

Opinion

BAKER CITY
Herald
Serving Baker County since 1870

Write a letter
news@bakercityherald.com

EDITORIAL

Drug team has had a busy stretch

The Baker County Narcotics Enforcement Team has been busy recently.

This is both good news, and bad.

Bad, of course, because the team's arrests stem from significant drug distribution happening in and around Baker County.

But it's gratifying to see that police are identifying these operations, arresting suspects and confiscating drugs.

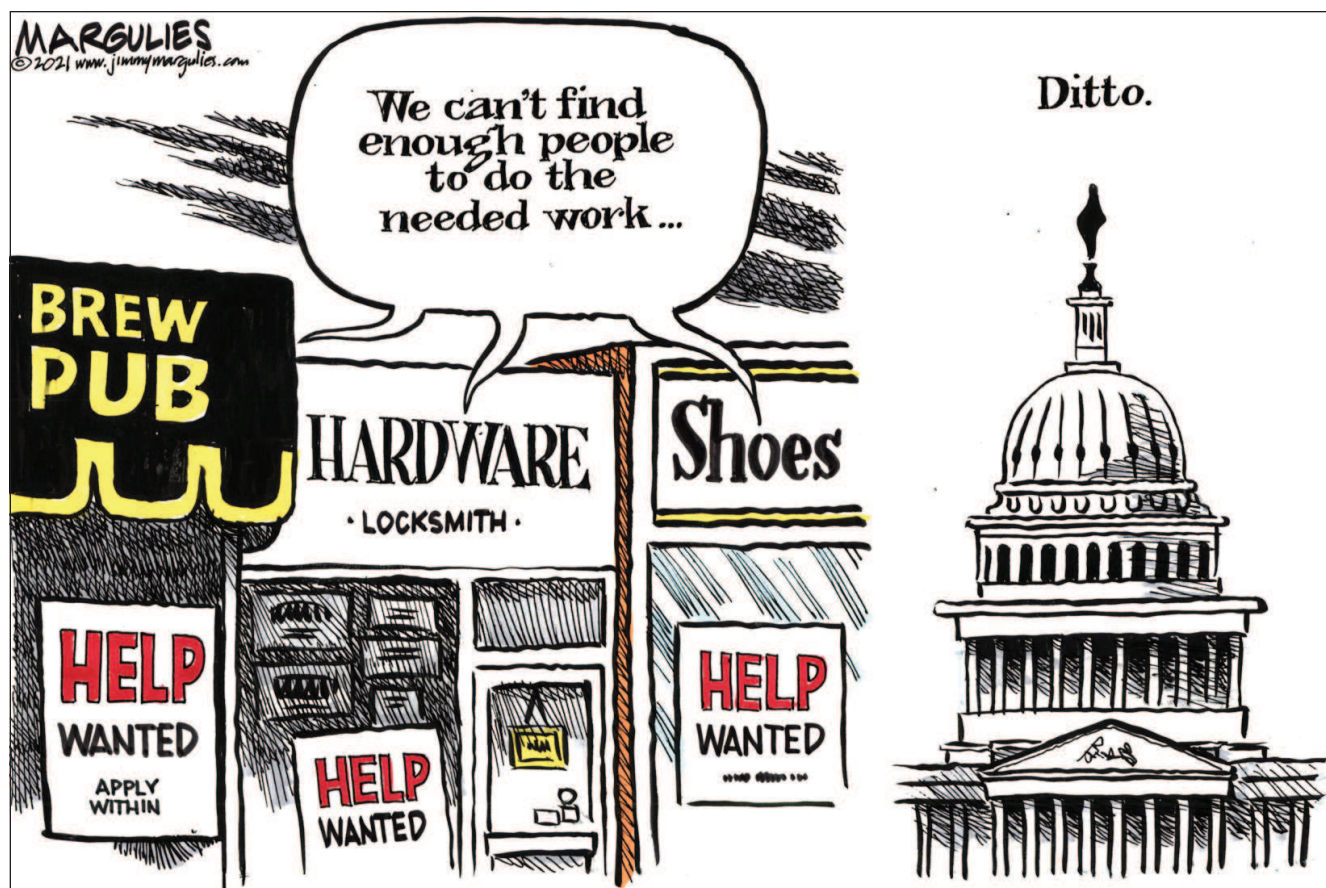
During the past three weeks, the Narcotics Enforcement Team, whose members include officers from the Baker City Police, Baker County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police, with support from the Baker County District Attorney's Office, has arrested two men, one in Baker City and one in Ontario, who are accused of selling heroin and methamphetamine, and in one case fentanyl, in Baker County and surrounding areas.

