

# Opinion

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## EDITORIAL

# State risk level plan is unfair

Baker County's rate of new COVID-19 cases has dropped to its lowest level in more than three months, and our reward is ...

Well, there is no reward.

The county will instead continue to be subject to the most severe restrictions on businesses and events, under Oregon's current system, through at least May 27.

This is grossly unfair.

Consider these statistics:

For the 10-day period May 9-18, Baker County reported 15 new cases. The county had zero or one new case on seven of those 10 days.

That's the fewest new cases in a 10-day period since Feb. 4-13, when the total was 13. At that time, Baker County was at the lowest of the state's four risk levels. At that level, restaurants and bars could have indoor dining up to 50% of capacity, with no limit on the total number of people, including diners and staff.

But today Baker County is at high risk (the top of the risk level, extreme, is no longer an option for any county — a meager consolation). Indoor dining is limited to 25% of capacity or 50 total people.

The reason the county is not benefiting from its significant drop in new cases is that Gov. Kate Brown and the Oregon Health Authority continue to use a rigid, outdated set of criteria to determine county risk levels. The specific problem for Baker County is its percentage of positive COVID-19 tests.

For the most recent two-week measuring period, May 2-15, the county's positivity rate was 8.9%. To drop from high risk to moderate risk, the rate would need to drop below 8%. The county's total new cases during that period was 40, which would qualify for moderate risk. At that risk level, restaurants and bars can have indoor dining up to 50% of capacity, or a maximum of 100 people — double the current limits.

The state's reliance on test positivity rate to set risk levels is terribly flawed, and in two ways.

First, by sticking to the two-week measuring period that's been in place since early December, state officials utterly ignore the rapid progress that the county has made. The test positivity rate for the second of the two weeks (May 9-15) was 5.5%. Our businesses are being punished solely because of the 11% positivity rate for the week May 2-8.

Second, the state metric utterly fails to acknowledge that the total number of tests has dropped substantially, a completely predictable trend given that a substantial portion of the population has either been infected or been vaccinated, and thus would have no reason to even consider being tested. In Baker County, the weekly total of COVID-19 tests dropped from 236 from May 2-8, to 146 from May 9-15 (during February, by contrast, when the county had similar numbers of new cases, the weekly test total was much higher, exceeding 300). As any fourth-grader can tell you, if fewer people are being tested, even a small number of positive tests will yield a higher positivity percentage, despite the actual prevalence of the virus in Baker County plummeting. The number of positive tests dropped from 26 from May 2-8 to just eight from May 9-15.

