

EDITORIAL

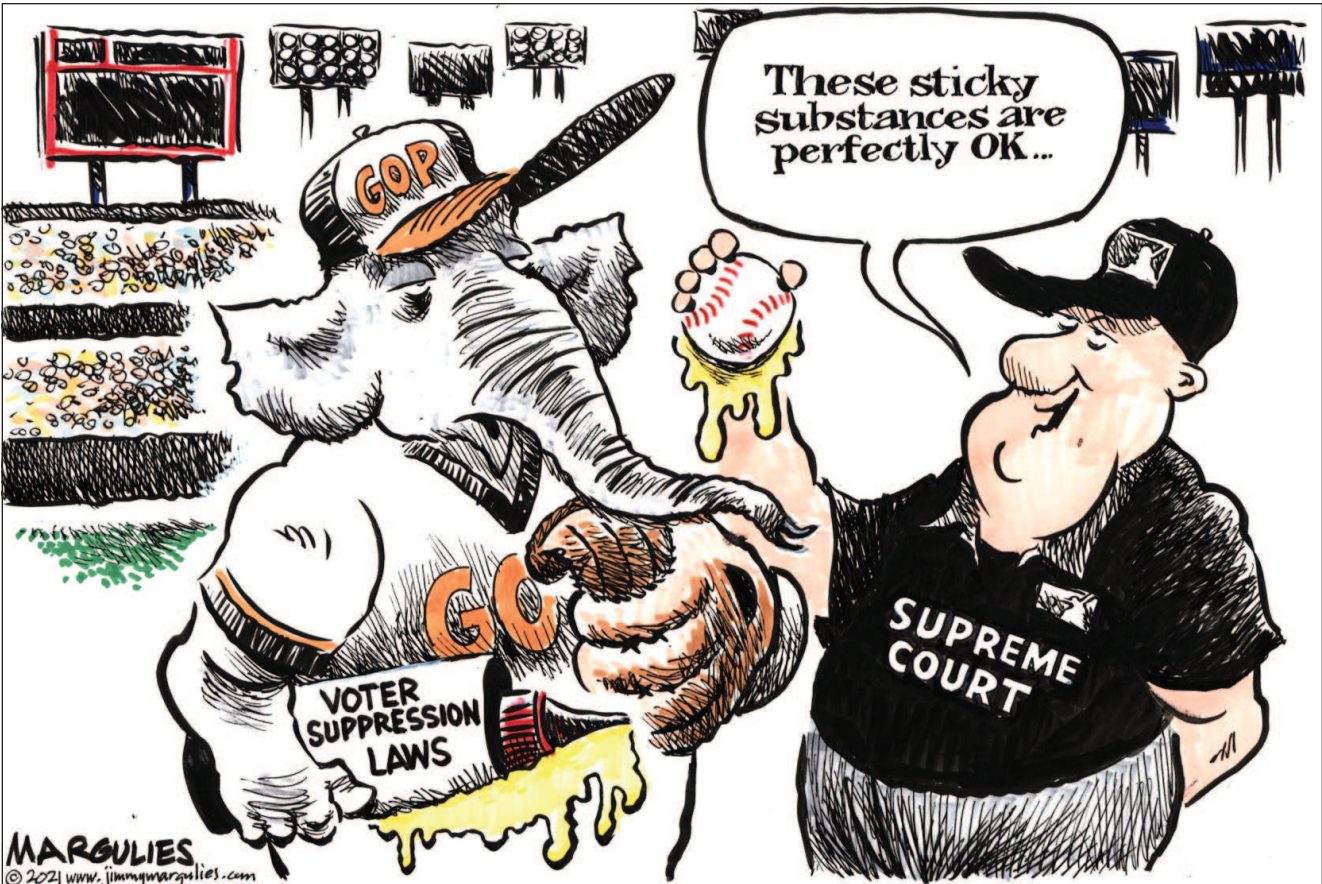
Water woes

Baker City’s water supply situation would be troubling if today were Sept. 10. But it’s July 10. And with summer scarcely underway, and hot, dry weather likely to continue for several more weeks at least, the prospects are considerably more concerning than they would be on the cusp of autumn. Put simply, we’re going through water at a rate that’s not sustainable. During June, which ended with a record-setting heat wave, Baker City used 129.9 million gallons of water, according to the public works department. In June 2020 the city’s thirst amounted to 81.7 million gallons — 45% less. On June 28 the city enacted stage 1 of its water curtailment ordinance, also known as alert status. Under stage 1, the city asks residents and businesses to voluntarily use less water. The city specifically asked that its parks and cemetery maintenance contractor, and the city-owned Quail Ridge Golf Course, to cut back by 30%. Michelle Owen, the city’s public works director, said this week that the golf course reduced its water use even more than that because its irrigation pump failed.

