

EDITORIAL

Seniors get the shaft yet again

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown isn't the only elected official who has forced older Oregonians to wait for a COVID-19 vaccine despite the irrefutable evidence that they are vastly more likely to die from the virus if they remain unvaccinated.

President Joe Biden has joined Brown in earning this dubious distinction.

For a pair of politicians who have vowed to heed science as they deal with the pandemic, Biden and Brown have in effect ignored third-grade math.

The numbers tell an unequivocal story.

In Oregon, almost 77% of those who have died after testing positive for COVID-19 were 70 or older. And 91% were 60 or older.

Yet first Brown, and more recently Biden, have given priority for vaccination to teachers, the vast majority of whom are younger than 60, rather than to those for whom this virus truly is life-threatening.

In January Brown decided that teachers would have priority for receiving vaccines. Older Oregonians had to wait from one to four weeks to become eligible, depending on their age.

On March 2 President Biden announced that vaccinating teachers was a priority during March, and he asked pharmacies that participate in a federal vaccine program to set aside doses for teachers, other school employees and child care workers.

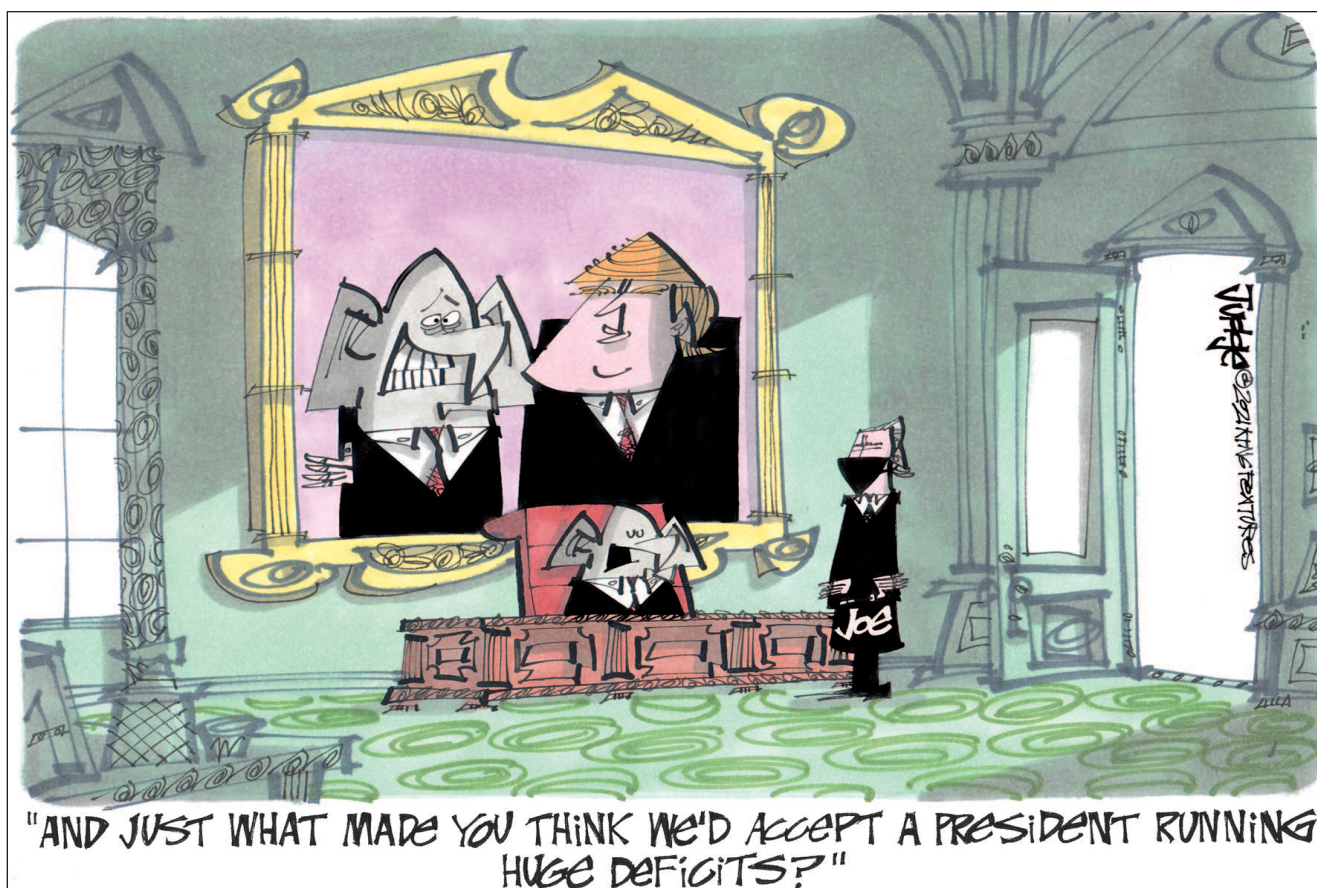
Brown said the White House failed to consult with Oregon, meaning Biden apparently didn't know the state had already given priority to teachers. Fortunately, on Thursday, March 11, the federal government exempted Oregon from Biden's policy.

