

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Back to low risk, for good

It was a belated move, but at least the Oregon Health Authority dropped Baker County to the lowest risk level for COVID-19 spread before the first holiday weekend of summer.

The change took effect today, May 27.

Restaurants, bars, theaters, museums and fitness centers can welcome customers up to 50% of capacity.

Baker County hadn't been at the lowest risk level since April 22. The county moved to the high risk level on April 23, then to extreme risk on April 30.

The county returned to high risk on May 7 and had been at that level until today, even though the case rate subsequently has dropped to its lowest level since October 2020.

The next milestone is likely to happen in less than a month. Gov. Kate Brown said she will cancel restrictions statewide when 70% of Oregonians 18 and older are at least partially vaccinated. As of Wednesday, May 26, that figure was at 64.4%.

Until the state reaches the 70% threshold, state officials should keep Baker County at the lowest level of restrictions, barring a major outbreak of the sort that has yet to happen here during the pandemic. Our business owners have suffered enough from limitations that are not only stringent, but that have at times changed every two weeks, making it difficult if not impossible for owners to plan ahead.

It's unconscionable for the state to continue to punish businesses, with no evidence that they have contributed to the spread of COVID-19, simply because the county's test positivity rate slightly exceeds an arbitrary level. The county could have dropped to lowest risk May 21, but the positivity rate, due solely to statistics from the first week of May, was 8.9% over a two-week measuring period, above the threshold of 8% to stay out of high risk.

During the most recent two-week measuring period, the positivity rate was 3.6%, below the 5% threshold for lowest risk status.

Baker County residents have made great progress in curbing COVID-19 this month. We're preparing for a summer that should be much closer to normal than 2020 was. Without a defensible reason, state officials shouldn't cast clouds over this bright prospect.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Letters to the editor

We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days. Writers must sign their letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Email letters to news@bakercityherald.com.

THE WUHAN OLYMPICS...



Your views

Don't rewrite history based on current standards

Is it 1984? Winston Smith, the protagonist of George Orwell's fictional book, "1984," about living in a socialist society, works at the Ministry of Truth. Ironically, he spends each day rewriting history so that it agrees with the current political ideas and propaganda.

Recently I read that some major newspapers are rewriting or removing previous articles if they reflect negatively on persons who are members of

minority groups. Since the electronic files are changed, anyone conducting research would find a different version of a story, or no story, compared to what was published at the time of the event. The stated purpose of this effort is to protect minority persons from an image of them participating in criminal or negative activities. The motivation for this change effort is the belief that minority persons were unfairly targeted — i.e., that news articles were written about them when a white person would

have escaped the notoriety.

I'm not a journalist. I don't know how they decide if a particular event is newsworthy, or not, or how minority status might come into play in that decision. Certainly, everyone should be treated fairly. But if history is being rewritten to comply with current political ideas, it appears we might be living in an Orwellian world. I'm very concerned.

Jim Carnahan
Baker City

Reversing Roe v. Wade: wrong, but it's not anti-democratic

By Michael McGough

May 19 marked the first meeting of a commission appointed by President Joe Biden to study possible changes to the Supreme Court including an increase in its size — aka "court-packing."

But Demand Justice, a group that advocates adding four justices to the nine-member court, thinks that Democrats can't wait for the commission to conclude its work before moving to expand the court. One reason for urgency, it suggests, is the possibility that the court might overrule Roe v. Wade, the 1973 decision that legalized abortion nationwide.

That's not a far-fetched fear. Last week the justices announced that they will review a Mississippi law that would outlaw most abortions after 15 weeks of a pregnancy — a frontal assault on the principle enunciated in Roe and later cases that women have a right to abortion before a fetus is viable.

It may make sense for advocates of enlarging the court to add the threat to Roe to their rhetorical arsenal. But there's also a risk of muddling their message.

Until now, the most eloquent arguments for enlarging the court have been based on the idea that a conservative Supreme Court is stifling democracy.

In April Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne wrote that court-packing wouldn't be on the table "if conservative justices had not substituted their own political preferences for Congress's decisions, notably on voting rights and campaign finance reform."