Yet overall, the city is continuing to use water at about the same high rate as during June. On June 28, the day the alert status took effect, the city used half a million gallons more than the day before, Owen said. For the first five days of July, the city’s use averaged about 1 million gallons more per day than for the same period in 2020. Yet even as the city was using more water, its primary source was producing less. The city gets its water from springs and streams in its 10,000-acre watershed on the east slopes of the Elkhorn Mountains, west of town. Owen said the volume from those sources has dropped by about half a million gallons per day over the past week. The city is already using one of its supplementary sources — a well — and Owen said the city likely will take the other — Godrich Lake — earlier than usual.

Starting Monday, July 12, the city will move into stage 2 of the water curtailment ordinance — the warning stage. Residents will be allowed to use city water (the ordinance doesn’t affect private wells) to irrigate lawns and gardens only between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. How well residents adhere to the stage 2 restrictions likely will determine whether the city needs to move to stage 3 — critical status. Under that stage — which the city has never imposed — the city would limit water volumes for industrial and commercial users, and prohibit residents from using city water to water lawns or wash vehicles at any time. The city would cease using city water to irrigate parks, Mount Hope Cemetery, schools and the golf course. Owen said that if the city could cut its daily use from the recent 5-million-gallon range to about 3.5 million, it would help the situation considerably. Meeting that goal doesn’t require the people stop using water outside. A modest reduction, if most people follow suit, will yield tangible results that benefit the entire community.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Working together to silence harmful train horns

Editor’s note: The author sent this letter to the Baker City Council.

On June 8th, I walked into a City Council meeting for the first time since 2020, and I didn’t know what to expect. What I saw was a panel of good neighbors — people who have stepped forward to serve and seek the best for Baker City residents. A quick scan of the Council agenda and meeting packet reminded me how hard you work on our behalf. It is a part-time job with a volunteer’s compensation, and you probably hear more complaints than thanks. So let me be among those who say, “Thank you.” Sincerely, you make me want to be a better citizen and do more for our community. I was grateful for the opportunity to discuss a community service project that Baker City residents have been working

on for years, and I’m proud to be part of it. You listened patiently to my statement during the time allotted for comments, and later you asked questions in good faith to understand our concern. I really appreciated that. We discussed the extraordinary power of the train horn, and how it is harming many Baker City residents at home and work, night and day. It is hurting our kids at South Baker Intermediate and Baker Web Academy. It is hurting many of our businesses, customers, and employees (including our tourism income, because impacted visitors leave negative online ratings). Also, the horn is artificially depressing the property values of many Baker City residents. The train horn has gotten louder over the decades. The decibels now range from 96 to 110 — levels proven to be “hazardous” and “highly hazardous” to kids and adults. This unfortunate situation is the result of

one-size-fits-all federal regulation that simply doesn’t fit our community. What if we could work together to safely de-regulate this harmful horn? What if we could make life better for thousands of our neighbors and generations of Baker City kids? What if we could improve the safety of our railroad crossings (affordably, like La Grande did), so the horn doesn’t need to blow all the time? We can. With your support, Baker City can do all of this, safely and affordably. We look forward to sharing more information, and we would be honored to work with you to solve this problem. Thank you again for your time and interest. Your neighbor. Email QuietZoneBakerCity@gmail.com to learn more about the project. Peter Fargo Baker City

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from The Miami Herald: The middle-of-the-night assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise at his home near Port-au-Prince early Wednesday is a shocking and brutal act that will be felt far beyond the island nation. In Miami, with its deep connections to Haiti, this bloodshed comes as cataclysmic news. It will no doubt create even greater fears that the country, already hurting for so long, will now descend into chaos. It’s not yet completely clear what happened. Initial reports indicated the attackers spoke Spanish and that some claimed to be with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, though sources told the Miami Herald those DEA claims were false. Interim premier Claude Joseph quickly condemned the attack, which also seriously injured Moise’s wife, Martine, as “odious, inhumane and barbaric.” It follows months of unrest and violence in Haiti, a poor nation of about

