

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Temporary move to museum sensible

The extended closure of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center starting next winter will create a significant void in Baker County's list of visitor attractions.

Shrinking that void as much as possible, during the estimated 2 1/2 years that the Center is closed, is a vital task.

And the proposal that Baker County and Bureau of Land Management officials are working on — moving some exhibits from the Center to the county-owned Baker Heritage Museum in Baker City — is a good one.

Oregon's U.S. senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, think so, too. They recently sent a letter to Barry Bushue, Oregon/Washington director for the BLM, which owns and operates the Interpretive Center, endorsing the Heritage Museum as the temporary "Oregon Trail Experience" while the Center is undergoing a \$3-million-plus renovation to make it more energy-efficient.

(The Center has a considerable appetite for kilowatt-hours; according to a BLM survey, the building is the agency's least-efficient structure. The Center runs up monthly electrical bills averaging about \$10,000.)

The Heritage Museum, at 2480 Grove St., is already one of Baker County's finest attractions. Occupying the brick building that once served as the city's swimming pool — natatorium — the museum features notable collections of local artifacts and the Cavin-Warfel Collection, a world-class display of rocks, minerals and fossils that Baker City sisters Mamie Cavin and Elizabeth Cavin Warfel amassed over almost half a century.

Although it's hardly feasible to move to the Heritage Museum everything that makes the Interpretive Center such a popular place — an average of about 44,000 people per year have visited since 2008, and 2.4 million since it opened in 1992 — the museum is big enough to offer a reasonable facsimile of the Center experience.

Also, the museum's location near downtown Baker City is ideal. Although most people who visit the Interpretive Center also spend at least some time in Baker City and elsewhere in Baker County, the Center's location, five miles east of town, does allow people to exit Interstate 84, tour the Center and continue on their way.

But to enjoy the Oregon Trail Experience at the Heritage Museum, visitors will have to drive into Baker City. It seems likely that some of those people will decide to explore beyond the museum. That's beneficial for local businesses.

It's unfortunate that it will take more than two years to renovate the Interpretive Center, at a cost roughly one-third of what the government spend to build the facility. At least the investment should ensure that the Center will continue to bring visitors to Baker County for decades to come.

In the meantime it's imperative that local and BLM officials work together to ensure that Baker County retains its reputation as a necessary stop on the itinerary of any traveler interested in learning about the Oregon Trail.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Polio victims understand the value of vaccines

I rarely find a subject worth writing a letter to the editor anymore, I'm too old and set in my ways to persuade anyone to my political views. However I admit Baker City is by and large Republican and I just saw a story on the news that said nearly 30% of Republicans refuse to get the COVID-19 vaccine. If I can just get a few of you to heed the words of this old man, then I will feel I've finally accomplished something good. Please, please all of you regardless of political party that won't get the vaccine for whatever reason, ask yourself this one simple question: "How many major diseases have you had in your lifetime?" I venture to say the answer is zero. And why is that, very simply you have been vaccinated for them. Especially if you are under 50 years of age.

I am 74 and had polio when I was 2 years old in 1948, couldn't use my left leg for over a year, plagued to this day with problems with the left leg. Polio vaccine wasn't available until I was 9 years old in 1955. I wish every day of my life it had

been invented prior to 1946. I have a dear friend who was a poster child for March of Dimes, who suffered more than I did. I know she wishes the vaccine had been available when she was born as well.

So if you want to save your family so much pain and anguish, and perhaps save their life as well by not transmitting the COVID to them, please please reconsider and get the shot. You have nothing to lose but your life.

Bill Ward
Baker City

America needs to stop rampant illegal immigration

Illegal aliens are overrunning the country. They cross our borders unrestricted. They destroy the environment. Soon there will be nothing for those who have lived here for a long time to live on. Competition for resources is going to cause future trouble. The people are getting angry and if the influx of the uninvited keeps up there will be war. It does no good to talk with Washington, D.C., where corruption is out of control.

There are many who do well because of this invasion and they will not listen to the people. When they sense that we are on the edge of revolt they say give up your weapons of war, get some gun control and there will be peace in our land. Give up your rifles and the government will take care of you and make you safe. We can not tolerate domestic terrorism or discrimination because of skin color.

It is bs. The government always goes back on its promises. I say again as I have said before. It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees kissing the ass of your master, Washington, D.C. Peace is better than war but if war is necessary let it begin. I will not surrender my rifle.

