

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Governor's hollow words

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown, in announcing on Tuesday, May 4, that Baker County and 14 other counties would move from extreme risk to high risk under the state's COVID-19 restrictions Friday, May 7, implied that she was bestowing a significant favor on those fortunate counties.

"Based on today's numbers, I am keeping my commitment to Oregonians," Brown said.

This hardly qualifies as a sacrifice on the governor's part.

Brown was merely adhering to the standards she had set. Oregonians should not feel grateful that their governor merely does what she said she would do.

The margin that prompted the governor's announcement Tuesday was decidedly narrow.

In April Brown announced that no county would move into the extreme risk category — which carries the most stringent restrictions, including a ban on indoor dining in restaurants and bars — unless two statewide statistics, both involving COVID-19 patients being treated in hospitals, were met.

One threshold is 300 patients statewide. The other is a weekly increase in hospitalization rates of 15% or more.

Oregon continues to exceed the first mark — there were 330 COVID-19 patients in hospitals statewide as of Wednesday, May 5. But the percentage growth in hospitalization rates was 14.9%.

So by a margin of 0.1%, Baker County will drop from extreme risk, where it's been since April 30, to high risk this Friday.

Yet the county would not have qualified for that move based solely on case counts and test positivity. And that highlights the hollowness of the governor's recent rhetoric.

In an April 27 press release, Brown said that "Counties will stay in extreme risk for a maximum of three weeks, and will be able to move to a lower risk level sooner if their COVID-19 case rates are brought down in the intervening weeks ..."

That sounded promising.

Well, not exactly.

The governor's statement seems pretty straightforward, even if it lacks any numerical criteria. But what the governor didn't say is that although state officials are reviewing counties' risk levels weekly, they're still being assessed based on COVID-19 cases and test positivity rates over a two-week period. During the most recent measuring period, April 18 to May 1, Baker County had 61 new cases and a test positivity rate of 10.6%. To qualify for high risk rather than extreme, the county needs to have 59 or fewer cases and a test positivity rate below 10%. Had the statewide rate of hospitalizations increased by 0.1% more — 15% instead of 14.9% — Baker County would have remained at extreme risk for at least another week, through May 13.

Yet the governor said counties could move to a lower risk level if their case rates "are brought down in the intervening weeks."

