

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# Getting ahead of the virus

The Baker High School gymnasium, normally a bustling place throughout the winter, has been placid the past few months.

Instead of the squeaking of sneakers as basketball players race up and down the court, mostly silence.

The new, brighter scoreboards installed last year are dark.

But on two Friday mornings in February the BHS gym again teemed with activity.

A very different sort of activity, to be sure.

But one that will help to ensure that the gym will eventually be used again for its customary purposes.

The COVID-19 vaccination clinics that Baker County organized on Feb. 12 and Feb. 26 were impressive, and heartening.

On those two days about 800 Baker County residents were inoculated.

Several of those people emailed or wrote to the Baker City Herald to express their gratitude, both for the clinics and for how well-organized they were.

The clinics contributed greatly to Baker County having the sixth-highest rate of COVID-19 vaccinations, per 10,000 residents, among Oregon's 36 counties.

Since the first doses were administered in mid-December, there has been a second pandemic-related statistic to track on a daily basis. But seeing updates on the number of county residents who have been vaccinated is much different from checking the new COVID-19 cases. The latter is depressing, the former inspiring.

Fortunately, the trend in vaccinations has been rising far faster than the number of cases.

In just two and a half months, as of Monday, March 1, a total of 2,795 Baker County residents have received either both vaccine doses (1,147) or their first dose (1,648). That means almost 17% of the county's 16,800 residents are fully or partially vaccinated.

By comparison, one year into the pandemic, 660 county residents have tested positive for the virus — 3.9%.

The pandemic isn't over, of course.

For the 10-day period ending March 1, the county recorded 31 new COVID-19 cases. There were 19 new cases during the previous 10 days.

"We still can't let our guard down," Nancy Staten, director of the Baker County Health Department, said on March 1. "We can see the light at the end of the tunnel. We're getting there."

With a third vaccine becoming available this week — the Johnson & Johnson vaccine that requires only one dose — the pace of vaccinations should increase.

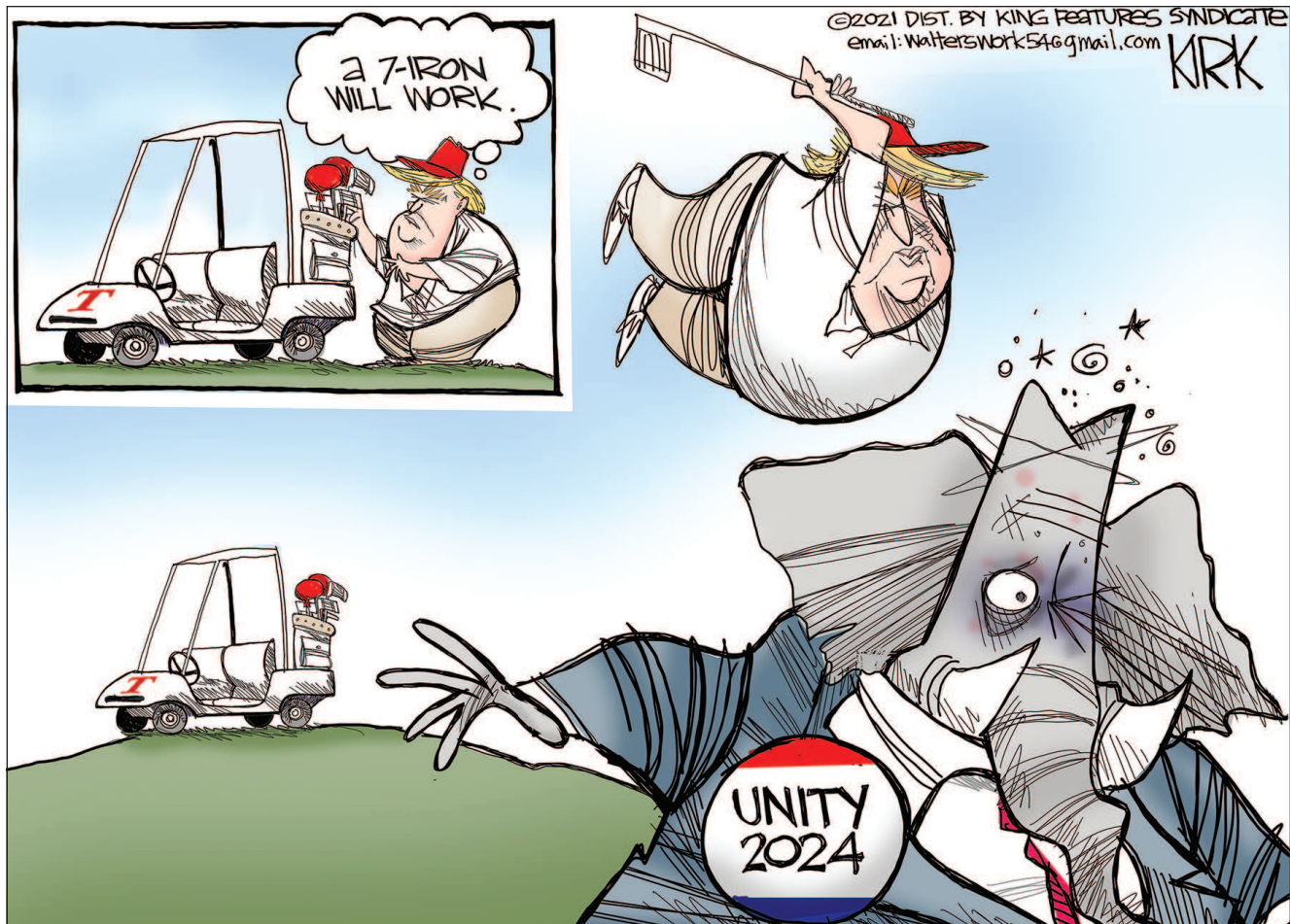
As for the BHS gym, on Tuesday, March 2, it was the site of the Baker High School volleyball team's first match in an abbreviated season that continues through early April.