Dionne also cited the Republican-controlled Senate's refusal to consider President Barack Obama's nomination of Merrick Garland to the court. His point about the court striking down laws that promote political participation was especially potent, potentially even for some Republicans.

But the claim that the court is "anti-democratic" doesn't mesh neatly with the argument that it needs to be expanded to preserve or reinstate Roe v. Wade.

The democratic process has often been the enemy of abortion rights. In Roe and a companion case, Doe v. Bolton, the court struck down restrictions on abortion enacted by the states of Texas and Georgia. The Mississippi law the court will review was approved by the people's representatives in their wisdom (or folly) only three years ago. And if Roe were overruled, "trigger" laws in several states would make abortion illegal.

There are compelling reasons to op-

pose a reversal of Roe v. Wade, beginning with the argument that the court was right to hold that a constitutional right to privacy "is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."

Additionally, overruling a precedent almost half a century old would cause what Chief Justice John G. Roberts famously called a "jolt to the legal system." It also would upend the lives of women who have organized their lives in reliance on its protections, as the court recognized when it reaffirmed the "essential holding" of Roe in its 1992 ruling in Planned Parenthood v. Casey.

None of the reasons for reaffirming Roe, however, is primarily about democracy.

In its response to the court taking the Mississippi case, Demand Justice said, "The Supreme Court is a looming threat to our democracy and in urgent need of reform." Even if that's true as a general proposition, it's an odd frame for an argument about protecting Roe v. Wade. Advocates of expanding the court can argue that the current court is hostile to abortion rights, but that doesn't mean it's "anti-democratic."

Michael McGough is the senior editorial writer for the Los Angeles Times.

OTHER VIEWS

We must condemn surge in antisemitic attacks

Editorial from The Los Angeles Times:

The recent military confrontation between Israel and Gaza-based Hamas militants spawned a regrettable yet predictable response: a surge in antisemitic attacks. Yet we all know it doesn't take a flash of violence in the Middle East for people to give free rein to their hatred. Antisemitism courses through world cultures, and world history, with a distressing persistence, like a virus we can't vanquish.

Over the last several weeks, vandals have struck synagogues around the country; a mob beat a Jewish man in New York City near dueling protests by pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel groups, while other Jews have suffered random attacks; epithets have been hurled in the streets

and social media sites have been filled with antisemitic comments and memes; and swastikas have been scrawled on school walls.

California has seen its share, too. In the most recent high-profile incident, a Banning man was arrested late Friday after Los Angeles police alleged that he was part of a group of people who hurled antisemitic remarks and scuffled with Jewish diners at a West Hollywood sushi restaurant on May 18. More arrests, police say, are expected. Meanwhile, the Anti-Defamation League reported last month a 40% increase in known antisemitic incidents in the state from 2016 to 2020.

People sometimes excuse antisemitism as a lesser outrage because of the unique nature of the targets — people who are, for

the most part, white and often lead lives of privilege, which can make it hard for others to recognize them as a victimized minority. But they have been just that sort of minority historically, and they often are in the present. Ethnic slurs and scuffles like those we've seen in recent weeks are part of a continuum of hateful action that, on the extreme end, leads to violent death.

Hyperbole? No. Deadly mass shootings in recent years at synagogues in Poway and Pittsburgh and a kosher deli in Jersey City, N.J., were the peaks of sporadic acts of violence against Jews that includes the punching of a Hasidic Jew in Brooklyn last week by a man police say also tried to torch a building housing a synagogue and yeshiva, as well as the slashing attack that wounded five people at a Hanukkah

celebration in Rockland County, N.Y., two years ago.

The most vexing aspect of such acts of hatred is their persistence. Even bigots have a right to their soapbox in this country, but we can counter their message by better informing their potential audience. Experts suggest that the best antidote to racism is education, exposure and inclusion — the more people see and understand one another and their differences, the less likely they are to act on their prejudices.

In truth, we can't end antisemitism any more than we can end anti-Black and anti-Asian racism. But we all must work harder to reduce it and to recognize that society doesn't function for all when so many have to constantly look over their shoulders.