Both arrests resulted from investigations by the Narcotics Enforcement Team, said Lt. Ty Duby of the Baker City Police, who's also a former Oregon State Police detective.

Duby said the team concept is crucial because it allows police to focus their efforts based on information they develop about potential drug sales networks. Although arrests are always possible in the normal course of police work, Duby said having a group of officers dedicated to pursuing narcotics cases greatly improves the chances that suspects will be arrested.

The Baker County team has proved its worth this spring. We can only hope that it will be so effective that it will no longer be necessary.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Time to institute paid family leave

Editorial from The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

President Joe Biden's American Families Plan contains a long list of potential investments aimed at revitalizing the country, but one proposal in particular is long overdue: paid family leave.

With no federally mandated paid leave, the U.S. finds itself an anachronism in comparison with dozens of other industrialized countries. As such, it falls further behind economic competitors in terms of the number of women participating in the labor force. The situation has gotten worse with the coronavirus pandemic, which has pushed more women from the workforce to the lowest levels in more than three decades. It's time the country acknowledged that paid family leave is needed to remain competitive.

Biden's plan would commit \$225 billion over a decade toward implementing paid family and medical

leave. It would provide workers up to \$4,000 a month when they take family or medical leave. A range of weekly wages would be replaced, rising to 80% of wages for the lowest-earning workers. Within 10 years, the plan would guarantee 12 weeks of paid parental, family and personal illness leave.

Under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act now in place, workers can qualify for 12 weeks of leave for the birth of a child, to care for a sick family member, or for other medical reasons. Although the worker's job is protected, it is unpaid, and many simply cannot afford to forgo 12 weeks of pay.

The Biden administration estimates that nearly 1 in 4 new mothers returns to work within two weeks of giving birth and 1 in 5 retirees left the workforce earlier than planned to care for an ill family member. Although some companies have seen the benefit of offering paid leave as a way of re-

taining valued employees, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 95% of the lowest earners still have no access to paid family leave.

Paid family leave helps workers and employers alike. New parents have the opportunity to be at home with their child in those earliest days, and studies from the few states that do have paid family leave show that mothers, in particular, are more likely to return to the workforce following the leave of absence. Those with a sick family member can facilitate important and needed care without worrying about their financial situation. And companies benefit from higher rates of worker retention and reduced turnover costs.

The plan proposed by Biden offers a starting point to begin phasing in a national policy of required paid family leave. It's something that is needed if the U.S. is to maintain a robust, competitive workforce.

Fact-checkers show refreshing interest in Biden

I've been pleased recently to see that the fact-checkers at The Associated Press, who never refuted so many statements and with such apparent glee as they did during the Trump presidency, have not let their enthusiasm for exposing exaggerations and falsities go flaccid in the Biden era.

Which is not to say the media organization is quite finished with the erstwhile resident of the White House. It's as if the AP, after more than four years of mining unparalleled riches, refuses to stop digging for new offshoots from the glittering vein that was the Trump administration.

Although not even the most naive observer of political journalism could believe that the media have been as aggressive in covering Biden as they were with Trump, the AP's fact check following Biden's address to Congress last month was to me refreshingly blunt.

Biden, for instance, in talking about immigration, touted his efforts as vice president during Barack Obama's presidency, saying "The plan was working, but the last administration decided it was not worth it."

Anyone who's not a mindless Biden acolyte recognizes how vapid that claim is.

And the AP, to its credit, didn't equivocate.

"That's wrong," was the AP's assessment.

The fact-checkers bolstered that by noting that the Trump administration sent similar amounts of financial aid to Central America as the Obama administration did, yet the number of unaccompanied children crossing the U.S. border from Mexico in March 2021 was the highest on record.

The AP also challenged Biden's



JAYSON JACOBY

claim that his economic plan, including spending \$2.3 trillion on "infrastructure" (a term that, as the Biden administration defines it, apparently includes money to build a garage on my property), is supported by a "broad consensus of economics — left, right, center — and they agree that what I'm proposing will help create millions of jobs and generate historic economic growth."