Four days after the gym was a place where hundreds of Baker County's older residents were gaining protection from a virus that poses a vastly greater risk to them, a group of teenagers was using that cavernous space to bump, set and spike volleyballs.

Two quite different uses of the same space.

But both were welcome indeed.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



## Your views

### Oregon's River Democracy Act should be celebrated

This letter is a response to the letter to the editor published last week entitled "The River Democracy Act should be opposed."

Our family has lived in and loved Baker Valley since we settled here after World War II. My mom and dad built our family home, raised cattle and worked to support the community here. This wild and verdant country and the rivers that sustain it are what we have loved most about this place. I was happy to join thousands of Oregonians in nominating local rivers for protection under Wyden's proposed "River Democracy Act." I know many friends and neighbors who did the same. You can read the bill at <https://www.wyden.senate.gov/>

I understand concerns regarding new public lands protections but the facts don't support the most common fears. Read the Bill, and you will find that Senator Wyden's visionary proposal does not affect private property rights, reduce access or stop grazing, logging or mining.

The bill does recognize the extraordinary value of our wild, life giving rivers which are also our most valuable long-term resource. Like all groundbreaking proposals, successful implementation requires thoughtful planning and local engagement throughout the process. I urge you to stay tuned and stay involved. Protecting this resource is not a land grab, rather it is passing on to

### Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. 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](mailto:news@bakercityherald.com).

future generations what was passed on to us. It preserves what makes our part of the world so special. I can think of no better way to honor the legacy of those who have gone before us and ensure a vibrant future for those who will follow us.

Robin Coen  
Baker City

### City Council lucky to have a nonpartisan free thinker

Obviously Chuck Chase and Tom Hughes have drank the "cancel culture kool aid" and are embracing our Republican Party of Eastern OR and "their" endorsed and skewed city council. Looks like they are also throwing big kisses at our power hungry and "emotional" mayor. No moderates need apply.

Thank goodness we have at least one "nonpartisan" free thinker in the person of Jason Spriet. He is not afraid of the "bullies" and will speak up and fight for fairness. "The Good Ole Boys Club" is now firmly entrenched in our

"once" great and fair city. Are we now at the mercy of conspiracy believers such as Mr. Hughes, and I quote, "baseless health mandates?" Wow! Might want to let some dead people weigh in on that.

