

EDITORIAL

Getting
the most
from the
money

A considerable sum of money is coming to Baker County and to its cities.

The nearly \$5.5 million from the American Rescue Plan Act — the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill that President Joe Biden signed last week — brings to the county both great opportunity and great responsibility.

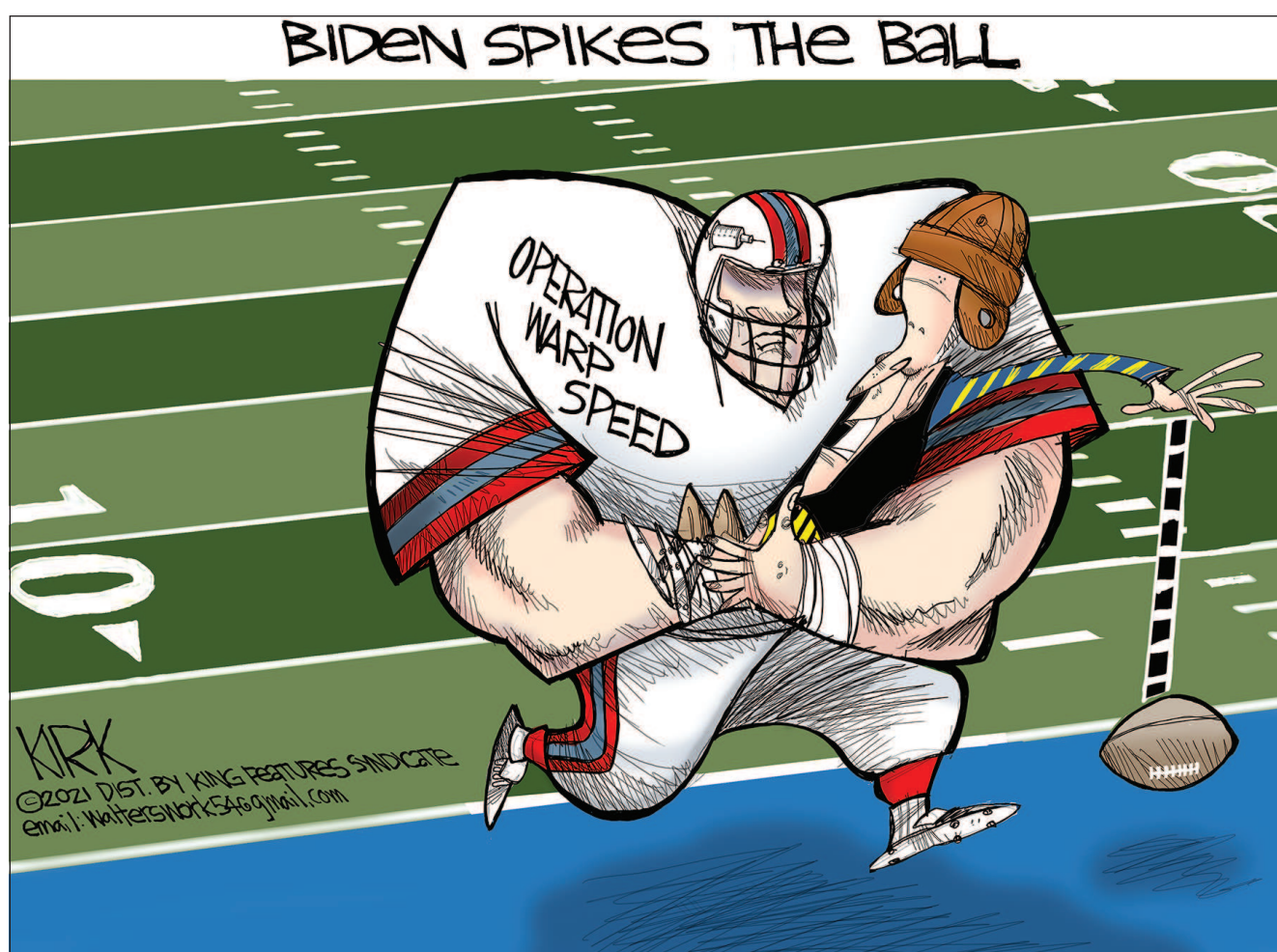
Baker County is slated to receive \$3.13 million. Baker City will get \$2 million. Haines and Huntington will receive \$90,000 each, Halfway \$60,000, Richland and Sumpter \$40,000 each, and Unity \$10,000.

Sen. Jeff Merkley said this week that local officials can use the money to offset costs the county and cities have incurred during the pandemic, and to help local businesses and organizations. County Commissioner Mark Bennett said he believes helping beleaguered businesses should be a focus. He's right.

The county in particular, as the lead agency for the local response to COVID-19, has taken on additional duties and, inevitably, costs. But as Bennett noted, the county also is eligible for financial aid from several sources, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Major revenue sources for the county and for Baker City — property taxes and, for the city, water and sewer service — have been relatively steady.

But businesses, and in particular those in the hospitality industry, have not fared so well during a year of closures and restrictions over which they have no control. Some nonprofit service organizations have suffered too. Last year the city and the county doled out more than \$900,000 in federal COVID-19 aid to local businesses and groups. Local governments should use a similar process to distribute the larger amounts of money from the American Rescue Plan Act. This can be difficult, as the real need undoubtedly exceeds the available aid. But local officials need to be diligent in examining those needs so as to ensure the money has the greatest possible benefit.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Voting law changes
reminiscent of Jim Crow

In the aftermath of an election that was declared fraudulent without evidence, legislatures in many states are introducing 200+ changes to voting laws that make it more complicated and/or inconvenient to vote.