Both Biden and Brown justified their decision by saying their goal is to vaccinate teachers so students can return to their classrooms. A fine idea, to be sure.

Trouble is, neither the governor nor the president can compel teachers to go back to school. In Oregon, seven weeks after Brown moved teachers to the head of the line, many of the state's larger school districts haven't resumed in-person classes, at least for older students. Last week the governor ordered all schools to have in-person classes for kindergarten through fifth-grade by March 29, and for older students by April 19. But that doesn't necessarily mean students will be in their classes every day — Brown's order allows hybrid schedules as well.

Neither Brown's nor Biden's decision to give preference to teachers for vaccines has had the result they claimed it would. But both have deprived those most vulnerable to the virus from getting access to a vaccine.

—Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



City Council needs to be civil

By Beverly Calder

Less than 60 days ago, five members of our council took an oath to uphold and defend the constitutions of our country and our state as well as the charter of Baker City.

Our city charter is a short and concise document, although written in legalese as should be expected. It outlines the powers of the city and provides the framework for ordinance creation, public works, elections and the duties of the council and city manager.

Chapter 3, Section 12 states: "All elections for city office must be non-partisan."

As council, they represent and serve all 10,000 plus citizens of Baker City, nearly four times the number of votes that any individual received in the last election. There are no party lines in our council chamber. Our council represents the whole community.

Our charter further states, in Chapter 5, Section 18: "The mayor shall enforce the rules of council."

The Revised Rules of Council — amended just this past April — are more specific:

- 5a. All members of council shall accord the utmost courtesy to each other; to city employees and to the public and shall refrain at all times from rude or derogatory remarks, reflections as to integrity, abusive comments and statements as to motive and personalities.

- 17. Each member should support the collective decision making of the council.

In the past 30 days we have seen a lack of civility. We have witnessed violations of these rules. We have heard malicious statements made against public servants, volunteers and leaders in our community.

We have seen repulsive statements made online. These acts are in violation of both our City Charter and the

Rules of Procedure of the Council.

These acts certainly do not represent the oath taken by each member of our council and they cause harm. Public service demands civility to function properly.

Many of the statements have been made without "naming names" but in a community as small as ours, the objects are often obvious. Each of the people maligned have given much to our community and deserve, at a minimum, the respect of the council and a civil manner.

The mayor impugned the character of an applicant for the Golf Board a month ago. That applicant, Fred Warner Jr., has served this community well and faithfully. The Warner family has been a contributing part of Baker City for generations. These statements shocked me but it was only the beginning.

A council member posted a statement online maligning both the elected members of the county commission and the appointed committee volunteers that serve the county.

One council member posted a silent assault on another member of the council on Facebook. I feel compelled to include this because it matters what is said — or posted — when you represent the city council. I will not include the obscenities.

"As for you worthless (bleep) lying piece of (bleep). You can kiss my (bleep) I got zero time for any more of your (bleep)."

This comment was "liked" by the mayor — the person charged with enforcing the rules of council.

In the Feb. 23 council meeting, the mayor also impugned the character and motives of three business leaders in our community that also volunteer their service on boards and committees. Not saying their names provides no cover for this attack. Business creators and volunteers should not

need to be defended; they should be respected and honored for their willingness to serve.