The reality, the AP concluded, is that Biden is "glossing over the naysayers."

Those include Larry Summers, who was Obama's top economic and treasury secretary during Bill Clinton's presidency. Summers, the AP pointed out, has "warned that Biden's relief package risks rates of inflation not seen in a generation."

Yet even as the AP was subjecting Biden's claims to the unflattering mirror of reality, its fact-checkers also got in a few digs, albeit indirectly, at Trump.

The story, though it focused on Biden's speech, took on a couple statements from Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, who gave the Republican response.

(A tradition, by the way, which ought to be scrapped. One partisan speech per evening should be the legal limit.)

Scott credited the Trump administration for contributing to the rapid development of COVID-19 vaccines, noting that "our country is flooded with safe and effective vaccines."

The AP, reverting to its previous curious standard when it comes

to any statement that praises Trump, deemed Scott's claim "a real stretch."

But the AP's support for that conclusion — and I'm being charitable — is sketchy.

The fact-checkers could hardly ignore the fact that vaccines exist, and that the Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed helped to make that possible.

But the AP was not deterred by the absence of a compelling counterclaim to Scott.

Instead, the fact-checkers' tepid response was that "several state governors were complaining about jumbled signals from Trump's team" regarding vaccine availability during the last month of his presidency.

The AP doesn't name any of the governors, but it seems likely that the list would include Oregon Gov. Kate Brown. Trouble is, she was complaining about the Trump administration even while Oregon had stockpiles of thousands of doses of vaccine it apparently was incapable of distributing.

The fact-checkers conclude with what, given the subject of Scott's statement, qualifies as a non sequitur: "Trump was focused on his campaign to overturn the election results and did not devote much public attention to the pandemic as his term came to an end."

That's a reasonably fair assessment.

What it has to do with Scott pointing out that the country is "flooded with safe and effective vaccines," is another matter.

The purveyors of consumer products, perhaps the keenest observers of contemporary culture, have gone

all in on the pandemic.

In the hypercompetitive marketplace, the most agile players tend to thrive, of course, while the plodders fail. And certain companies have pursued the unique opportunities that COVID-19 has presented like so many cheetahs latching onto a hapless wildebeest.

Some of these gambits are so obvious that they hardly require an MBA to recognize.

We've all seen the proliferation across all media in advertisements for face masks, for instance, a product previously of interest mainly to the relatively few among us who work regularly with caustic chemicals or paint a lot of cars.

But the virus has also created profit niches that aren't so predictable.

The other day I watched a TV ad for what at a cursory glance seemed to be a typical swiveling office chair.

Except the typical swiveling office chair, at least in my experience with the breed, is not capable of massaging your lower back and warming your kidneys while you're sitting in it, tapping away at a keyboard or giggling at YouTube videos of people trying to skateboard down flights of concrete stairs.

The target audience for this chair isn't an office drone or an executive, however, but rather workers who have sought, or have been required, to hunker at home to keep clear of COVID-19.

The chair, besides its ability to knead your knotted muscles and keep your internal organs toasty, boasts several other features — I don't recall the details — designed to appeal to homebound employees.

My initial reaction to the ad was a grudging admiration for whoever decided that tinkering with

a simple piece of furniture could tempt people who didn't realize they needed an office chair to sign up for the easy payment plan.

But as I watched the actor relax in the chair and participate in a Zoom (or at least Zoom-like) meeting with a beatific smile that was about as convincing as the wood-grain in a 1974 Pinto, my appreciation for the marketing savvy was replaced by dismay.

It struck me that the scenario that plays out in the commercial might not be so temporary after all — that employees padding around in pajamas rather than business casual might remain commonplace even after we've banished the pandemic to history.

This isn't wholly negative, to be sure.

COVID-19 has ravaged our economy, but the damage certainly would have been worse if not for modern communication technology — some of which wasn't available as recently as a decade or so ago — that kept certain sectors running even as offices closed.

Yet the possibility that the trend precipitated by the worst pandemic in a century could insinuate itself into society on a more permanent basis seems to me the grimmest of prospects.

I don't believe we will prosper, in the long run, from making murky the formerly distinct boundary between home and work.

When our homes cease to be refuges — the places where we can relax after the travails of the work-day, and recognize them as family — then I fear we will have lost something that can't be replaced.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.