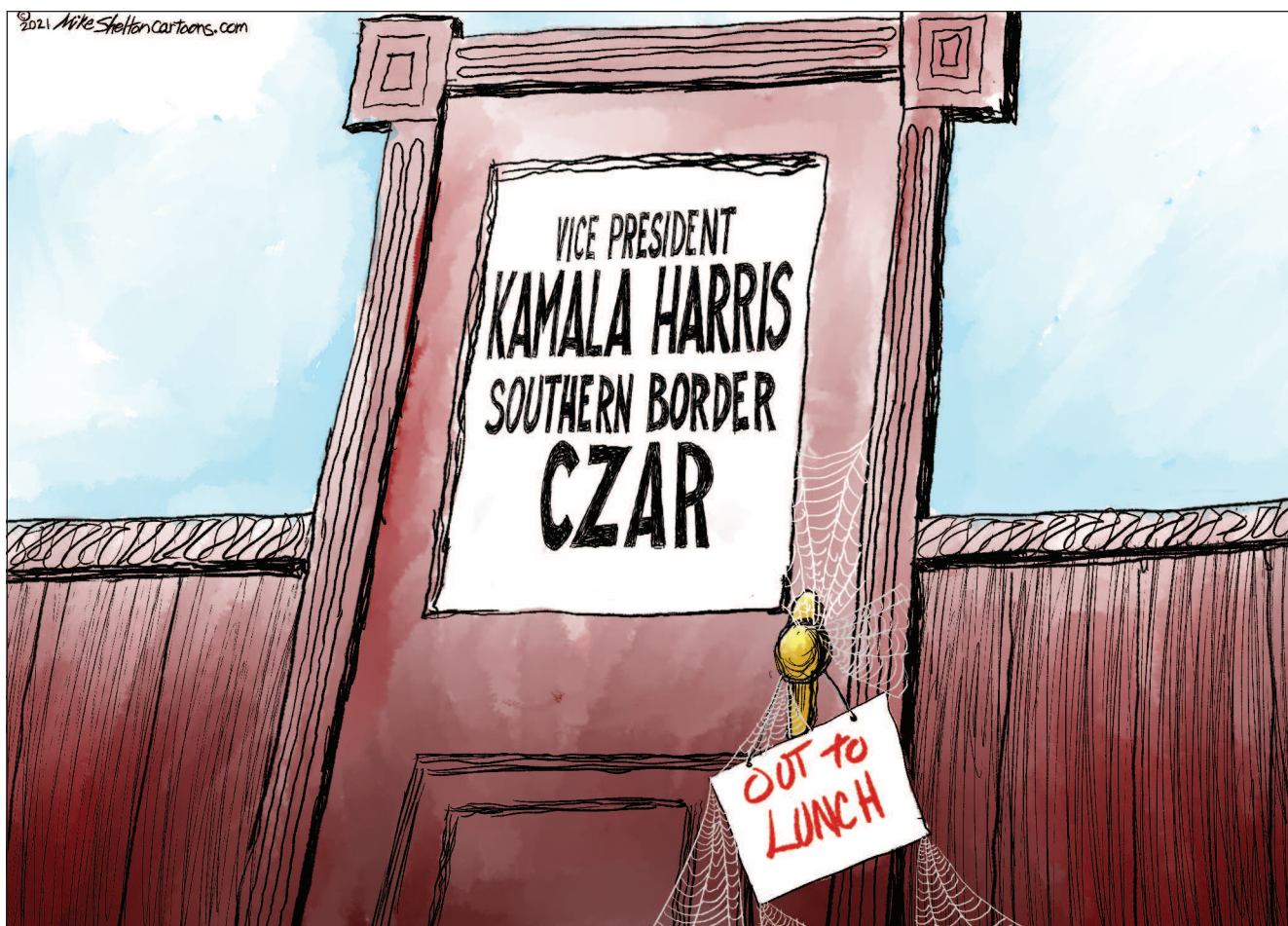
A reasonable person would call that a meaningful improvement, one that totally justifies relaxing the restrictions. Oregon officials, unfortunately, are not reasonable.

There are other reasons to move Baker County out of high risk. Most recently state officials have tied risk levels to the number of COVID-19 patients in hospitals. From May 1-15, the largest share of new cases in Baker County — 22.2% — was among 5- to 9-year-olds. Kids in that age range almost never need hospital treatment for this virus — 1% of Oregon's total during the pandemic.

Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett has pleaded with state officials to drop, or at least modify, the test positivity rate metric in setting risk levels. So far his efforts have proved fruitless. The state continues to punish businesses for no legitimate reason.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

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## Your views

### Be respectful of private property along Pine Creek

The many benefits of living up Pine Creek as we do include ready access to the upper road and the very scenic Pine Creek Reservoir. My partner and I have enjoyed multiple hikes and ATV rides up this scenic drainage for sunny, warm picnics beside the reservoir and photo opportunities, which are abundant, including close-ups of our beloved goats.

Dave McCarty and his partner, Joelleen, are our neighbors (in country terms) and we have found them to be friendly and accommodating. We met both of them at different times while hiking the road through their property.

Dave's recent purchase of the 1,500-acre parcel above us on the hill has been a godsend. He is currently logging and thinning the thick forest growth that has accumulated over the last several decades. That overgrowth has been a major concern of wildfire. Listening to his helicopter logging on the job every day is music to my ears.

His property borders Baker City's watershed area and reducing fire fuels in this area is a boon to all of us. Any time we can reduce forest fire threats is a step in the right direction. Living in an overlay area, the threat of wildfire is forefront on our minds (and that of our insurers).

Using the Pine Creek Reservoir Road has been a privilege that too many people have taken for granted and come to view as a right. There has always been a huge sign at the beginning of the property notifying the public that the next 2 1/2 miles are private property and please stay on the road. However, as with most good things, a few bad apples have spoiled the whole box requiring the current owner to take steps to ensure the safety of his own property. Admit it. You would do the same.

In a two-week period late last fall, it was reported to me that no less than three half-dead campfires (half-dead meaning still warm and smoldering) were found abandoned on this parcel of land with no one in attendance along with the discovery of an illegal elk trap

(archery season). That's when Dave installed the gate and I for one am damned glad he did!

