

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Wyden town hall on River Act must provide answers

U.S. Sen Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, will host an online town hall meeting Tuesday, Aug. 31, and if you get the chance, we urge you to listen in.

The subject of the town hall will be the River Democracy Act, a sweeping piece of new legislation pushed by Wyden and Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon.

The bill is designed to greatly expand conservation protections to more than 4,000 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon, including many waterways in the eastern part of the state.

Wyden touts the legislation to expand recreation access, protect drinking water, limit wildfire and safeguard endangered fish and wildlife.

The spirit of the bill — to protect more waterways — is a good one. Our natural resources are a finite commodity and represent national treasures that enhance us as a people and a nation.

Now, more than 2,000 river miles in the state are protected under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

As much merit as the proposed legislation has, it still needs to be explained carefully to voters. That it is why it is so important for area voters to participate in the town hall.

While protecting rivers and streams is a good idea, the fact is, there already are existing protections — such as the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act — on many waterways. Other federal laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, also help add a layer of protection to streams and rivers.

The danger in such pieces of legislation is unintended consequences. That's why Wyden must explain how, or if, private property rights will be impacted with the legislation. He also must explain how, or if, grazing rights will be affected by the legislation.

The streams and rivers of Eastern Oregon are part of our heritage and must be safeguarded, but too often the region is seen as a kind of giant, conservation amusement park for a minority of people who have little or no connection to our unique way of life.

The natural bounty of our region isn't something taken for granted for most of us who live in Eastern Oregon. We see it every day. No one wants to see our local natural resource treasures destroyed.

But before we go and create yet another layer of federal regulations to our region, let's make sure we are all on the same page and working for the same results.

So, tune into the town hall and exercise your right to give feedback to your elected representative.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.



Your views

Mask mandates don't violate constitutional rights

I understand that some people are claiming their rights as citizens are being violated by mandates to wear a mask. To my knowledge, nothing in our constitution requires the wearing of clothes. Therefore, I am certain none of the anti-maskers will object to seeing a slightly over 70, slightly overweight woman shopping in the produce department of their local grocery store.

Also, it would only be fair at your next surgery to sign a waiver, exempting the surgical team from wearing masks. They are inconvenient and uncomfortable and, in your opinion, serve no purpose.

I have had these thoughts for several months, but never took the time to write. I just learned that two friends, too young to be vaccinated, have COVID, which will likely prevent them from starting school with their classes. They are suffering with fevers and headaches. Did they catch this virus from a person who was vaccinated and wearing a mask? Possibly, but is that what you honestly believe?

Marilyn Hereau
Baker City

Baker City is plenty special without train whistles

I've heard it said that Baker City wouldn't

be Baker City without the trains. Our town is wonderful in so many ways. If we really delve into what makes Baker City a special place trains have nothing to do with it. Baker City is known for a lovely downtown, unique local businesses, beautiful geographical setting, historic buildings, and a vibrant arts scene. If the train horns go quiet Baker City will not lose a bit of its small town character and we will gain a lot in quality of life.

I understand that many people are wary of change, especially if they perceive that it's driven by outsiders or newcomers. That seems to be human nature. A town that resists change, innovation and improvement will lose its resilience. As a community we need to plan carefully, study what other towns are doing, and make decisions based on what is best for everyone today and in the future.

In the years since Baker City citizens voted against silencing train horns, the horns blasts have gotten louder and more shrill in tone. There is no question that staff and students at South Baker School are negatively impacted. Quieting the horns would improve education quality, improve the school's reputation, and attract teachers and families.

Many people, including children, are chronically

sleep deprived from the tremendously loud and numerous nighttime horn blasts. The effects of poor quality, interrupted sleep are devastating to physical, mental and emotional health.

We have an opportunity to make a positive change in our community. We lose nothing by quieting the train horns. We have a group of people willing to raise money to make the change. We have a neighboring town who has done it successfully. We all care about our fellow community members, right? We look out for one another. That's what living in a small town is all about. Let's not get political, fearful of change, or pretend that we can't afford to do this. Instead let's put our collective energy into making our lovely little town even better.

Cynthia Roberts
Baker City

We need leaders on COVID vaccinations

Mark Twain is often quoted as saying: "There are three types of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics."

Here's a statistic that is easily proven true: About 99% of persons presently hospitalized suffering from COVID are persons who have NOT been vaccinated. What better statistic could one have that vaccines are effective?

Yet, as of last week,

almost 70% of Baker County young people ages 20-29 have NOT received the free vaccination. And in the age group 12-17 80% are NOT vaccinated. Alas, any day now many of them will be returning to schools and colleges.

In order to stimulate our elected leaders on Baker City Council to take the lead in encouraging citizens to get vaccinated, I've sent three pleas to the mayor and six councilors to find if they would set a good example by publicly announcing they are vaccinated. To the first plea I got not one response. To the second plea I got two "yes" responses: Councilor Lynette Perry and Councilor Jason Spriet. And to my third plea a "yes" response from Councilor Heather Sells. I thank all three councilors for being good role models.

I got no response from Mayor McQuisten and Councilors Alderson, Dixon, and Waggoner.

I believe that County Commissioners Bruce Nichols and Mark Bennett have been vaccinated.

Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, whose state has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the nation, says, "It is sad to see someone go to the hospital or die when it can be prevented."

I encourage everyone to get vaccinated and wear a mask.

Gary Dielman
Baker City

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the

accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.

- Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.
- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information cannot be

published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.

Mail: To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814

Email: news@bakercityherald.com

OTHER VIEWS

Editorial from Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:

The courts seem to be holding that employers can require workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of employment, but things get more complicated when there is a labor union involved.

Rather than avoid the issue, employers and unions should be talking about how to make a vaccine-for-all protocol work.

Allegheny County, for example, is requiring

vaccinations of new employees only, while the largely unionized county workforce will not be subject to the same mandate. Current employees who are not vaccinated will be required to wear a mask and undergo regular testing.

Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald acknowledged that requiring a vaccine for all employees would involve a labor negotiation. "It becomes more complicated when it comes to collective bargaining and some other

things along those lines," he told reporters.

The right direction is discussion between labor and management. In reasonable workplaces, all employees — union and management alike — should be able to reach a consensus on a public health issue. It's certain no employer wants to be the test case as to whether a collective bargaining agreement can be amended to include a required COVID-19 vaccination. But the approach should not be

adversarial but collaborative. It's for the benefit of all.

Even as there are increasing calls for mandatory vaccinations — with exceptions for religious and health reasons — as terms of employment, there is a lot of reluctance among employers to engage with their union leaders on the matter. This reluctance should be pushed aside in light of the rising number of COVID-19 cases linked to the delta variant.

This is especially pertinent in the health

care sector, where doctors, nurses and other health care professionals have a higher risk of coming in contact with COVID-positive patients, as well as in public schools where the delta variant could spread quickly among unvaccinated children.

Some unions have voiced opposition to mandated vaccines, but others seem willing to consider the matter. The president of the American Federation of Teachers, the second-

largest teachers union in the country, said recently that the union, which was opposed to mandatory vaccinations, should now work with employers on the issue. Randi Weingarten's public comments on the matter came Aug. 8.

Working together: This is the right approach to a health crisis that both employers and unions are trying to navigate. The bottom line is that everyone involved wants the same outcome: a safe environment for everyone.