In this time of conflict and division, quoting the Indian chiefs of a century ago is a waste of time. We must find solutions for our brave new world. Surely, we can constantly grow to a half billion, maybe a billion because of immigration. Everybody knows that growth is good, until it isn't.

Steve Culley
Baker City

Republicans, Democrats agree on this: keep growing the debt

By Chris Reed

"The American Republic will endure until the day Congress discovers that it can bribe the public with the public's money," Alexis de Tocqueville supposedly said after an 1831 visit to the United States. Whether or not the French diplomat and political scientist actually made this observation is a subject of debate. But whoever came up with the line was onto something. The events of the last four years should mortify Americans who believe the government should be run by responsible adults.

Then-Vice President Dick Cheney famously observed in 2003 that "Reagan proved that deficits don't matter." But after Republicans took control of the House in 2010 and challenged then-President Barack Obama's progressive agenda, there was actually a six-year span in which spending growth was relatively restrained.

Even so, in January 2017, with the national debt at \$20 trillion, the Congressional Budget Office issued a report warning that continuing to run annual budget deficits in the \$500 billion range was a recipe for disaster. It said debt interest payments would continue to grow, squeezing the federal budget and making a "death spiral" more likely — one in which the U.S. government would have to borrow money to fund its operations at increasingly higher interest rates because potential investors would lose confidence in the viability of a nation that had spent beyond its means for decades. Those higher interest rates would sharply boost the cost of federal borrowing and thus make the fiscal crisis even more difficult to address.

So what's happened since? Once in control of both the White House and Congress, each party has taken the

opportunity to make this severe threat much worse. In December 2017, President Donald Trump and House and Senate Republicans approved massive tax cuts that mostly helped affluent Americans and large U.S. corporations. The CBO estimated it would add \$2.3 trillion to the national debt over 10 years.

Some Democrats — including Rep. Scott Peters, D-Calif. — denounced this ballooning of the debt as irresponsible. But other Democrats said that if Republican lawmakers didn't give a damn about red ink, they wouldn't when the Democrats were in charge. In 2018, Hawaii Sen. Brian Schatz said, "I just reject the premise" that supporters of making college free should explain how it would be paid for.

Such thinking has become the norm for his party. Congressional Democrats approved a \$1.9 trillion measure on March 10 and President Joe Biden signed it on March 11, billing the pork barrel package as "pandemic relief." It is more accurately seen as intergenerational fiscal abuse.

Yes, of course, some of the emergency spending measures adopted in 2020 — on bipartisan votes — were necessary to help the millions of people who lost their jobs in the early days of pandemic lockdowns and to help public schools and local and state governments deal with COVID-19.

But only 5% of the "pandemic relief" is going to pandemic public health needs, according to the Commission for a Responsible Federal Budget. By far the biggest chunk — more than \$900 billion, per the commission — is being given to individuals and states regardless of whether their finances actually took a major hit.

Remember, the great majority of Americans never lost their jobs during

the pandemic recession. So why should people who make \$75,000 (a middle-class income in most states) or less get a \$1,400 cash payment and additional \$1,400 payments for each dependent child? And why should couples who make \$150,000 (an upper-class income in many states) or less each get \$1,400 and additional multiples for their dependents? Why can't this aid be means-tested?

Remember, state revenue didn't take nearly the hit expected at the start of the pandemic. Overall, it was only down 1.6%, according to the National Association of State Budget Officers. While of course states had to pay for unexpected costs related to the pandemic public health emergency, the \$300 billion already provided by the federal government should have covered their costs. Yet the "pandemic stimulus" includes \$350 billion more for states, many of which will just roll these borrowed federal dollars into their rainy-day funds. Why can't this aid be means-tested?

Republicans are right to howl about these massive giveaways. But they have no credibility after their massive 2017 giveaways to wealthy individuals and corporations — which Democrats were right to howl about at the time.

If CBO analysts fretted in 2017 about America surviving with \$500 billion annual deficits, this fiscal year's \$4.2 trillion deficit should freak them out. But having the national debt jump to \$30 trillion should freak everyone out — especially the younger and poorer people likely to pay the highest price when the "death spiral" arrives and their nation goes broke.

Chris Reed is the deputy editorial and opinion editor of The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Letters to the editor

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