal is to be able to place these youths safely with guardians so quickly, there'll be no need for sites like the ones the new administration is reopening.

Fighting words and the power of politicians

I learned at least one thing from the second impeachment trial of former president Donald Trump.

Politicians say "fight" a lot.

Not as frequently as is implied by the edited recording that Trump's lawyers played in the Senate, to be sure, a stitched together litany of sound snippets that is the audio equivalent of a migraine.

But politicians utter that bellicose word pretty often just the same.

I suppose, with the benefit of hindsight, that I knew this even before I was bombarded by the word while listening to the impeachment trial.

Politicians have for many decades — centuries, even — borrowed heavily from the military lexicon to describe their bloodless engagements.

They speak not only of fighting — for constituents and against the cretins in the other party, commonly — but also of their legislative battles and the wars they wage against such implacable foes as poverty, racism and drugs.

We've heard this martial language so often that we're numb to how inappropriate it is to compare, even implicitly, a debate on the House or Senate floor to rushing a machine gun nest or enduring an artillery barrage.

(The same could be said for sports, come to that.)

But our ears perk up when that familiar word, "fight," is implicated



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in a historic invasion of the U.S. Capitol.

Among the phrases Trump uttered during his now infamous speech on Jan. 6 was "fight like hell."

This particular fight, of course, was against what Trump continues to insist was an unfair — indeed, a "stolen" — election.

And it's beyond dispute that the people who defiled the Capitol were motivated largely by their belief, shared with and encouraged by Trump, that Joe Biden's victory was illegitimate.

But the question put to senators involved quite a different matter.

Was Trump, by dint of that speech, responsible for the ugly scene at the seat of American legislative power?

Except it seems to me that the charge against Trump was even more specific than that.

As I listened to the representatives who presented the case for conviction in the Senate, it struck me that what they were actually alleging is that had Trump not spoken publicly on Jan. 6, it is all but inconceivable to imagine that anyone would have illegally entered the Capitol.

To agree with this premise you

must conclude, obviously, that Trump's influence over his acolytes is extraordinary powerful.

But that's not even the whole of it.

To concede that the House managers proved their case against Trump, you also have to be convinced that he and his supporters have developed a rapport so strong, and so sophisticated, that his most faithful supporters can discern between the former president's actual marching orders — to belabor the military analogy — and when Trump is merely trying to confound his critics.

I make a distinction here between "most faithful" supporters and the rest because I think it's a crucial one, perhaps the most crucial in this entire sordid affair.

Recall that of the many thousands of people who watched Trump speak on Jan. 6 and who later gathered at the Capitol, the Capitol Police estimated that about 800 actually entered the building.

During that speech, one of Trump's more specific statements about the impending rally was this: "I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard."

The Associated Press, in a disturbingly subjective exercise in "fact-checking," describes that statement as a "passing remark, lost in the winds of that day's rage."

The AP's description of the

remark being "lost" makes no sense, considering that Trump made it before the "rage" which generated such a zephyr, according to this possibly unprecedented poetic indulgence by the normally staid AP.

I find the adjective "passing" inapt, too.

Trump focused much of his speech on his allegations of election fraud, not on the impending rally at the Capitol.

But when he did cite the rally specifically, he also used an adverb with a precise meaning: "peacefully."

And of course a majority of protesters complied.

I suppose it's conceivable that that majority either didn't recognize Trump's call for violence, coded though it was (except, apparently, to the discerning listeners at the AP), or else they lacked the fortitude of the criminals.

But the far more plausible explanation is that the greater number of people did what Trump called on them to do — to make their voices heard, and "peacefully."

I'm not suggesting, of course, that the cretins who barged into the Capitol and killed a police officer weren't also in thrall of Trump's simplistic and bombastic rhetoric.

But if this ugly episode is to have the laudable effect of tempering militant political speech, then Trump's critics, both among politicians and the media, need to muster at least a credible attempt at even-handedness.

Politicians ought to consider how

often they employ "fight" or its synonyms in their own rhetoric.

One of the House impeachment managers, Rep. Madeleine Dean of Pennsylvania, kept count, noting that Trump said either "fight" or "fighting" 20 times during his speech.

(The AP's fact-checkers, proving themselves as handy with a calculator as with a thesaurus, proclaimed Dean's tally as accurate. I presume none of those 20 references could be considered "passing," or prone to being lost in winds of rage.)

I understand that the attack on the Capitol is, fortunately, unique.

And it was Trump's supporters who committed the dastardly acts on Jan. 6, not the lackeys of a Democrat who also speaks occasionally of "fighting" for or against something.

But that reality is a flaccid reason to excuse other politicians, regardless of party, for resorting to potentially inciteful language.

It's nonsensical to believe that among all political leaders, Trump alone has the oratorical authority that induces his followers to commit crimes — especially when, during the speech in question, he unequivocally endorses a peaceful demonstration.

To conflate his rhetoric, obnoxious though it so often is, with a Mansouquet omnipotence is to indulge in the worse sort of partisan fantasy.

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