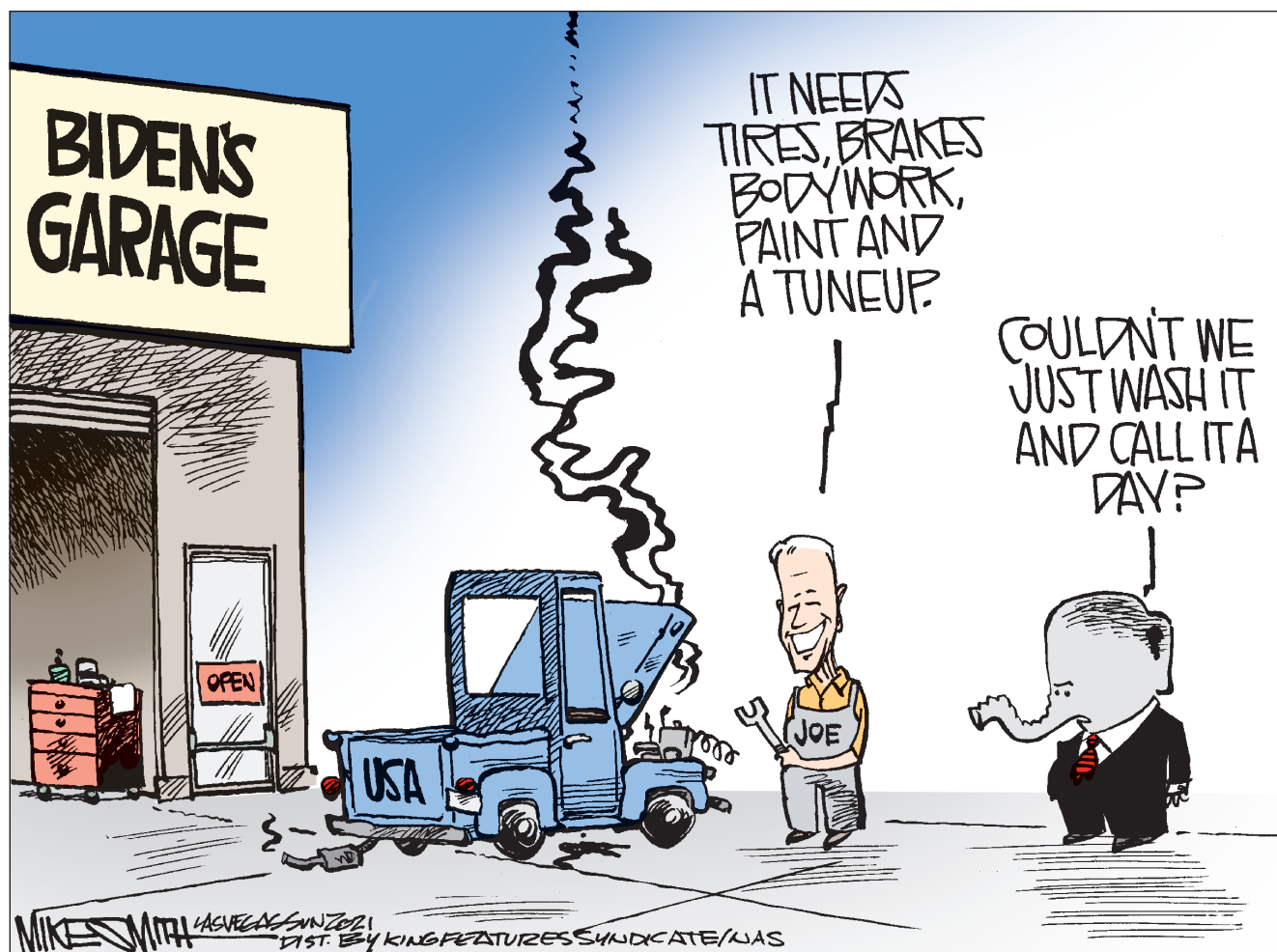
Baker County did that. During the second week of the April 18-May 1 period, the county's new cases dropped by 55% — from 42 to 19. Its test positivity rate fell from 13.6% to 7%. Those are significant improvements. Yet they wouldn't have yielded any benefit to the county; the state would have continued to punish the county and many of its businesses based on statistics nearly two weeks old.

Ideally, counties will no longer have to worry about moving back to extreme risk. Brown said Tuesday that she doesn't expect any counties to return to that risk level for the duration of the pandemic.

The governor should, however, have made the move to high risk for Baker and 14 other counties immediate rather than waiting until Friday. Consider that on April 29 Brown, in a letter justifying her decision to move those counties to extreme risk, cited computer modeling showing that that move "could save roughly 180 lives." Yet four days later, based on the margin of 0.1% in hospitalization rates, the governor decided those counties — including Multnomah, the state's most populous — could return to high risk.

It beggars belief that all those lives would still be in danger if the statewide hospitalization rate increase were 15%, but that the danger disappeared when it dipped to 14.9%. Nor is it logical to think that those 180 people would be spared if 15 counties remained at extreme risk Wednesday and Thursday, but that the threat would pass as soon as Friday arrives. This sort of silly adherence to a rigid schedule — risk level changes must always take effect on Fridays, apparently — erodes the governor's credibility, and extends the punishment to business owners and local economies.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Mayor, Council's stance make Baker City proud

To Baker City Mayor Kerry McQuisten: I just saw your appearance on "Fox News Primetime" and was pleased and gratified to see you, our small-town mayor capturing the interest of the national news. You comported yourself well, with dignity and clarity.

I hope you know, in that appearance you spoke to the majority of the population, not only in our town but across the state and, I suspect, across the nation. Americans need to regain their courage and dignity and the best way for that to happen is for us all to speak out and refuse to be forced into unwise, unwelcome servitude to the Socialist ideology.

The first step to regain our freedom is to stand together and refuse to wear the "Mask of Shame." The second and most important is to bring all our businesses back to normal operation. No more Soviet-style lockdowns.

You and the City Council are to be congratulated for taking the bold step of speaking out. Recall the story of "The Kings New Clothes." I don't know if our present crop of children know that story but they do know there is something wrong with the masks. We must protect their innocence, health and their future freedom.

God Bless you and the council. I am confident the entire city is as proud of you as Penny and I.