Tyler Brown's family has served, quite literally, this community for 40 years. Beyond creating a brand that is talked about with envy around the Northwest, Tyler has created jobs and has actively served his community as a volunteer with the Chamber, the Downtown and the County.

Scott Thatcher is one of the largest employers in our downtown. His company provides some of the best and most relied upon customer service in our town. The Thatchers have expanded their operation to the great benefit of our entire county as well as the county to the north of us with a second store.

Tori Thatcher was raised by a second-generation entrepreneur. She returned to Baker City after college to pursue her career, marry a public servant raised by another local entrepreneur and start a family. Tori served as the first president of Baker City Downtown and has been an exceptional new voice on the Transient Lodging committee as a representative of the burgeoning AirBnB economy. This industry has been critically important during our COVID year for tourists.

These individuals have contributed energy, ideas and jobs to our community. None of these industry leaders financially benefit from volunteer service and not one of these people should suffer derision from their elected leaders.

It is time we ask our city council to observe and respect the City Charter and the Rules of Procedure. It should be the desire of the council as a whole to lift up our community and encourage more participation.

Beverly Calder is a former Baker City Council member and a Baker City business owner.

Paying the price for another slothful autumn

The problem with leaves is that they don't.

Leave, that is.

Every autumn, while engaged in the seasonal ritual of raking, I convince myself that the scattering of leaves which get stuck around the bases of shrubs or in other inaccessible spots will eventually go away.

I am quite persuasive.

I assure myself that the leaves, left to themselves and exposed to the gales that are apt to arrive on occasion between Halloween and Easter, will bustle off to the adjacent field or out onto the street, beyond the reach of my rake and, more important, my concern.

Perhaps this is true of certain leaves.

But it is decidedly not so with my leaves.

We have several types of trees on the place but the most prolific leaf-producers are the several willows.

There is a weeping willow, and



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four or five others whose variety I can't remember.

As willows are wont to do, each of these trees produces every year a prodigious volume of long, narrow leaves. Willow leaves, despite being shaped rather like spears, are not aerodynamic.

The physics of the matter are beyond my ken, but it seems to me that willow leaves, lacking the surface area of, say, maple leaves, are less likely to catch the wind and sail away.

Once winter arrives and the snow conceals my sloth, I temporarily forget about the leaves.

The pristine white scene hides all manner of sins — the garden

tool I neglected to return to the shed, the abandoned lawn sprinkler, the plastic fire engine that my grandson, Brysen, was the last to touch.

But then along comes a balmy morning in March, and the snow retreats to reveal the leafy reality.

I happened to look out my bedroom window on just such a day recently and I noticed that the west side of our lot — the side where most of our willows grow — looked rather like the yard of a homestead abandoned decades ago.

The ground was littered with a messy mixture of limbs — willows shed these almost as readily as a shaggy dog transfers fur to a new sofa — piles of pebbly brown deer scat, and dingy old snow.

And, of course, leaves.

But these leaves aren't the colorful, pleasantly scented leaves of a brilliant October day.

In the climatic purgatory of early

March in a mountain valley, where snow squalls and sunshine swap places seemingly on an hourly basis, willow leaves are a uniform slate-grey and coated with a cold slime.

You don't so much rake them as scrape them.

I used a hand trowel to peel the leafy layers, more the method of a geologist than a gardener.

Indeed the procedure told a story of sorts, just as examining the strata of stone can do.

Beneath the sodden surface layer of decaying leaves the trowel blade clanged off a congealed melange of ice and granular snow.

I felt the slight thrill of discovery, and a twinge of nostalgia as I recalled the snowfalls of a winter now almost past.

These frozen traces also bolster my belief that my haphazard handling of leaves each autumn is justified.

This is proof, or so I tell myself, that willow leaves are effective insulation, and that by maintaining our landscaping in an unkempt manner I deserve not to be branded as lazy but rather celebrated for protecting the roots of the perennials from the ravages of arctic frosts.

This is scanty evidence, to be sure — unlikely to persuade the most credulous jury.

But my threshold for proof is low, and I am satisfied.

Anyway it's pleasant just to be out in the good air, feeling the cold earth, knowing that soon enough, with the sun's aid, it will yield its annual bounty of the warm and living green.

The next day the snow slunk back and the slate once again was white and clean, waiting for new stories to be written.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.