It's reminiscent of the South's Jim Crow laws instituted after the 13th Amendment abolished slavery and the 15th Amendment guaranteed the right to vote to all citizens, including former slaves. In spite of having lost the Civil War, Southern states instituted Jim Crow laws, which perpetuated racial segregation and discrimination for decades, the aftermath of which the U.S. is still wrestling with.

Below I quote from a speech by the most famous man to escape slavery, Frederick Douglass, 1818-1895. On July 5, 1852, in Rochester, New York, Douglass, a decade before the Civil

Letters to the editor

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War, addressing his speech to proponents of slavery, gave his impression of "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro":

"What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling van-

ity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy — a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages."

This letter may be considered a continuation of my letter published in the Baker City Herald last Sept. 8, in which I pointed out how many U.S. presidents (10) had slave servants in their households and how slave labor was used to construct the White House and the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. Compensation for the slaves' labor was paid to the slave owners, not a cent to the slaves.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

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 attorney; Alice Durlfing, county treasurer; Stefanie Kirby, county clerk; 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.

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

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

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

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

The lingering filth attached to the Holocaust

Until I read the book, I would have claimed, and with considerable confidence, that my feelings about the Holocaust were rigid.

Mine, I would have asserted, was the familiar mixture of disgust and horror and a sorrow so deep that no word can convey its unfathomable essence.

But while I was reading "Auschwitz: A New History" by Laurence Rees, I came to understand that another emotion was perhaps almost as powerful as those others.

Hated. I don't mean to suggest that I had never felt angry while reading other accounts of that inhumane episode in human history.

Of course I had. I don't believe anyone, save perhaps a sociopath, could learn about the Nazis' atrocities and not succumb to at least a brief rage at the reality that such a crime could be perpetrated.

But the anger that Rees' book provoked was a different sort, one that changed my perspective not only about the people guilty of these crimes but, sadly, about those who are utterly innocent.

Rees' work, as the title implies, focused on the most infamous of the camps, Auschwitz in Poland, the



JAYSON
JACOBY

tiny plot of land where 1.1 million people, most of them Jews, died.

I'm still not sure why I felt differently after reading his book, which was published in 2005.

Rees, an Englishman who worked for the BBC and has written four other books about World War II, didn't reveal any new and shocking aspects of a story which has been well-plumbed by historians for decades.

The author himself neatly summarizes the basic thrust of his work, writing in the introduction that "Auschwitz, through its destructive dynamism, was both a microcosm of the Nazi state and the logical consequence of it."

Rees' book relies heavily on interviews with more than 100 people, including some fortunate enough to survive Auschwitz, as well as some Germans who worked there.

Among the themes in "Auschwitz" that are not revelatory is the ordinariness of some of those who contributed to the Holocaust.

This concept is captured most adeptly, and famously, by Hannah Arendt, who wrote of the "banality of evil."

Rees delved into this idea at the level of the individual — a former SS guard, for instance, who was complicit in mass murder but who, decades later, was a pleasant person for Rees to pass an afternoon with.

But Rees also examined what seems to me a much more troubling notion — that some malignant attribute of German society during Hitler's reign made possible the circumstances which can still induce nightmares most of a century later.

This flaw — it can hardly be described otherwise — is the infectious agent that made Auschwitz, and the Holocaust, the "logical consequence" that Rees writes about.

The very idea, of course, that genocide could be "logical" is abhorrent.

I think it was Rees' moderation — he largely eschewed the most graphic descriptions, which are so terribly available to more sensationalistic writers — that affected me as other, superficially similar books did not.

His writing, because it is dispassionate, was all the more convincing

in arguing the thesis that what happened was inevitable.

What bothered me most, though, as I neared the end of Rees' book, is the realization that the Holocaust is a malevolent force which can afflict, to some degree, even those who are repelled by it.

As I was reading the final chapter I thought about the summer of 1986, part of which I spent in what was then West Germany.

I stayed with two families. I suppose I must have met, in more than a passing sense, a few dozen Germans during the visit. Without exception they were fine people, friendly and accommodating to an immature 15-year-old whose language skills were modest.

But not until I read Rees' book did I ever think of those Germans in the context of the Holocaust. This is an indirect connection, to be sure; few of those I met that summer were even alive during the war.

What I mean is that I wondered — and I seemed helpless to avoid the comparison, distasteful though it was — whether any of those Germans might, like their forebears, be unusually prone to participating in industrial murder.

This is terribly unfair. And I believe the answer is no.

Yet the stain that the Holocaust left on Germany, and on Germans, is indelible, it seems to me.

This is why, of course, the country's leaders have passed laws, including one that makes it a crime to deny the Holocaust, that would rouse free speech advocates in America to high dudgeon.

I can't, as an American, fathom the lingering guilt in Germany.

Yet after reading Rees' book I realized, in a way I never had before, that events so horrific that they render even superlatives useless can carry a bit of their filth forward through the decades, flossing that fouls, however slightly, the reputations of people who don't deserve any such association.

The story of Auschwitz must never be forgotten, of course.

And for that reason I appreciate the scholarship of historians such as Rees.

Yet it saddens me that after reading such a fine piece of work I was so incensed that I connected, in even the tiniest way, the acts of long-dead criminals to living people who happen to live in the same country.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.