Rick and Penny Rienks
Baker City

Mayor, City Council stand against governor's orders

Way to go Mayor McQuisten and City Council on illegal COVID lockdown! Job well done. Keep it up. Freedom is at stake.

Brown violated our Constitution by extending the COVID emergency beyond 30 days without vote by State legislation, thereby making ALL subsequent orders illegal as well!

Oregon State Constitution ARTICLE X-A CATASTROPHIC DISASTERS

Section 6. Termination of operation of this Article; extension by Legislative Assembly; transition provisions; limitation on power of Governor to invoke this Article. (1) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, the provisions of sections 1 to 5 of this Article, once invoked, shall cease to be operative not later than 30 days following the date the Governor invoked the provisions of sections 1 to 5 of this Article,

or on an earlier date recommended by the Governor and determined by the Legislative Assembly. The Governor may not recommend a date under this subsection unless the Governor finds and declares that the immediate response to the catastrophic disaster has ended.

(2) Prior to expiration of the 30-day limit established in subsection (1) of this section, the Legislative Assembly may extend the operation of sections 1 to 5 of this Article beyond the 30-day limit upon the approval of three-fifths of the members of each house who are able to attend a session described in subsection (3) of section 3 of this Article.

5) The Governor may not invoke the provisions of sections 1 to 5 of this Article more than one time with respect to the same catastrophic disaster. A determination under subsection (1) of this section or an extension described in subsection (2) of this section that establishes a date upon which the provisions of sections 1 to 5 of this Article shall cease to be operative does not prevent invoking the provisions of sections 1 to 5 of this Article in response to a new declaration by the Governor that a different catastrophic disaster has occurred. (Created through H.J.R. 7, 2011, and adopted by the people Nov. 6, 2012)

https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/Pages/OrConst.aspx

Mick Hiatt
Baker City

Rural America has little in common with urban left

The Founding Fathers didn't trust a centralized government or a standing army. They wanted checks and balances and an ironclad guarantee before ratifying the constitution. Free speech and an armed populace, in the bill of rights, were central to adopting a federalized system. The second amendment was designed as an ace in the hole against tyranny. You can check it out by reading the federalist papers and things like Jefferson's letters. His tree of liberty letter is a good one.

The left will scoff at the idea of armed citizens taking on a totalitarian government backed by the U.S. military, even though the military backing a dictator is remote. Our military is formidable. I saw it in action in Vietnam. One night, as new guy, I pointed out a thunderstorm up in the mountains. My black fireteam partner laughed, it was a B-52 strike. Later

a red laser type beam came from the sky as Puff with his miniguns strafed the area. Every 10th round was a red tracer. Five-five batteries blasted away with artillery, and a battleship dropped in some 16-inch shells that made the ground shake. I saw jets make napalm runs and Huey gunships support Marines. An ambush was met by a platoon with M14's and M60 machine guns. Impressive. You can't win against that. Trouble is somebody forgot to tell the VC and NVA. The same argument about the futility of resisting tyranny was around in 1775. England had the most impressive military in the world. Again, somebody forgot to tell Washington. In April 1775 a shot was fired that was heard around the world. Tyranny was challenged.

CNN is now constantly hammering away about mass shootings. There have been a few, like the one in Indianapolis. They were quick to cover it, complete with mugshots and background on the shooter. In the meantime, as black and brown gangs compete for territory to distribute cartel drugs CNN coverage is simply presented as mass shootings. No mugshots. That might be racist. Out here in flyover country it is just written off as Saturday night in Portland. Gang violence is gun violence to the left but even they don't dispute the fact that the leading cause of death for black males 16 to 24 is homicide. The liberal way of dealing with that is to disband gang units and defund the police and take guns away from the country boys. The idea of drone strikes on cartel drug labs would disturb their inner child.

The civil cold war is warming up as cities burn with unchecked "peaceful protests." Liberal agenda to disarm the public only makes it get hotter. Add to that the Biden border and it doesn't bode well for peace and harmony or the unity Uncle Joe promised. We are supposed to have discourse and talk our differences out. Be bipartisan. That doesn't work. Say you oppose anymore immigration because of overpopulation and you are immediately thought of as racist. Assert the right to defend yourself or the republic and you are a gun lobby.

Rural America has little in common with the urban left. Political separation sounds good. I'm for borders and guns. What will happen will happen.

Steve Culley
Baker City

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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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

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.