11 million. Since January 2020, Moise, 53, had been ruling by decree, after the country failed to hold elections. Opposition leaders have been demanding that he step down amid a constitutional crisis and allegations that he used armed gangs to stay in power. The assault occurred just one day after Moise named a new prime minister to take charge of the government and prepare the country for elections in two months, including for president. Even as the country has grown increasingly dangerous, with kidnappings on the rise along with gang violence, the Biden administration has been pushing for free and fair elections there. But not everyone agreed. In February, members of Congress sent a letter to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken urging the U.S. to back a transition government in Haiti. The lawmakers said the human rights situation there was perilous, and accused Moise of flouting democracy. In May, the U.S. extended 18 months

of Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, to Haitians already living in the United States, an important acknowledgment that conditions in the country had grown too unstable for citizens to return safely. The assassination of Moise will now force new clarity in U.S. policy on Haiti. The U.S. is Haiti’s biggest donor. The administration is well aware that there have been worrying signs for months that Moise was becoming the region’s newest strongman. Still, the U.S. has continued to push for “free and fair” elections” in a country with too much turmoil to pull that off. We don’t yet know what the full ramifications of this assassination will be. We don’t know in what direction the country will go nor exactly what the U.S. role will need to be. But there is no doubt, as we wait to learn more, that this horrific execution of the president of Haiti means the U.S. must step up, clearly and strongly, to back democracy in that tortured nation.

Landscaping with 150-million-year-old material

I recently finished a landscaping project that was about 150 million years in the making. Not that I have anything like that kind of time. Not to say patience. Or longevity genes. Although I like to keep a lush lawn — a challenge this year while trying not to exacerbate Baker City’s water supply crisis — and enjoy flowers in bloom and shade trees in full leaf, my obsession, when it comes to gardening, is edges. That is, the place where grass gives way to some other landscaping feature. Nothing pleases my eye quite so much as a sharply cut edge. I find this affinity passing strange if only because it involves geometric precision, and I was even more helpless in trying to fathom geometry than I was with other advanced maths. The trouble with edges — or at



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least with my version of them, as my wife, Lisa, occasionally reminds me — is that I tend to leave a strip of bare dirt between the lawn and the flower bed. I have experimented with a variety of solutions to this unsightly, and occasionally muddy, boundary, including covering the dirt with bark mulch or pea gravel. But none seemed satisfactory. Bark mulch looks fresh and comely when it’s first laid, but it quickly turns dingy as it dries. And the passage of the lawnmower tends to turn pea gravel into shrapnel, which is unpleasant. Then I thought of granitic sand. I don’t know what inspired this,

but once the idea was lodged in my subconscious it was stuck fast, demanding action. There is plenty of the stuff readily available, to be sure. Wherever a highway was blasted through granitic bedrock the road cuts have thick deposits of the coarse sand that is the byproduct of erosion. (The local versions, geologists say, are not true granites but several igneous cousins, including tonalite and granodiorite and others with additional syllables that make them the linguistic versions of those geometric concepts that I could never make sense of.) Moreover, federal law allows people to gather up to 250 pounds of stone (or, presumably, eroded stone) per year for personal use. (Such collecting is not allowed on mining claims, naturally.) I didn’t need 250 pounds of sand to fill the narrow strips on our place, although I hauled prob-

ably half that weight home in five-gallon buckets. I shoveled the sand from two spots I have passed dozens of times — one along the Sumpter-Granite highway, the other beside the Forest Service gravel road leading to the Dutch Flat trailhead. The granitic sand, which ranges in color from a white nearly as bright as golf course bunker sand, to a light tan, is a fine addition to our landscaping. The stuff compacts well, and it makes an attractive color contrast between the green grass and the multicolored blossoms in the flower beds. I also find it intriguing to ponder the immense spans of time, and the powerful natural forces, that made it possible for me to brighten my modest patch of ground in the year 2021, which still sounds to me impossibly futuristic. The granitic rock in the Elkhorns is part of what geologists call a

batholith — a large expanse of magma that, rather than spewing across the landscape from volcanic vents, instead placidly cooled below ground, only to be exposed by the combination of uplift and erosion. The Bald Mountain batholith, which makes up much of the northern half of the Elkhorns, including the peaks around Anthony Lakes, is between 140 and 150 million years old. Such a period is, much like geometry, beyond my ability to comprehend in any meaningful way. But I still like to stand in my yard, to look up at the Elkhorns and to consider how it came to be that a tiny fragment of those great mountains ended up, after such a span, decorating my yard during my own infinitesimally brief existence. Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.