As for the actions of our then city manager? Fred Warner had complete authority to try and keep some sanity and safety in the city he was managing. Wasn't that his job? Appears he was trying to help and protect all of us. It only takes a day of personal research to realize the anti-maskers, COVID hoaxers and individuals that see the health guidelines and restrictions as not pertaining to their selfish goals, are now firmly seated in our city government! Mr. Chase described our city council as Mayor McQuisten's "team." I am fairly certain that they should be "independently" deciding what is best for all citizens, they are not the personal team of our mayor. I recently read that our dictatorial mayor possibly overstepped her authority by misinterpreting the rules on appointing board members? Our former mayor and his wife are exemplary, productive citizens of Baker City and have given more to this community than you will ever dream of Mr. Hughes! The only one I see causing dissension, creating hate and promoting a cancel culture agenda is you! Maybe we should revisit the election results surrounding our city councilors ... I detect some voter fraud.

Mike Meyer  
Baker City

## OTHER VIEWS

# A new vaccine, and more progress

### Editorial from The New York Daily News

Last weekend marked another step in defeating COVID-19 as the FDA approved Johnson & Johnson's vaccine, giving America 100 million additional doses by this summer, another wonderful life-saving weapon against the deadly virus. Coming a day after President Joe Biden celebrated the 50 millionth shot jabbed in an arm, victory seems near.

On the two principal goals, avoiding COVID hospitalizations and deaths, studies show that J&J is batting a thousand. If you have a chance to get a shot, take it. The same goes for the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNtech vaccines.

Besides adding a third option to our arsenal, the J&J vaccine is much more

convenient than the other two. It is a single dose, and doesn't require ultra-cold storage, making it much easier to handle than the Moderna and Pfizer shots. Those both require two shots, administered weeks apart, to be fully effective. Pfizer's ultra-cold storage requirements, which the FDA relaxed last week, limited where shots could be kept and used, restricting distribution sites to places like hospitals with costly refrigerators capable of maintaining the negative 70 degrees Celsius temperature required to keep the Pfizer shots viable.

The Johnson & Johnson shot's future availability should turbocharge efforts in New York and around the country to get more shots delivered to more places — to churches, doctors, nonprofits and

health care clinics that have established relationships with hard-to-reach but vulnerable people — the elderly, non-white, non-English speaking residents whose biggest obstacle to getting a shot at this point isn't vaccine hesitancy but difficulties they face getting an appointment. For example, Manhattan's 125 available vaccine sites are nearly double the 69 locations to get shots in the Bronx, despite the boroughs' similar-size populations.

Difficulty finding doses, trusting the dose-givers, and getting to where shots are given has meant just 15% of eligible elderly Black New Yorkers had gotten vaccinated as of earlier last week, compared to 30% of eligible elderly white New Yorkers.

We've got the tools we need. Get shots into the arms that need them, now.

## CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

**President Joe Biden:** The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

**U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley:** D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; [merkley.senate.gov](mailto:merkley.senate.gov).

**U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden:** D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; [wyden.senate.gov](mailto:wyden.senate.gov).

**U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz** (2nd District): D.C. office: 2182 Rayburn Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. La Grande office: 1211 Washington Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-624-2400, fax, 541-624-2402; [walden.house.gov](mailto:walden.house.gov).

**Oregon Gov. Kate Brown:** 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR

97310; 503-378-3111; [www.governor.oregon.gov](http://www.governor.oregon.gov).

**Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read:** [oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us](mailto:oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us); 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

**Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum:** Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

**Oregon Legislature:** Legislative documents and information are available online at [www.leg.state.or.us](http://www.leg.state.or.us).

**State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario):** Salem office: 900

Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: [Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov)

**State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane):** Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: [Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov)

**Baker City Hall:** 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Lynette Perry, Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane

Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Heather Sells and Johnny Waggoner Sr.

**Baker City administration:** 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ray Duman, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

**Baker County Commission:** Baker County Courthouse 1995 3rd St., Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-8200. Meets the first and third Wednesdays at 9 a.m.; Bill Harvey (chair), Mark Bennett, Bruce Nichols.

**Baker County departments:** 541-523-8200. Travis Ash, sheriff; Noodle Perkins, roadmaster; Greg Baxter, district clerk; Kerry Alice Durlinger, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county attorney; Kerry Savage, county assessor.

**Baker School District:** 2090 4th Street, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-524-2260; fax 541-524-2564. Superintendent: Mark Witty. Board meets the third Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. Council Chambers, Baker City Hall, 1655 First St.; Andrew Bryan, Kevin Cassidy, Chris Hawkins, Katie Lamb and Julie Huntington.