Late last fall — keep in mind what our weather is like at this time. A stiff wind could have whipped up any of these abandoned fires and turned them into a raging inferno!

Remember Paradise, California? Don't think it can't happen here. The Elkhorn forests are way overdue for a major burn. Ask the Forest Service about that. A good downslope wind from such fires can carry embers deep into the ripe, dry wheat fields of the valley as well and then we're all in trouble.

Some of you are up in arms over the closure of this access and whether or not there is deeded public access through (not "to") this property is still being debated.

This property is not mine and it is not yours. It belongs solely to Dave McCarty. He has stated that he will allow hikers to go through (not while he's logging though — get real!). All you have to do is call. He's posted his phone number on the gate. A little respect is in order here.

The defiance exhibited by some of you is worthy of a good old-fashioned trip to the woodshed! This is NOT your property! Ask permission and use a little common sense. No owner of a logging show is going to allow the public to go through the middle of their work area. It is extremely dangerous and liability is a huge concern along with theft and you know some idiot will go up there and help themselves to whatever is not nailed down.

Wait until the logging is over and call the owner. If we show a little respect, it may work out for all of us. As for the rest of you crybabies, get over it! It is not public land and public access is yet

to be determined. Obey the law.

**Cindy Birko**  
Baker City

### Greater Idaho website addresses issues in op-ed

I'd like to answer some questions raised by an op-ed opposing the relocation of the Oregon/Idaho border.

Oregon state assets such as snowplows, prisons, land, buildings, and pension funds were paid for by all the people of Oregon, including East Oregonians. We paid for some of it, and so it's certain that any deal negotiated between Oregon and Idaho will allow rural Oregonians to take their share of the assets with them when the border is relocated. We propose that any legislation to move the border give 21% of state assets and liabilities to Idaho, since 21% of the population of Oregon would become citizens of Idaho. This applies to the state debt as well.

We recommend that the legislation to relocate the border should grandfather in the professional licenses, driver's licenses, and local election results. If the law is clear, no court battles will be necessary. Idaho doesn't require professional licenses for as many professions anyway.

All of these questions and more are answered in our FAQ and our proposal at greateridaho.org

**Mike McCarter**  
President, Citizens for Greater Idaho  
La Pine

### Phillips Lake prescribed burns leave an ugly mess

What a beautiful site the Forest Service has once again created by their wonderful prescribed burns. If you haven't you should take a drive up to Phillips Lake and take a look.

Burned through campground, so everyone will have the beautiful site of seeing black ash under every tree and kids and pets alike will be able to take advantage of walking and rolling around in this beautiful mess once again created by our wonderful forest circus at work. Great job!

**Brian Erwin**  
Baker City

### Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days. Email letters to news@bakercityherald.com.

## OTHER VIEWS

# Pride parade wrong to exclude cops

### Editorial from The New York Daily News:

A quarter-century has passed since gay NYPD cops sued for and won the right to march in the annual Pride Parade in their police uniforms, notching a small victory in the decades-long battle to end anti-LGBT discrimination within the now 36,000-uniformed-member force.

The long arc of history just bent the wrong way. The woke folk at Heritage of Pride, the nonprofit that's run the parade since 1984, have just imposed a new ban on cops in uniform participating in next month's COVID virtual Pride March. Somehow, people chronically discriminated against — with a shameful history of being sidelined from other parades — see no irony

in kicking a group to the curb just because of their jobs.

Organizers said the ban is warranted because cops in uniform can create "an atmosphere of fear or harm," particularly for Black and transgender people. Shame on them; while cops, like some of every group, do bad deeds, far many more routinely risk life and limb to protect members of the city's LGBT community. Which is, frankly, beside the point when considering whether a gay man or lesbian woman who happens to also be a police officer should be able to celebrate their sexual orientation at the same time that they express pride in their profession.

Since its creation in 1982, the trailblazing Gay Officers' Action League has advocated insistently for LGBT

officers and helped address discrimination in the department. What good is served, for example, by banning a transgender officer like Aiden Budd, who marched in uniform in the parade in 2016, from showing the world that gender identity and sexual orientation don't stop a person from practicing any occupation with dignity and skill? Maybe the parade's organizers should read their own mission statement, proclaiming that "we respect, value, and celebrate the unique attributes, characteristics and perspectives that make each person who they are."

Or would organizers prefer that gay, lesbian and transgender cops participate in the parade, but in plainclothes, hiding who they really are? That's called closeting.